

PERSPECTIVES ON PRIESTS' CULTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL MALPRACTICES IN MALACHI 1:6-2-9 AND THEIR CONSEQUENT ACTS OF NEGLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some perspectives on the priestly class in the book of Malachi with respect to their attitude toward the cult, their pedagogical responsibility and their consequent acts of negligence. It demonstrates that the priests in Malachi's day despised their covenantal relationship with Yahweh by disrespecting, dishonoring, despising and defiling Yahweh, and they questioned his accusations as if he either lied or was ignorant. Priests were saddled with the responsibility of guarding the entire cultic life of the people. Thus, the principal way they despised and defiled Yahweh day after day was through deficient and unacceptable offerings (1:6-2:3). On the other hand, the teaching aspect is considered to have been an integral part of the priestly office. The priests in Malachi are accused of causing many to falter by their pedagogical functions and or obligations to Yahweh (2:8) and by implication, the people of Yahweh were led astray for lack of the knowledge of God. Their failure was indeed the ground for the humiliating judgement pronounced on them by Yahweh in the inspired words of Malachi 1:6-2:9. These perspectives offer Yahweh's people and also contemporary religious leaders within the Christian tradition a glimpse into the nature and demands of the priesthood – that which requires men of profound moral character both because they are messengers of God who make known divine commands to the faithful, and because they have the privilege to offer sacrifices.

INTRODUCTION

The world of the priests is described and represented by the temple and all that belongs to it. Thus, when the prophets write, their purpose is simply to maintain what the temple symbolises, namely the presence of Yahweh in the midst of his people. The

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priests' main concern is on cult and rituals (Hrobon 2010:6, 10-12; Barton 2007:111-112). Since the priests' main focus is on cult and rituals, the prophetic indictment of the cult and rituals is seen not as their repudiation but as a rhetorical feature that forces the audience to focus on the importance of their ethical behaviour (Hrobon 2010:10). Their major religious functions consisted of the maintenance of purity by the sacrificial system at the Temple. Priests in the Old Testament officiated at various rituals, oversaw sacrifices, and regulated communal festivals, ensuring that society engaged in its due diligence to Yahweh in exchange for that deity's protection, support and blessings. Malachi (*mal'ākhî*) in the Hebrew Bible simply means "my messenger". The identification of the form *mal'ākhî* has constituted research problems and defensible positions have emerged from several scholarly debates.² While the problem of oral or written still persists in scholarly debates and there is no complete attempt yet to account for what traditions actually influenced the message in the book of Malachi, oral presentation of the message is assumed and thus the message of the book is treated as teaching or instruction with prophetic authority and as such prophecy. Malachi reveals the same sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of his contemporaries as did his predecessors. He was aware of the people's objections to God's ways, and by divine inspiration, was able to provide authoritative responses to them (Baldwin 1972:214). "He holds together concern for cultic needs of the present theocratic community and lively eschatological hope for the future" (Grabble 2004:90).

The book of Malachi³ is essentially about the religious questions of worship,

² On the one hand, Malachi is considered to be a proper name of the writer of the oracles and on the other hand, it is seen as a name or title for the unidentified person who is responsible for the book (Hill 1998:15). It is also seen to be a product of scribal prophecy, with no single individual acting as its author (Gertz et al. 2012:521).

³ The book of Malachi contains no clear historical information with respect to the time of its writing. Thus, while the prophecy is not specifically dated, internal evidence suggests that it originated in the post-exilic period, probably in the fifth century B.C.E. (Chisholm 2002:447; Grabble 2004:89; Boice 1986:230). Since Malachi mentions current abuses at the temple (1:7ff; 2:13; 3:10), the *terminus a quo* of the prophecy must be 516/515 B.C.E., the year the second temple was completed (Klein 1989:23). Malachi is assumed to be a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, though the dating of these books is also in question. It is noted that Ezra and Nehemiah probably migrated to Judah in 458 and 445 respectively (Klein 1999: 664-665). There is also another dating for Ezra. Gerstenberger (2011:96) notes that "the year of the book of Ezra would be either 458 or 397 B.C.E." It seems likely that the final stage of the book of Malachi can be dated sometime between 475-450 B.C.E.

temple and priesthood. Although it seems somehow difficult to determine the origin of Israelite priesthood (cf. Ex 19:22-24; Ex 28; Lee 2010:65-66), Malachi aligns himself with a particular priestly circle – the Levitical priesthood (Malachi 2:4-6) – over and against a rival priesthood that had gained control over the temple after it was rebuilt in 516/515 B.C.E. (Leuchter 2010:109). The longest disputation in Malachi is the one directed at the priest (Boda 2012:15). As it were, priests and Levites played the leading role in the cultic life of Israel; the responsibility of the priests' offering sacrifices was an essential aspect of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. However, the priests in the book of Malachi despised this covenantal relationship by neglecting their functions. In 1:6-14, the prophet charges the priests (*kōhānīm*) with shortchanging Yahweh in offerings due him by allowing the presentation of what he, Malachi, considers inferior animals (Hugenberger 1998:883-884). They are not accused of profiting by this, only of violating what appear to him to be transparently obvious standards of acceptability. In the continuation of this trade, Malachi contrasts their behavior with that of their ancestor Levi, who provided Israel with true instruction (Malachi 2:7). Although the prophet claims no special knowledge, he assumes his right to challenge what is done in violation of recognized standards (Zevit 2006:207). Malachi's message with reference to the three kinds of reprehensible misdeed against which the prophet gave his address – the neglect of the cult, lack of economic support of the clergy, and malpractices of mixed marriages and divorce (Blenkinsopp 1983:210) – reflect aspects of violation of the social responsibility of the covenant, i.e., failure to love one's brother amounts to violation of the religious responsibility, i.e., failure to love God (Clendenen 2004:326). While the neglect of the cult is considered a religious responsibility on the one hand, it is a social problem on the other hand because involvement in appropriately recognised and reputable cultic action was one of the fundamentals for participation in the temple community (Blenkinsopp 1983:198).

After rebuking Judah as a nation, Malachi confronts the priests who have despised God's name and defiled the altar of Yahweh. The prophet specifically dealt with the function and purpose of the priests and Levites. While priests were saddled with the responsibility of guarding the entire cultic life of the people, the teaching aspect is considered to have been an integral part of the priestly office. Mention of the priests' pedagogical functions and/or obligations is found in several biblical materials:

priestly,⁴ Deuteronomy,⁵ prophetic literature⁶ and historical texts of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles⁷ (Tiemeyer 2006:113-115). In fact, the scribes of Deuteronomy say something about themselves through their depiction of Moses: they regard themselves as the heirs and successors of Moses (Van der Toorn 2007:166-167). Deuteronomy 31 (vv. 9, 25-26), the chapter devoted to the succession of Moses, labels the priests as the guardians and the trustees of the Torah he has written. The priests should read his Torah to their contemporaries (Dt 31:10-13) as he instructed the people in his day. According to Deuteronomy 17:18-19 the priests are the only ones who have access to the Torah and are professionals of writing: they keep (31:25-26), copy (17:18) and read from the Torah (31:11) (Watts 2007:322). It seems viable to interpret these statements as self-references of the scribes: they claim the legacy of Moses (Van der Toorn 2007:167). Revelation was profoundly under discussion in the late layers of the Pentateuch (Otto 2006:939). According to the post-exilic Pentateuch's theory of covenant and revelation, God's revelation had come to an end with Moses' death (Dt 34:10-12), so that there could be no other access to God's Torah than by the interpretation of his Torah (Chapman 2000:127-131; Nihan 2010:22; Schmid 2007:244ff.). According to Deuteronomy the Torah had already been explained and applied to Israel's life as it had been written down by Moses in the land of Moab (Dt 1:1-5; 31:9-13) (Otto 2006:939). For the authors of the post-exilic Pentateuch Moses

⁴ In the priestly material, the command to the priests to teach is found in Lv 10:10-11, where the Aaronite priests are instructed to distinguish between pure and impure and between the unclean and the clean (*ûlāhabhdîl bēn haqqōdēsh ûbēn haḥōl ûbēn haṭṭāmē' ûbēn haṭṭāhōr*), and to teach the Mosaic Law to the people of Israel (*û'ḥōrōth 'eth-binē yiśrā'el 'eth kol-haḥuqqîm 'āsher dibhbar yhw' (ādḥōnāy) 'ālēm biyadh mōshe^h*).

⁵ In Deuteronomy, within the context of Moses' blessing, the tribe of Levi is praised for its loyalty to the fulfilment of their teaching obligations, having taught God's precepts to Jacob and His instruction (*tōrā^h*) to Israel (*yōrû mishpāte^hkhā le'āqōbh w^ethōrāth^ekhā l'yiśrā'el*) (Dt 33:10).

⁶ In the prophetic literature, Ezekiel combines the two tasks in the corresponding text of Lv 10:10-11, probably on the ground of familiarity when he declares: "Moreover, they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ez 44:23). However, from a negative point of view, Ezekiel declares that at one point of the coming destruction will be the priests' loss of their ability to instruct (*w^ethōrā^h tō'bhadh mikkkhōhēn*) (Ez 7:26). Jeremiah also testifies to the idea that the priests were responsible for the instruction of the people (see Jr 18:18).

⁷ Ezra 7:10 attests to how Ezra the priest "prepared his heart to seek instruction and to do and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (*kī 'ezrā' hēkhîn l'bhābhō lidhrōsh 'eth-tōrath yhw' (ādḥōnāy) w^el'āsōth ûl'ammēdh b'yiśrā'el ḥōq ûmishpāṭ*). See similar attestations in Nehemiah 8:1-8, 11; 2 Chronicles 17:7-9.

was not only the last prophet of Yahweh's direct revelation, but he was also the first scribe writing down the Torah and the first exegete of the Torah that accompanied the people of Israel on their way into the promised land after Moses' death. Thus, for the priestly authors of the post-exilic Pentateuch Moses' task as prophet was revived in the written Torah (Otto 2006:939).

Thus given the fact that teaching was an important aspect of the priestly office, the prophetic critique of this area becomes very pointed. In Malachi 2:4-9, the prophet highlights the shortcomings of the corrupt priesthood of his day with respect to their teaching potentials by way of what is expected of them, as demonstrated by the ideal of the ancient Levites. While condemning the abuse of priestly power and corrupt worship, Malachi regards himself no less than a reformer, calling both his priestly colleagues and the larger community to renewed fidelity to Yahweh's covenant (Brown 1996:191). Malachi attempts to bring the priesthood closer to what the prophets perceived to be the ideal; priests who excelled in teaching; effective and efficient exegetes of scripture, priests who provided social justices, who worshipped Yahweh alone and whose performance of the cult satisfied the most rigorous cultic demands. As a background, the article examines the literary form of the second oracle, reflects concern on the responsibility of the priests, that of offering sacrifices which was an essential aspect of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, focuses attention on the identity of Levi and the nature of God's covenant with him elaborating on his excellent ability to teach, and concluding with the corruption and contempt of the priests with respect to their lack of the same ability. The article notes further that the priests' failure in adequately and responsibly discharging their sacred duties was indeed the ground for the humiliating judgement pronounced on them by Yahweh in the inspired words of Malachi 1:6-2:9.

LITERARY FORM OF MALACHI'S SECOND ORACLE: MALACHI 1:6-2:9

While it is important for readers to know the primary message of Malachi, by way of identifying the literary genre, it is also very necessary to determine how the author has arranged the message of the book in order to highlight its central concerns. The Christian Old Testament ends with the words of the prophet Malachi, a structure to the book inherited basically from the translators of the Greek translation of the scriptures,

the LXX. Written after the return from Babylonian exile, Malachi describes the continuing unfaithfulness of the people of God. This ending also looks to the future, but a different kind of future. The book concludes with warnings about impending judgment and the announcement of the coming of the prophet Elijah (Jackson 2004:41). Perhaps because of the people's disillusionment and contempt for their covenant with God, Malachi uses a somewhat unique structure in trying to make God's point with the people. Although it was occasionally used by other prophets, no one else uses it to the extent that he does. Whatever labels one gives to the oracles of Malachi – discussion, dialogue, or disputation – it has become almost axiomatic in Malachi studies that the book comprises six speeches,⁸ a superscription and two appendices (4:4 [MT 3:22]; 4:5-6 [MT 3:23-24])⁹ (Clendenen 2004:227; Hill 1998:26).

With respect to the form of the prophecy, it has been noted that Malachi has a style that is unique among the Old Testament prophetic books (Clendenen 2004:218). Many a scholar has assessed the literary features of Malachi and the discussions have focused on how best to describe the method Malachi uses to communicate with Israel. It may be described as “prophetic disputation” (Murray 1987:110), “confrontational dialogue” (Hendrix 1987:465), “covenant lawsuit” (O'Brien 1990:63),¹⁰ sermonic (Pierce 1984:285) or oracular, but its frequent use of quotations, rhetorical questions (see Merrill 1994:380), and polemical argument gives it a peculiar character (Clendenen 2004:218). Again, “catechetical format” has also been suggested to capture the questioning approach used in Malachi, a technique found also in Haggai

⁸ Hill (1998:26) following other interpreters identifies six such disputation speeches in Malachi: (1) 1:2-5, (2) 1:6-2:9, (3) 2:10-16 (excluding vv. 11-12 as a later addition), (4) 2:17-3:5, (5) 3:6-12, and (6) 3:13-21 (Eng., 4:3; the last three verses of the canonical book, 4:4-6 in English, are excluded as a later addition).

⁹ Although some would not agree (Assis 2011:208-209; Koorevaar 2010:75; Clendenen 2004:455; Floyd 2000:568-569; Stuart 1998:1391; Verhoef 1987:337-338; Glazier-McDonald 1987:243-245), the conclusion of the book of Malachi in 4:4-6 (MT 3:22-24) is widely considered to be a later redactional addition (or additions) to Malachi 3:13-21 and, for that matter, to the rest of the book (Rudolph 1975:290; Smith 1984:340; Childs 1979:495-96; Eissfeldt 1965:441-42; Hill 1998:363-366).

¹⁰ In order to account for the use of covenant terminology that many have noted in the book, she analyses the book as comprising five “accusations” (1:6-29; 2:10-16; 2:17-3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13-21), in addition to a “prologue” (1:2-5), a “final admonition” (3:22), as well as a “final ultimatum” (3:23-24).

(Braun 1977:299).¹¹ Other prophets certainly made use of questions, very similar to those of Malachi (Berry 1996:273) (e.g., Is 40:27-28; Jr 2:14, 23, 29, 32; Amos 5:20; Mc 2:7; Hg 1:4; 2:3; some twenty-five questions in Zechariah 1-8), but in these prophets the questions are not as central to the entire book as they are in Malachi (Schuller 1996:850). In any case, what stands out is that Malachi reveals the same sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of his contemporaries as did his predecessors. He was conscious of the people's objections to God's ways, and by divine inspiration was able to provide authoritative responses to them (Cheung 2001:7). Thus one must relate to the verbal interchange between Malachi and his audience as a "discussion" in which the two contrary opinions are recorded but where one (Malachi's) is given more space than that of his opponents (Tiemeyer 2005:178).

The division of the book's message into six smaller sections (Pierce 1984:282) with most of these sections having a three-part form – an established proposition, the respondent's objection, and the key and concluding element, which may itself be made up of smaller elements, that is, oracle of salvation, threat, or admonition – has given rise to the classification of the book as consisting of disputation speeches (Petersen 1995:29; Redditt 2000:849; Clendenen 2004:218). These disputes which Malachi brings against Israel are legal in nature, having a courtroom setting, with covenantal law serving as the basis for the charges against the people tried before the priest in the Temple (Achtmeier 1986:172). In Malachi, Clendenen (2004:219) identifies six disputation speeches: (1) 1:2-5, (2) 1:6-2:9, (3) 2:10-16 (with the exception of vv.11-12 as a latter addition), (4) 2:17-3:5, (5) 3:6-12, and (6) 3:13-21 (English 4:3; as the last three verses of the canonical book, 4:4-6 in English are excluded as a later addition). In its literary structure, the book is seen as a series of dialogues or disputes between the prophet and those he is addressing. Typically, there are three elements that go together to form a dispute: the prophet's assertion, objection from those addressed, and the prophet's response, which is a message that he gives from the Lord in the particular situation he addresses (Clark and Hatton 2002:369-70). Since the book's unique conception relies on the force of the disputation to challenge current

¹¹ Boda (2000:299-300) notes, "The interrogative mood engages the audience in a powerful way, forcing them to reflect on the message in a deeper measure than in mere pronouncements. It is used by Haggai both to bring judgement (1:4, 9; 2:12-13, 19) and to express sympathy (2:3)." See also Craig (1996:244) and Pierce (1984:277) who have exploited these question styles for redactional ends, suggesting that they point to the unity of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi.

behaviour and attitudes of people and their religious leaders in matters of ritual practices, the attempt here is to identify such disputation speeches. Malachi reflects concern on the past and warns about the future. His disputations challenge syncretistic cultic practices on the one hand and fear the coming day of Yahweh on the other hand (Nogalski 2011:1002).

Malachi 1:6-2:9 contains the longest disputation directed towards the priests. These verses make up about one third of Malachi's oracles (Schuller 1996:858; Hill 1998:173; Kealy 2009:233; Nogalski 2011:1003; Boda 2012:15). These disputes are composed of two distinct speech-acts with Yahweh as the subject of the first (1:6-14) and the Levitical priesthood as subject of the second (2:1-9) (Hill 1998:172). Although Malachi reflects the social and religious struggles of the fifth century, his primary concern is the priesthood and its cultic activities. In these verses one sees a blunt critique of two sins of the priests: the priests of Yehud are accused of disrespecting, dishonouring, despising and defiling Yahweh, and they question his accusations as if he either lied or was ignorant. But the principal way they despise and defile Yahweh day after day is through deficient and unacceptable offerings (1:6-2:3). They are also accused of causing many to falter by their teaching (2:8) (Tiemeyer 2006:18). The Levitical priests had failed in discharging the duties of their sacred trust – teaching Israel the laws of Yahweh (cf. Dt 33:10) and by implication, the people of Yahweh were led astray for lack of the knowledge of God (cf. Hs 4:6; Hill 1998:173). While Malachi 1:6-9, 12; 2:1-3 clearly addresses the priests who were responsible for accepting the animals brought to them for sacrifice, the people were also culpable by choosing second-class animals and presenting them at the temple (Verhoef 1987:214), at a time when worship was conceived to take place among the nations where Yahweh's name received proper respect (1:11-12). This failure causes Yahweh to threaten to do away with temple sacrifices altogether (1:10). The people bring inferior sacrifices which they would not dare present to their Persian governor (1:8) (Nogalski 2011:1003).

PRIESTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CULT (MALACHI 1:6-9, 12)

In the book of Malachi, the first prophetic accusation against the priests (*kōhānīm*), charges them with the ones who all the time (participle) are despising (*bōzē*) the name of Yahweh. This is made clear through their acts of bringing sacrifices of unclean

animals to the altar (6-9, 12) which invariably results in God's preference of the sacrifices of others (11) (Tiemeyer 2006:109). Thus, employing direct speech, Yahweh specifies what the sin is: contempt for Yahweh's name, disrespect and dishonour. In verse 6, the prophet opens with a proverbial statement that leads to an accusation against the priests of not having honoured God enough. They are addressed in the vocative *hakhkhōhānīm bōzê shemî* ("the priests who despise my name") and once addressed in the vocative, the *kōhānīm* (priests) are immediately referred to as "you" (O'Brien 1990:30). The opening statement establishes the framework for the entire unit and brings together the language of both familial and covenantal relationship. The discussion of right relationship between father and son and master and servant is rooted in the specific commandment of the Decalogue (Schuller 1996:859; Weyde 2000:114).¹² In this vital relationship, Yahweh in his mercy adopts Israel as a child. He chose them not because of anything special in them, but because of his grace and love (Ex 4:22-23; Is 44:1-2; 63:16; Hs 11:1). It is essentially an "exclusive relationship the Lord established with Israel by his sovereign grace in choosing them through Abraham, redeeming them from Egypt, and forming his covenant with them at Sinai" (Clendenen 2004:247).

In verse 7, the elaboration of the accusation against the priests is followed by another quotation of the addressees: *bammeh ghē'alnūkhā* ("How have we defiled you or polluted you?"). This question shows that it is not yet clear to the addressees (the priests) that to present polluted food (defiled offerings) implies that Yahweh's name is despised as the motivated accusation in verse 6 argues (Weyde 2000:123). Their response carries connotations of scepticism, surprise and challenge. They disagree with Yahweh's accusations or are absolutely blind to their own actions and attitudes. Following the priests' attitude towards the reputation of Yahweh, the prophet turns his focus to their failure in the performance of their ritual duties as functionaries in the sacrificial system of the Temple. When Malachi spells out how the priests have despised Yahweh's name, he specifically points out:

¹² The first allusion of Yahweh as the father of Israel is (given a synchronic reading of the HB) in Exodus 4:22, "Israel is my son, my firstborn" but the relationship is not fully established (assumed by both parties) until the covenant at Sinai (Ex 20ff.). Following the event at Sinai, the relationship is directly attested several times throughout the OT (2 Sm 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Pss 68:5; 89:26; Pr 3:11-12; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jr 3:4, 19; 31:9. See also Ex 4:22; Dt8:5; 14:1; 32:18; Jb 5:17; Pss 27:10; 103:13; Is 1:2; Hs 11:1-4).

They are accused of offering defiled food (1:7); they offer improper animals for sacrifice (1:8). These include animals that are blind, lame and sick; the deity wishes that they no longer kindle fire upon the altar vainly (1:10); the deity will not accept *minḥāh* from them (1:10); they profane the altar by thinking that it is despicable (1:12); they disdain the altar (1:13); they bring seized, lame and sick offerings (1:13); they bring *minḥāh* (1:13). All these accusations/descriptions attribute to the priests altar functions (O'Brien 1990:30-31).

Here, the priests were disobeying the fundamental Mosaic Law that God gets the best as his possession. The Deuteronomy and priestly laws (Lv 1; 2:3, 10; 6:9 11, 19, 22; 22:17-25; Dt 15:19-23), which require that animals be free of defect and blemish, are assumed or even expanded (for example, to include sick animals, something not specified in any of the legal codes) (Stuart 1998:1300; Schuller 1996:859).

The word *maghghîshîm* (v. 7) employed here with the meaning offering which is consistent with its usage in the Pentateuch (e.g., Lv 2:8) and elsewhere in Malachi (1:8, 11; 2:12; 3:3) (Stuart 1998:1300) is from the verb *nāghash* (to offer) (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:621). It is a *hiph'îl* active participle meaning a continuous or habitual action of the priests when approaching the altar for offerings (cf. Mt 1:8, 11; 2:12; 3:3). The participle helps to describe the situation which needs to be changed (Pohlig 1998:38). In Malachi, it has a special feature, since it specifically refers not only to cult objects (1:12), but to Yahweh: *bammeh ghē'alnūkhā* (1:7b) (Weyde 2000:122-123). It is believed that in Judean law contact with something defiled renders the person defiled, so God would be seen to have been defiled by accepting defiled and unacceptable sacrifices (Pohlig 1998:37).

The type of offering referred to is explained by the word *leḥem*. In its primary sense, *leḥem* denotes bread (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:536) and in general food. In the OT, *leḥem* appears sometimes when referring to food offerings (e.g., Lv 3:11; 21:6, 8, 21; 22:25; Nm 28:2 and Ez 44:7). For example, in the Holiness Code (H) (Lv 17-26) animal sacrifices are usually called *leḥem 'ēlōhîm* ("the food of God") (Lv 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25) (Weyde 2000:123). In the post-exilic prophetic tradition of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi corpus, the only reference to *leḥem* is in Haggai 2:12 meaning sacrificial meat (Hill 1998:178). These offerings and or sacrifices are described as *leḥem meghō'āl*. The word *meghō'āl* is the *pi'el* participle of the verb *gā'al* "to pollute, desecrate" (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:146). The participle is

also translated as an adjective meaning “worthless” and “to be ritually defiled” in the *pu'al* stem. It is a technical cultic language for something unfit to be sacrificed. This implies that the sacrificial animals were blemished or otherwise in imperfect physical condition and thus not suitable for sacrifice according to Levitical law (Pohlig 1998:338, 340). While the term means that these animals were physically unsuitable for sacrifice on the one hand, it means that the wrong attitude of the priests rendered the sacrifices unfit on the other hand (Pohlig 1998:40).

Again, these *lehem meghō'al* are associated with *mizbeḥî* (“my altar”) and *shûlḥan yhwḥ* (“the table of Yahweh”). The expression *'al-mizbeḥî* (“on my altar”) appears frequently in Leviticus, always meaning the altar of burnt offerings, i.e., the bronze altar, rather than the incense altar or the table of the bread of the presence (Weyde 2000:126). The *shûlḥan* denotes a table, whether for personal or cultic use (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:1020). It does not refer to the table upon which the bread of Presence (*lehem haphphānîm*)¹³ was placed. It refers rather to the tables referred to in Ezekiel 40:38ff, located at the gates of the inner court, where sacrifices were to be slaughtered (Weyde 2000:126). The word refers to the altar and it is parallel to *mizbeḥî* (“my altar”). Both expressions, *mizbeḥî* (“my altar”) and *shûlḥan yhwḥ* (“the table of Yahweh”) are synonymous pairs and do not indicate different concepts. This is a remarkable parallelism in the Hebrew Bible (Stuart 1998:1301; Weyde 2000:127). The use of *shûlḥan* agrees with the analogy of the governor’s table. It also reminds one of the common practice of sealing the establishment of covenants with meals. In this light, the construct relationship between *shûlḥan* and *yhwḥ* may be understood to refer to the image of Yahweh as the host at a banquet to which the guests brought food (see 1 Sm 20:29; 2 Sm 9:7-13). The table indicates a symbol of the hospitality and loyalty of the host extended toward his guest. Thus to slight the table was to slight the host (Pohlig 1998:39).

The recurring structure of verse 8, *wekhî-thaghghishûn ... 'ên rā'* is composed of two parallel clauses. Both the terminology and content of these clauses are closely linked to verse 7. The repeated verb *nāghash* (*hiph'il*) in verse 8a alludes clearly to the clause *maghghishîm 'al-mizbeḥî* in verse 7a, and the objects of that verb in verse 8a (*'iwwēr pissēaḥ weḥōleh* – ‘the blind, lame and sick’) seem to interpret the phrase

¹³ The phrase *lehem haphphānîm* (“bread of Presence”) occurs in Ex 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; 1 Sm 21:7; 1 Kgs 7:48 (par 2 Chr 4:19). As for *shûlḥan* with this reference, see, for example Ex 25:23, 27f, 30; 26:35 30:27; Nm 3:31; 1 Kgs 7:48 (par 2 Chr 4:19) (Weyde 2000:126).

lehem meghō'āl in verse 7b. While this verse does not continue the quotation of the addressees in verse 7b, it however elaborates the accusation in it (Weyde 2000:128). The expression *wekhî-thaghghishûn* (but when you present) parallels the beginning of v. 7 *maghghîshîm* (when you present), serving as a further specification of what the defilement is. The adverb *kî* as a connective should be understood as temporal (when) rather than causal or conditional (Weyde 2000:129). This again indicates a continuous action and it clearly refers to sacrifices at the altar of bronze since it has been observed that blemished animals are the object of the offering.

The OT sacrificial laws clearly prohibit offering animals that are faulty physically (Ex 12:5; 29:1; Lv 1:3; 22:18-25; Nm 6:14; 19:2; Dt 15:21; 17:1). It is clear in these laws that one or two types of physical deficiencies, such as blindness or lameness, are typically mentioned in the manner of synecdoche, but the implication is that imperfections of whatever kind cannot be tolerated. This would include sick animals (*hōleh*) (Stuart 1998:1301). Of all the categories of technical cultic terms used in the description of animals disqualified for offerings as found in Leviticus 22:22-24 – matching the twelve defects in a priest, cf. Leviticus 21:18-20 – Malachi chooses five defects in animals that render them unfit for sacrifice: *'iwwēr* (blind; Malachi 1:8), *hōleh* (sick; Malachi 1:8, 13), *phissēah* (limping; Malachi 1:8, 13), *gāzûl* (injured or stolen; Malachi 1:13, also “loot”) and *māshhāth* (damaged; Malachi 1:14) (O'Brien 1990:92-93). It is however noted that only Malachi uses *hōleh* and *gāzûl* (though a similar idea may underline Lv 7:24; 17:15 and 22:18-19) for describing sacrificial blemishes, but these blemishes are implicit in the sacrificial regulations.

The *lamed* preposition prefixed to the verb *lizbōah* expresses purpose (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:510); it is a dative of goal or objective and implies that the prophet is referring to animal sacrifice generally. In fact, Malachi has in view all sacrifices on the altar (Hill 1998:179). The expression *'ên rā'* (“is it not evil?”) offers several possible translations. The construct of *'ayin* in its absolute form denotes “nothing, the absence of something”; in the construct state, it functions as a negation, hence *'ên rā'* (nothing bad, no evil). A rhetorical question is employed by the LXX, Syriac and Arabic versions such that other commentators and versions translate “is that not...?” (NIV, NLT, NRSV), “is it not...?” (NASB, KJV ASV), “is this not...?” (NJB) (Pohlig 1998:41). Some modern translations prefer “wrong” for *rā'*, and indeed the word can be translated “bad”, “unpleasant”, and the like; it need not have moral overtones. However, since the word can describe in its range of meaning moral failure,

“evil” (namely, the defilement of Yahweh’s altar) surely fits the context very well (Stuart 1998:1301).

There appears to be an obvious ironic slant to the challenges and charges against the priests in this verse (8). What the priests are doing is so unacceptable and unsatisfactory that there is no way it could be called right, if only they would be honest about it. The proof is found in the fact that they know very well that a human they desire to please (the Persian appointee governor) would reject what they are presenting to God, whom they should much more desire to honour. Their governor would consider the imperfect sacrifice as an insult and would thus not accept or show favour to those bringing it (Stuart 1998:1301). The *hiph’il* imperative *haqriḇhēhû* from the verb *qārabh* “to offer, give, present, bring” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:897) is part of the Hebrew technical cultic vocabulary. Its reference here could be either to the payment of compulsory taxes or to some voluntary gifts (Pohlig 1998:42-42). The enclitic particle of urgency *nā’* (“now, indeed, please”) (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:609) enforces the imperative by adding an element of irony to the unacceptable nature of the sacrifices in question: “try giving, if you offer, just offer it, just try giving those, do offer them, why not offer it” (Pohlig 1998:42-43). It is obvious that neither priest nor layman would even dream of treating their *pehāh* (Persian governor of Yehud whose identity and nationality are unknown)¹⁴ in the same way as they were treating Yahweh, and this demolishes any theory arguing that the priests lacked knowledge of sacrificial laws. The *hiph’il* imperative *haqriḇhēhû* is sarcastic, for implicit is the understanding that no one would ever offer such gifts to the governor. How ironic, then, that the priests could think that God should be willing to accept or show favour to them and the worshippers they represent.

Similarly, the double question *lephehāthekhā hăyirśekhā* (“would he be pleased with you?”) and *hăyisśā’ phāneykhā* (“would he receive you kindly?”) is best understood as a rhetorical one, for a negative answer is understood to both parts. Thus the imperative is underlying a condition, and the following double question underlying

¹⁴ Pohlig (1998:42) remarks that *pehāh* is probably a loan word from Akkadian, used here to show that Samaria and/or Judah were under the rule of a governor who had been placed there by the king of Persia. It denotes “lord of a district”, a position lower than “satrap” for the Persians. While one is able to know the identity of any Judean governors in the fifth century prior to Nehemiah’s arrival (444 B.C.E.), one remains in the dark as to the governor that Malachi’s original audience would have had in mind when they heard these words preached if the dating of Malachi around 460 B.C.E. is correct (see Stuart 1998:1303).

encodes an unreal consequence. The *qal* imperfect verb *yirśekhā* means “to be pleased with, to be gracious to, to accept, take pleasure in, and to be favourable to someone”. It is also translated in the active voice as “that certainly wouldn’t please him”. The word *’ō* translated “or” is a conjunction expressing choice (Pohlig 1998:42). The idiom *hăyisśā’ phāneykhā* (to receive one graciously, to show one favour, to be gracious towards one, grant you a cordial reception) (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:815) is an ironic echo of the language of the Aaronic blessing, *yisśā’yhw h pānāyw ’ēleykhā* (“May the Lord lift up His countenance on you” Nm 6:26) (Stuart 1998:1303).

Thus in verse 9 the prophet introduces a conclusion based on what has been previously stated with the use of *we’aththāh* “and now, now therefore” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:774). The expression *hallū-nā’ phenê-’ēl* (“will you not entreat God’s favour ...?”) is an idiom employed in the OT for seeking the favour, mercy, and blessing of God.¹⁵ It means “to implore, to entreat, to try to appease, to supplicate, to petition” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:318). The *pi’el* of *hālah* here echoes, probably more accidentally than purposefully, the adjectival *hōleh* (sick) in verse 8 but with the different meaning that the *pi’el* verb form carries (literally, to make soft, weak, to fall sick, thus more abstractly to appeal, implore) (Stuart 1998:1303). The plural imperative undoubtedly refers to the priests as a group. The sentence is in fact, “a common liturgical expression, here employed ironically to bring home the fact that the priests are no more in good standing with God, and thus can no longer fulfil their role as intercessors for themselves or for the nation” (Pohlig 1998:44). Here, the exhortation comes from Malachi who includes himself in the community of Yehud. Since both verse 8 and certainly the end of verse 9 are full of irony, *hallū-nā’* can best be understood as Malachi’s ironic and emphatic exhortation to appease God with polluted and unworthy sacrifices. The argument may then be simplified as follows:

What a governor would reject, God certainly wouldn’t accept, so why don’t you priests stop thinking that God is accepting (*hăyisśā’ phāneykhā*, again satirically echoing Nm 6:26) your inferior offerings and repent of the practice, appealing for mercy? The national favour is jeopardized by your behavior! (Stuart 1998:1303).

While the *waw* conjunction prefixed to *wihānēnū* is best understood as conjunctive

¹⁵ Exodus 32:11; 1 Sm 13:12; 1 Kgs 13:6; 2 Kgs 13:4; 2 Chr 33:12; Jb 11:19; Pss 45:12; 119:58; Jr 26:19; Dn 9:13; Zc 7:2; 8:21, 22.

sequential, the apodosis to a condition “so that, that”, i.e., denoting purpose or result, the verb *ḥānan* means “to be gracious, to be merciful, to take pity” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:335). The phrase *miyyedhkhem ḥāythāh zō'th* (“with such an offering on your part”) is understood differently:

As a circumstantial clause; as long as the priests bring unacceptable sacrifices, God cannot accept them, ‘with such offerings from your hand’..., a parenthesis; ‘of your hand has this [the unacceptable sacrifices offered by the priest] occurred’..., an assertion from which flows the following phrase; ‘you have sinned’..., a condition to be fulfilled by the Jews in return for God’s favour; ‘if you do this [placate God]’..., a comment on the fact that God will refuse to show favour to the Jews; ‘it will be your fault’ (Pohlig 1998:45).

Indeed, disrespect for Yahweh has come through those who were supposed to speak from God. Thus it would be wrong to assume that God was ready to allow the priests go free from punishment by merely praying for forgiveness for despising him *we'aththāh ḥallū-nā' phenê-'ēl wiḥānēnū* (“Now will you not entreat God's favour, that He may be gracious to us?”). The rhetorical question directed to the priests at the end of this verse *ḥāyissā' mikkhem pānīm* (“will he show you favour?”) implies a curse of anger and rejection from Yahweh, anticipating the more overt curse against the priests yet to come (Stuart 1998:1303).

The indictment against the priests in verse 12 is a prose restatement of the important points of verse 7, reemphasizing that what the priests are doing is illegal and not accidental (Clendenen 2004:279; Stuart 1998:1307). Here, the *waw* connective is translated adversatively as “but” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:251), and Malachi, following his discourse pattern, uses the personal pronoun *'aththem* (2mp), as in the past (Malachi 1:6, 7), to highlight the subject of the action, the priests. The combination of the *waw* connective with the pronoun *aththem* changes the focus from the “pure offerings” of the nations, present and future, to the unacceptable worship of the priests.

The *pi'el* participle *meḥallelīm* from *ḥālal* “to profane, desecrate, defile, insult” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:320; Harris et al. 1980:661) denotes a continuous action: “you are profaning”. The verb *ḥālal* is synonymous with *gā'al* (1:7) “to pollute, desecrate” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:146). The word also appears in

2:10 (*pi'el* inf. constr.) *lehallēl berīth 'ābhōthēnū* (profaning the covenant of our fathers) and 2:11 (*pi'el*) *kī hīllēl yehūdhāh qōdhes̄h yhw̄h ('ādhōnāy) 'āsher 'āhēbh* (“for Judah has profaned the sanctuary that Yahweh loves”). What are the priests profaning in verse 12? The word *'ōthō* can mean “it” as the object of (are profaning) or “me” (Pohlig 1998:54). According to Hill (1998:189), the suffixed marker of the definite direct object *'ōthō* refers to the name of Yahweh mentioned three times in verse 11. To profane Yahweh’s name is commonly mentioned elsewhere in the OT to mean “insult God” in any of a variety of ways (Stuart 1998:1307).¹⁶ Priests could profane the name of Yahweh by

Failing to keep themselves holy (Lv 21:6), by coming into contact with or practicing mourning rites for the dead (Lv 21:1-5, 10-12), or by marrying a prostitute, a divorced woman, a widow (i.e., anyone but virgin; Lv 21:7, 13-14). A priest’s failure to marry properly would also ‘defile (*hālal*) his offspring among his people’ (Lv 21:15)... According to Lv 21:17-23 a priest who had a “defect” was not to ‘come near to offer food of his God’, or he would desecrate (*hālal*) the sanctuary and apparently also profane the Lord’s name (Clendenen 2004:281).

The expression *be'ēmorkhem shulhan 'ādhōnāy meghō'al hū'* (“by your saying ‘the table of the Lord is defiled’”) is simply a restatement of its parallel in verse 7, and *wenībhō nibhzeh 'okhlō* (“its food is contemptible”) is the sacrificial food prepared on it for eating by the priests and worshippers (Stuart 1998:1307). Thus in Malachi, the effect of bringing blemished sacrifices and defiling the altar amounted to treating it with contempt and thus disgracing the name of Yahweh. The synonymous words *hālal* (profane), *gā'al* (pollute) and *bāzāh* (despicable) all help to clarify further the intensity of the idea of ritual pollution.

EVIDENCE OF THEIR ATTITUDE AND ACCUSATION (MALACHI 1:13-14A)

In the light of this depreciatory attitude it is likely that the priests also considered the sacrificial cult as hardship or weariness, nuisance (Weyde 2000:152). Verse 13 is a

¹⁶ See Lv 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32; Pr 30:9; Is 48:11; 56:6; Jr 34:16; Ez 20:9, 14, 22, 39; Am 2:7.

prose restatement of the important points of verse 8, and as such it shares several vocabulary connections with verse 8. The derogatory actions of the priests listed in this verse constitute the evidence for the indictment of profaning Yahweh's altar given in the preceding verse. According to the previous quotations in verses 7 and 12 the priests, when instructing, declare that Yahweh's altar is polluted and despised, and that the animals offered in sacrifice are despicable.

The opening statement reveals the words the priests would utter, quietly or maybe in secret to one another, *hinnēh maththelā'āh* ("what a hardship!"). This exclamation consists of two Hebrew words, *hinnēh* (a demonstrative interjection or particle translated "behold", Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997: 243) and another that combines the interrogative particle *māh* ("what, how", Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:552) used as an exclamation with the noun *telā'āh* (burden, hardship, weariness, plague, and nuisance) (Pohlig 1998:57-58). In Exodus 18:8 and Numbers 20:14 *telā'āh* refers to the hardships that Israel had to endure under the oppression of Egypt. From a cultic perspective, there is perhaps an allusion to the Lord's words at a time when Yahweh complained about the burden that Israel's sacrifices were for him. "Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary (*lā'āh*) of bearing them" (Is 1:14). The same situation is recalled in Malachi when Yahweh declares: "You have become weary (*lā'āh*) of me, O Israel!" (Is 43:22 NASB; Clendenen 2004:282).

Another evidence for the profanation of the Lord's name is expressed in the statement *wehiphphaḥtem 'ōthō* ("and you sniff at it contemptuously or disdainfully"). The verb (*nāphaḥ*) appears in the *hiph'il* stem only here and in Job 31:39, where it means "to cause the death" of someone. It may be translated as "to sniff scornfully at, to sniff at in contempt, disdain, to turn up one's nose at, to degrade or enrage" (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:656; Pohlig 1998:58; Clendenen 2004:282). Whatever translation one chooses at this point, it is clear from the context that the priests were fulfilling the sacrificial duties without passion. They did not esteem or value the cult of Yahweh. Thus the expression *wehiphphaḥtem* is a gesture of disrespect and derision. The use of *'ōthō* is considered to be one of the *tiqqune sopherim* (scribal corrections) in the OT. The ancient rabbis understood the text as saying either "you sniff at Yahweh" (appeared to be in danger of blaspheming God to use "it" in reference to Yahweh) or "you sniff at the sacrificial system" (considered too harsh against the Levitical priesthood) (Pohlig 1998:57). The pronoun antecedent could refer

to the Lord's "table" from verse 12, or his "name" from verse 11 and so parallel to "you profane it" in verse 12 (Clendenen 2004:282; Hill 1998:191).

The rest of verse 13 continues to re-echo phrases from 1:6-10. In verse 8 the sacrifices were unacceptable because the animals were *'iwwēr* (blind), *hōleh* (sick), and *phissēah* (limping). Here in verse 13, the sacrifices are described by three adjectives similar to those in verse 8 except for the first. In place of *'iwwēr* (blind), they are described as *gāzûl* (injured or stolen; also loot). The *qal* passive participle *gāzûl* comes from the verb *gāzal* meaning "rob, seize violently, and loot" and with regard to the sacrificial animal; the word may describe that which has been "stolen" (Hill 1998:192). In verse 8, mention is made and interpretation given of *phissēah* (limping). Since such animals could not even be eaten in everyday, nonreligious settings (Ex 22:30 [31]; Lv 7:24; 17:15; 22:8; Ez 4:14; 44:31), they certainly could not be presented legitimately as sacrifices. But this was exactly what the priests were doing. Whether the ones robbing the animals were the priests themselves or the people of Yehud, Malachi's reprimand did not surprise the priests (Stuart 1998:1308).

The expression *ha'ertseh 'ôthāh miyyedhkhem 'āmar yhwēh* ("Should I receive that from your hand? says the LORD") is parallel to verse 10 *'ên-lî hēphets bākhem... ūminhāh lō'-ertseh miyyedhkhem* ("I have no pleasure in you ... and I will accept no offering from you"), making verses 10-13 a literary subunit. The interrogative particle *he'* in *ha'ertseh* is used both in the rhetorical sense ("Shall I accept it...?") and the exclamatory sense ("And I will accept no offering...!"). Thus according to Hill (1998:193), "Tragically, and ironically, Zerubbabel's Temple was erected so that Yahweh 'might be pleased with it' (*we'ertseh-bō*, Hag 1:8). By the time of Malachi, Yahweh can take no pleasure in his Temple because the ritual sacrifices offered to him by the corrupt priesthood are unacceptable (*lō'-ertseh*, v. 10)."

In verse 14a, the indictment is directed against the lay worshippers or anyone who bring the inferior animals to the priests rather than the priests. The fault was primarily with the priests since they take responsibility for the whole cultic life; leading in temple worship and also teaching the people about the Lord and his Law. However, the worshippers who were defrauding Yahweh with their sacrifices are also said to be "cursed" (cf. Dt 27:16) (Clendenen 2004:284). The *qal* passive participle *'ārûr* of *'ārar* "to be cursed, to be inflicted with a curse, accursed" (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:76; Harris et al. 1980:168) is "part of Hebrew covenant vocabulary, e.g., the ritual curses upon covenant breakers in Dt 27:15-26" (Pohlig 1998:61). The participle

here describes the participle *nôkhēl* from *nākhal* (to be crafty, deceitful). It is also translated as a simple noun: “cheat, hypocrite, rouse, deceiver, swindler” (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:76), *weyēsh be’edhrô zākhār* (one who has a male animal in his flock).¹⁷ The worshipper vows to sacrifice (*wenōdhēr wezōbhēah*)¹⁸ it to the Lord if he answers his prayer; but when the Lord answers his prayer, the worshipper breaks his vow, goes back on his promise and substitutes a worthless (blemished, damaged) animal (*māshhāth*) (Clendenen 2004:285). The person who resorted to such a scheme was a “cheat” and was placed under the curse of Yahweh (Dt 27:26) (Smith 1984:316). As Clendenen (2004:285) summarizes, “the intention of the speaker was to vigorously keep himself aloof from that person and his action.” This is because it spoke of separation from God, being expelled from a community relationship and from the “security, justice, and success” that he had enjoyed there. To them, being cursed by God meant being “delivered over to misfortune”.

THE IDENTITY OF LEVI AND GOD’S COVENANT WITH HIM (MALACHI 2:4-5)

God has spoken so critically and threateningly to the priests on account of the fact that their disobedience threatens the continuity of the Levitical covenant. It must be noted that in verses 4-7 the priests are personified in the singular (“Levi,” “he,” “him,” etc.). This is a means of emphasizing their corporate identity and responsibility, as well as their guilt under the covenant they have with God (Stuart 1998:1314-15). Verse 4 of the passage is seen as a transitional statement, bringing to a close the discussion of the curse on the priests (2:1-3) and then introduces the issue of the covenant with Levi. In verses 5-7, Malachi describes the faithfulness of Levi and the proper conduct of the

¹⁷ Male animals were specifically required for Passover sacrifices (Ex 12:5), burnt-offerings (Lv 1:3, 10), sin-offerings (Lv 4:3, 23) and votive sacrifices or free-will offerings (Lv 22:18-20). This last offering is the one the verse mentions since it involves a vow. However, when the petition was granted the worshipper was often tempted to offer a cheap substitute for a sacrifice (Ps 76:11).

¹⁸ Vows in the OT were promises to give God a particular gift or offering in the future, whether because of economic depression or because of other circumstances. These gifts could not include what Israelites were already obliged to give to their God, e.g., the tithe. There were vows of people (Lv 27:1-8), animals (Lv 27:9-13), houses (Lv 27:14-15), inheritances or family land (Lv 27:16-21) and any land or non-family land (Lv 27:22-25). On vow offerings see also, Nm 30:2; Dt 23:21-23.

priests. What could the priests have understood the expressions *berîth 'eth-lēwî* (my covenant with Levi, 2:4) and *berîth hallēwî* (covenant of Levi, 2:8) to mean? It is not clear whether this label denotes a particular person or serves a collective term referring to the priests and/or Levites. While many a scholar has argued for a distinction between priests and Levites,¹⁹ these verses can be understood as a comparison between the ideal priest, personified as Levi, and the contemporary clergy of Malachi's day (Tiemeyer 2006:127). O'Brien (1990:27-48, 101-106) carefully examines the various labels assigned by the prophet to the people with clerical connection and emphasizes that Malachi 2:4ff portrays the ideal priest on the basis of several traditions. She contends that both priests and Levi/sons of Levi (*kōhănîm* and *lēwî/benê-ēwî*) have the same function (altar duties and proper instruction) according to 1:6ff; 2:1; 3:3. Priests and Levi/sons of Levi (*kōhănîm* and *lēwî/benê-ēwî*) are treated in the same way; and it seems difficult to make a distinction between them. Thus Levi in Malachi 2:4-5 is best understood as another name for priests – the clergy in an abstract sense (Tiemeyer 2006:129).

Taking Levi as an individual, the relationship between this individual and Yahweh is described in terms of covenant. In verse 5, the clause *haḥayyîm wehashshālôm wā'eththenēm-lô* ("life and peace-I gave them to him") probably has an interpretative function in relation to the previous clause *berîthî hāythāh 'iththô* ("my covenant was with him"). That is Yahweh's covenant with Levi manifested in *ḥayyîm* ("life") and *shālôm* ("peace," "welfare," "well-being"), which Yahweh gave him as a reward for his faithfulness and obedience (Weyde 2000:186). Levi's acts of reverence are

¹⁹ On the one hand, Mason (1990:244) suggests as one possible explanation, that the priests addressed "are to be judged in order that the covenant with Levi might stand (Deut. 33:8-11). The very favourable reference Levi (vv. 5f) might be a pro-Levitical, anti-priestly piece of polemic...." Petersen (1995:191-93) holds that the priests addressed and criticized are "Aaronid priests", contrasted to the Levites; the latter are given "an almost quasi-prophetic role;" they have true instruction in their mouth (2:6), which reminds of the description of the prophet who had Yahweh's word in his mouth. On the other hand, Redditt (1995:151f.) contends that the temple priest are designated as "Levites," and for this reason a distinction is implicitly denied between Zadokites (priests) and non-Zadokites (Levites). Verhoef (1987:245) notes that it is a clear fact that no distinction is made between priests and Levites; the priests are under the covenant of Levi; they are the sons of Levi (Mal. 3:3). Glazer-McDonald (1987:77-80) contends that the terminology in Malachi 2:4ff only reflects the fact that in post-exilic times the entire priesthood was subsumed under one genealogy with Levi as its first ancestor. The terms "priest" and "Levite" were virtually interchangeable and all the priests had to claim Levitical descent.

described in the expression *môrā' wayyîrā'ēnî ûmiphpenē shemî niḥath hû'* (“fear and he feared me and bowed in awe of my name – reputation”). These words *yārā'* (“fear,” “reverence”) and *ḥāthath* (“terror”) signify much more the emotion of being frightened. They are ways of showing the seriousness of the priests’ responsibility in the supervision of worship, enforcement of the various provisions of the covenant, and keeping the nation holy (Num. 25:13) (Stuart 1998:1317). According to O’Brien (1990:41) *yārā'* in the diplomatic vocabulary of ancient Near East signifies the “attitude of exclusive allegiance”; in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the HB it describes loyalty and one’s observance of its covenant stipulation. Thus the intensity of this word pair serves to emphasize Levi’s extreme devotion and loyalty to Yahweh.

THE IDYLIC PRIESTLY PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY (MALACHI 2:6-7)

In verse 6, Malachi presents in several phrases how Levi revered Yahweh and stood in awe of his name. Here Levi is depicted by three principal elements that constitute what a priest who truly fears God is supposed to be like. First, true teaching and accurate interpretation of the law and rendering of legal decisions: as the ideal teacher, true instruction was in his mouth (*tôrath 'ēmeth ḥāythāh bephihû*) and on whose lips no wickedness was found (*we'awlāh lō'-nimtsā' bhiṣphāthāyw*). Here the term *tôrāh* (“instruction, law - a derived secondary sense” Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:435) stands in parallelism to *'awlāh* (“perversity, iniquity, unrighteousness, wickedness”, Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:732). Again, the terms *peh* (mouth) and *ṣephāthāyim* (lips) are paralleled in 2:6 and in 2:7 but in reverse order. The point of emphasis here is that the instruction in Levi’s mouth was true and accurate such that no wrong was found on his lips. Since obedience to the Yahweh’s *tôrāh* defined Israel’s faithfulness to their covenant with him, the life of Israel depended largely on the priests’ faithfulness in discharging their duties of instruction (Clendenen 2004:312).

Second, Levi was full of consistent obedience in various duties: he served with God in peace and uprightness (*bashālôm ûbhemishôr ḥālakh 'iththî*). Here again, *shālôm* carries with it the inherent idea of completeness and perfection. The term for “uprightness” *mishôr* refers elsewhere either to level ground (Pss 26:12; 27:11; Is 40:4; 42:16) or to fairness (Is 11:4; Ps 67:5). However, it’s most basic sense is that of consistency; hence the translation “perfectly and consistently” (Stuart 1998:1321).

Third, he (Levi) preserved the holiness of God's people: he turned many away from iniquity (*werabhbhîm hēshîbh mē'āwōn*). The word *'āwōn* refers to any kind of sin, iniquity, unrighteousness, and the like. It refers broadly to what is wrong and displeases God. Levi is credited with providing proper religious instruction and by maintaining his own integrity, fulfils his responsibility of leading others (O'Brien 1990:42).

Verse 7 continues the description of how Malachi envisioned the ideal priest. Here, consideration turns from the figure of Levi to that of the *kōhēn*. However, the shift in names does not affect the shift in description. The priest in 2:7, like Levi in 2:5-6, is responsible for speaking true *tōrāh* and for guarding knowledge (*kî-šiphthē khōhēn yishmerû-dha'ath wethōrāh yebhaqshû miphphîhû*). Here is a picture of an ideal priest who fulfils all the duties of priesthood; a teacher per excellence, who lives a life in complete loyalty to God's will and in harmony with his own teaching: "he lives as he teaches and when these things are combined they are redemptive for the rest of the people" (Tiemeyer 2006:131). This priest is given an elevated title, namely that of being an intermediary per excellence between God and the people (Glazer-McDonald 1987:71; Stuart 1998:1321). This is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible in which the priest is called a *mal'akh* (messenger). The term elsewhere refers either angelic beings (e.g., Gn 19:1; 21:17) or prophets (Hg 1:13; Is 44:26). This description represents the highest estimation of the responsibility of the priesthood in the OT. Malachi's description of the priest rather than the prophet as the *mal'akh yhw* ("Lord's messenger") is understood as an investiture of the priest with the stature previously enjoyed by the prophet. In this case, it renders the work of the prophets superfluous (O'Brien 1990:43).

CORRUPTION AND CONTEMPT OF THE PRIESTS (MALACHI 2:8-9)

In Malachi 2:8-9, the discontentment with the actual priesthood comes immediately. The focus on the covenant with Levi in 2:4-9 turns in 2:8-9 from professed ideal picture of past obedience to present disobedience. In verse 8, they are lambasted with three main accusations of corruption and contempt. First, they are living in disobedience: rather than walking with the Lord "in peace and uprightness" (*beshālôm ûbhemîshôr hālakh 'iththî*, 2:6), they have "turned from the way" (*sartem min-hadhherekh*). Their failure in ministry began with failure in their own lives. The noun

derekh denotes in its primary sense “way, path”; and a secondary sense carries the meaning of conduct or habitual pattern of living expected by God (Pohlig 1998:84). The phrase *sartem min-hadhdherekh* is used in Deuteronomy and related literature to denote disloyalty (Dt 9:12, 16; 11:28; 31:29; Ex 32:8; Judges 2:17).

Second, they have caused others to stumble and sin: instead of turning “many from sin” (*werabhbhîm hēshîbh mē’āwōn*, 2:6), their instruction (*tôrāh*) had “turned many to stumble” (*hikhshaltem rabhbhîm baththôrāh*). The *hiph’il* of *kāshal* (“to cause to stumble, lead to do wrong, lead to do sinful things”, Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:505) is used causatively. The priests, by neglecting their instructional duties, whether by priestly regulation, prophetic oracle, or educational instruction have caused others to stumble (O’Brien 1990:35-36). The third and most serious indictment in this text is that they have violated the covenant that made them priests: “you have corrupted the covenant with Levi” (*sheḥatem berîth hallēwî*). The verb *sheḥatem* (“to violate, annul, break ruin, corrupt”, Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:1007; Harris et al. 1980:2370) is used both in the *pi’el* and *hiph’il* stem with and without a direct object. When used without an object, it denotes the act of disloyalty (Hs 9:9; Gn 6:11; Dt 4:16, 25; Ez 16:47; 2 Chr 26:16). *Sheḥatem* takes a direct object in Malachi 2:8 and in Hosea 13:9, Isaiah 14:20, Jeremiah 48:18, etc., signifying total devastation. However, none of the verbs in the Hebrew Bible that describe covenant violation joins Malachi in describing the breaking of a covenant as *sheḥatem* (O’Brien 1990:37). While the covenant will continue because God is committed to it, the priests who have morally corrupted it have lost their part in it (Pohlig 1998:85).

Verse 9 brings the oracle to a close and adds a further dimension to the priests’ failure to provide instruction: *kephî ’āsher ’ēnkhem shōmrîm ’eth-derākhay wenōs’îm pānîm baththôrāh* (“in as much as you are not guarding my way but rather showing partiality in the instruction”). In the announcement of judgement against the priests which follows the accusation: *wegham-’āni nāthaththî ’ethkhem nibhzîm ūshephālîm lekhol-hā’ām* (“and so I have made you despised and debased before all the people”), the subject is strongly stressed by the pronoun *’āni* (“I”) and the preceding particle *gam* (“thus, therefore, so”, Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:168). The expression *nāthaththî ’ethkhem nibhzîm* (“I have made you despised”) recalls the terminology in the pronouncement of punishment against Edom: *kî-hinnēh qāṭōn nethaththîkhā bagōyim bāzûy bā’ādhām* (“For behold, I have made you small among the nations, Despised among men” Jr 49:15). The use of *nāthan nibhzîm* in 2:9 is important

because the verb *bāzāh* occurs also in the accusations in 1:6, 7, 12, and in both 1:7, 12 and 2:9 in *niph'al* participle. It is thus against this background that an idea of retribution appears in 2:9; the priests who despised Yahweh's name (1:6) and allow the altar of Yahweh (1:7) and the sacrifices on it (1:12) to be despised, will themselves be despised by Yahweh (Weyde 2000:206). The participle *nibhzîmi* is co-ordinated with *shephālîm* ("abased, humiliated, degraded", Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:1050; Harris et al. 1980:2445), which "can refer to something that is, or even should be, contemptible and to be avoided" (Stuart 1998:1324).

The motivation for their humiliation in 2:9 is terminologically linked to the two accusations in 2:8: *sartem min-hadhdherekh* ("turn aside from the way") and *kephî 'āsher shōmrîm 'eth-derākhay* ("not keeping my way") seem to be parallel. The first clause in 2:9 *kephî 'āsher 'ēnkhem shōmrîm 'eth-derākhay* ("in as much as you are not guarding my way") probably alludes synthetically to the first clause in 2:7 *kî-šiphthê khōhēn yishmerû-dha'ath* ("for the lips of a priest guard knowledge"), but the priests addressed are charged with not keeping (*shāmar*) the ways of Yahweh. The phrase *shōmrîm 'eth-derākhay* ("keep my way")²⁰ is used in an accusation in 2:9 alone (Weyde 2000:207). The meaning of the second clause *wenōs'îm pānîm baththôrāh* ("but rather showing partiality in the instruction") depends on the sense of the idiom *nōse'îm pānîm*.²¹ While both positive and negative connotations are possible in the rendering of the *nōse'îm pānîm*, the expression *wenōs'îm pānîm baththôrāh* is most likely governed by the negative *'ēnkhem* thus the translation "because you show partiality in judicial decisions" (Tiemeyer 2006:133). Glazier-McDonald (1987:73) concludes that the point of these words is that the priests "resorted not to legal precedent but looked to themselves only". The priests do not only oversees and pronounces blessings (2:1-4) but also provides moral leadership and instructions to others. Their failure in this regard was indeed part of the ground for the humiliating

²⁰ To keep the way of the Lord is used in various places throughout the HB to describe loyalty (Gn 18:19; 2 Sm 22:22; Jb 23:11; Pss 18:22; 37:34; Pr 8:32), since *shāmar* involves a servant carefully following his master's instructions (O'Brien 1990:38; Clendenen 2004:318).

²¹ Tiemeyer (2006:133) O'Brien (1990:38-39) and Clendenen (2004:318-19) observe that study of the various occurrences of *nōs'îm pānîm* (lift up the face) in the HB reveals its various meanings. It is used positively as "to show someone favour, to show one's pleasure and affection" (Gn 32:21; Nm 6:26; Dt 28:50; Jb 42:8; Lm 4:16, and MI 1:8, 9). But there are also instances where this idiom has a negative connotation "to show partiality, display favouritism" (Dt 10:17; Lv 19:15; Jb 32:21; Ps 82:2; Pr. 18:5).

judgement pronounced on them by Yahweh in the inspired words of Malachi 1:6-2:9.

PRIESTS' CONSEQUENT ACTS OF NEGLIGENCE (MALACHI 2:1-3)

Even though Yahweh's people have survived the ordeals of national defeat and disappointment through his sovereignty, Malachi asserts that they cannot carry on properly without the reformation, and or transformation of their leaders. As Zechariah exposes worthless shepherds (Zc 10:2-3; 11:15-17), so Malachi lambasts corrupt priests. Employing direct speech, Malachi levels harsh indictments against the priests who engage in practices that impugn the integrity of Yahweh and set the whole community in severe danger (Stulman and Kim 2010:241). This discourse unit focuses on the accusations of impurity against the priests as well as their subsequent cleansing. This unit specifies the terms of the judgement on the priests (*hakhkhōhānīm*); their persons, blessings and perhaps their offspring will be cursed (2:3). It is no surprise that the first lines of this second disputation are probably the hardest in the entire OT against the priests, introducing the oracle's judgement sentence (Stuart 1998:1310). The reason for this punishment lies in the priests attitude toward Yahweh and his service; their slackness and failure to give God the very best. In 2:1, the *kōhānīm* are addressed in the second person plural: *we'aththāh 'ālēkhem hammitswāh* ("and now to you this commandment"). The noun *mitswāh* here refers to a warning, and then to the resulting sentence of punishment which Yahweh is passing upon the priests. It refers implicitly to God's requirement that the priests acts in a worthy manner (Pohlig 1998:64-65). There are grave consequences for anyone stupid enough to disregard God's admonitions (cf. Lv 26:14-39; Zc 1:4-6; 7:12-14). As a punishment for failing to honour Yahweh's reputation, the *kōhānīm* in 2:2-4 receive Yahweh's punishment. The following section exegetes the curse pronouncements on the priests, their persons, blessings and perhaps their offspring.

CURSING THEIR BLESSINGS (MALACHI 2:2)

In verse 2, the prophet declares that unless the priests begin to hear (*im-lō' thishme 'ū*) and set it upon their heart to honour (*we'im-lō' thāsîmû 'al-lēbh lāthēth kābhōdh*) God, he will set calamities upon them (*weshillahtî bhākhem 'eth-hamme'ērāh*). The

expression *thāsîmû 'al-lēbh* (“set it upon the heart”) means, to determine a curse of one’s action in response to knowledge or awareness of something (Clendenen 2004:288). Malachi declares that Yahweh will send a curse upon them and curse their blessings: *we’ārôthî 'eth-birkhôthêkhem wegħam 'ārôthîhā* (“I will curse your blessings, and indeed, I have cursed them”). A curse is a pronouncement of divine punishment. All prophetic curses are based on the curse announced in the Mosaic covenant (especially Lv 26; Dt 4; 28-32). The precise meaning of *birkhôthêkhem* in 2:2 is variously interpreted. It may refer to either the material agricultural resources that the priests received from Yahweh through the people as tithing (Nm 18:21) or to the blessings that they pronounce upon people (O’Brien 1990:32).

Given the fact that not only the priests but also the people are to blame for the current situation (cf. 3:6-12), lack of agricultural productivity could be an appropriate punishment since it affects both parties (Glazier-McDonald 1987:67-68). Since the priests and some worshippers were motivated by greed to relax their standards on the quality of sacrifices, it is proper that they should receive as part of their punishment an economic blow. According to Stuart (1998:1311), the present verse contains two types of curses: rejection/destruction of the cult, and a futility curse. The function of a general curse is to emphasize that the miscreant will not get away with his or her sin (Lv 26:41, 43: “they will pay for their sin”). A futility curse focuses on the frustration of one’s plan and efforts as a divine punishment (Dt 28:29: “you will be unsuccessful in everything you do”).

Precisely, blessing was a priestly business. The priests served as the intermediaries between the people and God (Ex 28-29; cf. 1 Sm 2:28) and as such were empowered to pronounce his blessing on the people. The Aaronic blessing was probably the high point as well as the conclusion of the worshippers’ experience at the temple. It is therefore argued that all of Malachi 1:6-2:9 is a post-exilic exegetical reworking of the Aaronic blessing (Nm 6:23-27) in which the prophet ironically inverts the priests’ language, hopes and actions; their special prerogative of pronouncing blessings (O’Brien 1990:33; Tiemeyer 2006:242; Stuart 1998:1311). Thus just as lack of agricultural productivity would hurt the rest of the people, so also would lack of a benediction: were it to fail, to be withheld, or to be reversed in effectiveness so that it functioned as a curse (that is, so that the people went home after a blessing only to experience disaster of various kinds), there would be ritual consequences that would affect the recipients of the blessing (Tiemeyer 2006:243).

REBUKING THEIR SEED (MALACHI 2:3)

The second aspect of the punishment strikes the priests more personally. Two curse types are pronounced against the priests here: decimation/infertility of the family and dishonour (Stuart 1998:1312). Just as *birkhōthêkhem* in 2:2 refers to at least two possible meanings, so also does *zera'* in 2:3. It may mean that Yahweh will rebuke either agricultural seed or human progeny (O'Brien 1990:33). The first curse is given in the expression *hinnî ghō'ēr lākhem 'eth-hazzera'* ("behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring"). The verb in this clause *ghō'ēr* in its primary sense means "to cut off, hew down or off". The MT of *ghō'ēr* reads "rebuking", while the LXX reads *aphorizō* "cut off, separate, take away", which in turn appears to be based upon a reading either of *ghō'ēr* "to diminish, take away" or of *ghō'ēr* "to cut off" (Pohlig 1998:68-69). In the final word of the clause, the bulk of the LXX tradition, followed also by the Vulgate, read *ton ōmon* (shoulder, arm) for what is seen in the MT as *hazzera'* (the offspring, descendants, seed) (Stuart 1998:1312). *Hazzera'* (the seed) may be a reference to agricultural produce, a view which is combined with an agricultural interpretation of the blessings in verse 2. In this regard, the rebuking of the agricultural seed would punish the farmers rather than the priests. This interpretation however does not hold weight since *zera'* does not elsewhere denote fruit or crops (Verhoef 1987:241-42; O'Brien 1990:33).

Contrarily, the suggestion has been made that *zera'* (seed) refers to the offspring of the priests (cf. Jr 31:27), since the cutting off of crops would harm the farmer and not the priests, and as priests did not plant (Verhoef 1987:241). The removal of progeny strikes at the heart of the covenant between God and the priests and as such lack of continuity of the priestly lines would mean an end to the covenant (Petersen 1995:189). Thus a prediction of extinction of line to the priests meant to them not only a loss of their personal reputations and standing, but a loss of the distinct family office of honour as well (Stuart 1998:1313). *Zera'* (seed) usually describes future offspring who will share in the privileges bestowed on the original recipients, just as the descendants of Aaron and Phinehas were given the responsibilities of the priesthood (Ex 28:43; Nm 17:5; 25:13; Lv 21:17; 22:4) (O'Brien 1990:34).

But could this be primarily a rhetorical threat or a literal promise from God of the elimination of the priesthood? The answer from Stuart's (1998:1313) perspective must be that it was both. It was a rhetorical threat precisely because it was conditional (verse 2: "If you do not listen and if you do not take it to heart to give honour to my

name”). On the other hand, while one cannot with confidence assume that Malachi or his hearers would have thought that these inspired words were meant to predict the complete extermination of the descendants of the priests, whether immediately or slowly as time goes by, everyone hearing this curse knew that God was going to punish the priests, but the extent and exact nature would be more in doubt. The parallel in Hosea 4:6-8 along with the next phase in the elaboration of the punishment implies that Yahweh was threatening to forget the sons of sinful priests (O’Brien 1990:34; Clendenen 2004:291).

SPREADING DUNG UPON THEIR FACES (MALACHI 2:3)

The final phase in the elaboration of the punishment is in the sequence *wezērîthî pheresh ‘al-penêkhem peresh ḥaghghêkhem wenāsā’ ‘ethkhem ‘ēlāyw* (“and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it”). The term *peresh* “dung, refuse”, (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1997:831;) always appears in contexts of ritual animal sacrifice, though there are only five more instances in the OT (Ex 29:14; Lv 4:11, 8:17, 16:27; Nm 19:5). The term means in the technical sense the “inedible animal innards, especially the undigested contents of the stomachs of ruminants, and intestines and their fecal contents which were removed from the sacrificial animals prior to roasting on the altar” (Stuart 1998:1314). The victims’ intestine and contents were disposed of before the sacrifice was offered. The *peresh* from the sacrificed animals had to be taken outside the camp because it was unclean and otherwise would defile the Lord’s dwelling place with his people (cf. Lv 10:4-5; 13:46; 24:14; Nm 5:3; Dt 23:10, 12). Thus spreading the defiled waste on the priests’ faces (*pānîm*) and carrying them away as so much waste themselves was a figurative way of saying they would be removed from office in utter disgrace, targeting their sacramental duties (Clendenen 2004:292; Tiemeyer 2006:246).

The word *ḥaghghêkhem* is a compound of the noun *ḥagh* and the 2nd masculine plural possessive pronoun. It refers to “festival, feast, sacrifice, offering, festal sacrifice”. It is used here as a metonymy to refer to the animal offerings at the festivals (Pohlig 1998:70). Yahweh was not merely intending to spread some dung on their faces, but, metaphorically speaking, he would wait for the festivals during which the amount of excrement was by far the most voluminous. Here is a picture of priests’ faces splattered with animal dung, and it is God who is doing it. Dung was about as

unholy as a substance could be, and thus their humiliation and disgrace were complete (Stuart 1998:1314). The use of such vivid imagery enforces the degree of disgust Yahweh felt for the priests' attitude toward the cult. As they had treated the Lord with disdain (1:6) and polluted his altar with their corrupted sacrifices (1:7), so also the Lord will treat them with disdain and defile them, making them useless. Since they considered it a burden to serve the Lord (1:13), he will relieve them of their burden by removing them and their descendants from his service (Clendenen 2004:292).

CONCLUSION

This article examined the various accusations against the priests in Malachi 1:6-9, 12-14, and 2:1-3. Priests are expected to offer sacrifices upon the altar and to ensure that the animals for sacrifice are neither blind nor lame, and neither sick nor seized. The kindling of the altar fires and their presentation of *minhāh* should be done religiously. However, the actions and character of the current priesthood contradicted the ideal. They are found to be polluting the altar of Yahweh by offering polluted food on it. The accusations are followed by motivated curses: their persons, blessings and perhaps their offspring were to be cursed (2:3). The reason for this punishment lay in the priests' attitude toward Yahweh and his service; their slackness and failure to give Yahweh the very best. For Malachi, the ideal community is a Torah-observant community, one that acknowledges Yahweh's justice and sovereignty and in response lives as a reverential covenant community. Employing direct speech, Malachi levels harsh indictments against the priests who engage in practices that impugn the integrity of Yahweh and set the whole community in severe danger (Stulman and Kim 2010:241).

Malachi's criticism of the cult was conducted on the basis of covenantal principles. The ethical life of the Israelites was far from the covenantal ideal established between Yahweh and the nation. The cult was an expression of the inner life of the worshipper, i.e., an honouring, fearful relationship with Yahweh. Such a relationship was based on and sustained by Yahweh's grace who had mercifully chosen his people to be his. Again, contrary to pagan religions, the rituals of the cult were never meant to have magical properties. They were never separated from the worshipper. So, for someone to approach the altar, he had to be on good terms with the Yahweh whom he was trying to please, being submissive, penitent, thankful and

obedient to the *tôrāh*; that is, under covenant stipulations. The prophet did not treat the priests as innovators, but as people who are expected to follow policy, maintain standards determined by others, and to perform their duties in a conventional manner. Truly no prophet, however, except Malachi accused them (i.e., the priests) of malfeasance in office. Other prophets had many extreme and uncomplimentary observations to make about observances and cultic practices of their people, but did not single out priests as targets (Zevit 2006:208). Malachi shows where the ritual delinquencies are and how to deal with them, either by encouraging or bringing qualified animals. This is perhaps Malachi's most singular characteristic that appears nowhere else in the other prophetic books. The prophet's emphases on the temple obviously help one to see that there was nothing wrong with the cult unless it was not used correctly as part of the wider picture of Yahweh's covenant with his people. Malachi's insistence that sacrifices must be without blemish (Malachi 1:8, cf. 1:13, 14), exhorts Yahweh's people in faith communities to inspect their own souls for blemishes and to live in virtue. The prophetic narrative insists that the requisite inward spiritual reality and concrete physical regalia of worship cannot be totally separated.

In Malachi 2:4-9, the prophet highlights the shortcomings of the corrupt priesthood of his day with respect to their teaching potentials by way of what is expected of them, as demonstrated by the ideal of the ancient Levites. The analysis focused on the identity of Levi and the nature of God's covenant with him elaborating on his excellent ability to teach and concluded with the corruption and contempt of the priests with respect to their lack of the same ability. Malachi attempts to bring the priesthood closer to what the prophets perceived to be the Torah ideal; priests who excelled in teaching, effective and efficient exegetes of scripture, priest that provided social justice, who worshipped Yahweh alone and whose performance of the cult satisfied the most rigorous cultic demands. Malachi's oracle also implies an exhortation to Christian clergy to live in a way worthy of their status. It is necessary that those chosen for holy work or those called to the priesthood live in a holy way and conduct themselves morally in the church (O'Keefe 1996:149). Priests in the Old Testament and throughout the ancient Near East were not innovators and revealers of new knowledge, but acted as faithful custodians who transmitted the accumulated lore and rules of behaviour. In this regard, the priesthood functioned as conservative force in Israel's life (Nelson 1993:88-93). Malachi's emphasis on the role of the priest as teacher (2:5-7), as both the repository and the hander-on of the traditions of the

community, invite Yahweh's people in faith communities to look anew at the institutions in the church and their society that can serve as carriers of true ethical instruction (Schuller 1996:862-63).

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