

Landed Interpretation: An Environmental Ethicist Reads Leviticus

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LANDED CONTEXT

The title of this essay is a little misleading, suggesting that I write from a single location, when in fact my training in multiple disciplines gives me liminal academic status. I am not only an environmental ethicist; I am a former biblicist and archaeologist who has chosen ethics as her academic home because it is an ideal place for posing questions about ancient texts and modern life. I was raised in the Disciples of Christ Church, a low-church Protestant denomination that developed in rural Kentucky and whose sole article of faith is, “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible.”¹ I was always more comfortable with the second half of that statement of belief, and so I organized my studies around archaeological and textual studies of the Bible. Thus I am an environmental ethicist with training in critical methods of engagement with the Hebrew Bible, and one who has gotten her hands dirty at the archaeological sites of Castra, Ein Gedi, Sepphoris, and Kirbet Cana.

Not only do I have a liminal academic context, but I also have a liminal personal context. I spent my early years in Kentucky, where the Appalachian Mountains give us a different view of what is possible. There is quite a bit of both looking up and climbing up to be done, but there are also physical barriers to vision and long paths around mountains to be plotted. The mountains form a culture by isolation, but also by nourishment. And so I have a strong sense of the constructive force that place has in making people who they are, both socially and religiously. I come from the blending of two farming families, and I was always aware that my parents had chosen to leave the life of the land. My liminality comes from having one foot in the modern world, full of its technological advances, and one foot in an older, almost tribal culture

that prioritizes kinship ties and insider status while shirking much of what the modern world has to offer. It is no small wonder that I, having been formed in this environment, gravitate toward environmental ethics. I was reared with a love of nature, skepticism toward modern inventions, and an emphasis on the Bible. Bringing all of these parts of myself together without demonizing any one of them has been part of my long academic journey.

In addition to living in this liminal space academically and personally, I also inhabit it legally. As a woman married to a woman, my travels from place to place result in legal confusion. Am I in a state that recognizes the legal standing of my relationship? Do the state laws or the city laws govern my relationship at this time? These questions and others plague my movements and push me to think critically about place and its relationship to law. I am often put in the position of asking the question, Where am I? as the necessary precursor to, Who am I?—at least in relation to the other people of the lands that I traverse. This liminal legal status allows me to think of myself analogically as a *ger* in the land of Israel, who in Lev. 19:33 is extended the courtesy of legal standing. Yet the explicit mention suggests that the people did not simply assume the legal standing of strangers.

Of course, my marriage is also a contentious subject religiously. My social location pushes back against that simple reading: “No book but the Bible,” forcing an abundance of meaning for me or no meaning at all. I cannot read the statement as reductionistically limiting my own self-definition, but rather, I must engage the Bible as a polyphonous text, polyvalent and overflowing with meaning. In an effort to preserve meaning, I develop interpretations of the biblical text that honor my own investment in it but that don’t result in self-immolation. To this end, I often rely on an intertwining of premodern interpretive principles with the historical-critical method. Or more to the point, I embrace the Documentary Hypothesis while also affirming the superabundance of meaning within the biblical text. In short, an interweaving of my personal and academic contexts shapes my relationship to the biblical text and influences my reading.

My own commitments to the biblical text do not allow me to ignore Leviticus, but in fact demand that I engage it to bring about meaning in a modern, liminal context. Scholars have recognized Leviticus as a treasure trove of information on ancient Israelite cultic practice, family organization, legal reasoning, and social ethics (for instance, Douglas 2002 [1966] and Milgrom 2004). Yet much of the significance of this text has been relegated to informing how we think about the past. In fact, the Revised Common Lectionary includes only selections from Leviticus 19, and in public debates one hears only citations of the antihomosexuality passages (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). In many ways, the content of Leviticus has determined not only our approaches to the text but also what we expect to be the fruitful significance of any of our readings of it. Yet when Leviticus is read from an environmental ethics

perspective, it proves to be a valuable source for cultivating an ecological imagination, which gives a historically specific religious text a constructive voice in contemporary environmental ethics.

While the entire text of Leviticus can be read from an environmental ethics perspective, I will limit myself to the Holiness Code (chs. 17–27), due to the specific references to land and family in that section. As mentioned, previous studies of Leviticus have argued that the text doesn't have any contemporary relevance. We can only glean more information about the ancient cult, family structure, or legal reasoning, objects of study that are really only of academic interest. But within the Holiness Code, the content specifically about the land is a good starting place for interpreting the text to speak to a modern context. My approach locates the significance in our modern context rather than gleaning information about social history. Before narrowing this study to focus on the Holiness Code, however, I will go into more detail about what reading from an environmental ethics perspective means for my approach to the text.

LANDED READING

Environmental ethics is a broad field of study. It includes animal studies, sustainability studies, ecojustice, and ecotheology, just to name a few subfields. The overarching thematic unity of all these studies is that they investigate and make normative claims about the human relationship to nature. Within these studies, scholars must define *humans* and *nature*, as well as the unit of moral considerability for each. Does *human* mean “individuals,” or does it refer to a group? Are animals individuals that need to be protected, or do their habitats simply need to be protected? Is nature composed of individuals or species? Will normative judgments be based on value theory, on the preservation of human freedom, on theological principles, on the premise of limiting the aggregate amount of suffering in the world? These are only a few of the various options available to environmental ethicists, who engage conceptually and practically with the relationships between living entities in the world. While environmental ethicists interpret the world using these questions and categories (among others), these questions and categories need not be relegated to this one academic sphere. We can borrow these questions and concepts to orient our reading of the Holiness Code.

Certain assumptions about the world are embedded in these questions and concepts; so we must ask, what does asking these questions and using these concepts imply about the biblical text? First, it implies that the text has an ethical outlook and is seeking to regulate behavior. Given that Leviticus is a legal text including apodictic and casuistic laws, considering it to have an ethical outlook does not seem like much of a stretch. The difficulty lies in

seeing these apodictic and casuistic formulations as part of a larger ethical outlook that includes the deontological elements drawn from them, but that is not defined by them. This larger and encompassing ethical outlook leads to the second point; namely, the main topic of Leviticus is the human relationship to nature. Asserting such a claim means that the creation of holy space is a subcategory of this larger theme. Third, importing questions and concepts from environmental ethics in reading Leviticus suggests that the referents in the text have real-world analogues. Since the questions and concepts were formulated to navigate relationships between real-world entities, one may assume that using them would make a similar claim about the text of Leviticus—that, in fact, it makes claims about the world as it exists and ought to exist rather than about a merely textual world or the world described in the text, which is a world we do not physically inhabit. With Leviticus, this is not a pressing concern. The text contains mainly objects, animals, and categories of people that we would find in our everyday lives,² even in a modern context. The normative ethical warrant is presented as an imitative theological model,³ which could confound the idea that objects in the text have real-world analogues. But my reading of the Holiness Code does not rely on that theological context for ethical grounding. Rather, I contend that this theological warrant frames the entire ethical outlook of the text, adding a layer of normativity instead of defining the contours of normativity. Within that theological framing, there is still the need to further investigate the kinds of relationships presented.

In short, reading from an environmental ethics perspective shifts the kinds of questions that we ask of the Holiness Code. Rather than asking questions driven by the historical particularity of the text, we can formulate questions about the relationships between human and nonhuman entities, values embedded in the text, and duties prescribed by the text. While I have outlined some of the broad questions and concepts that will orient reading the Holiness Code from an environmental ethics perspective, we can narrow into a particular environmental perspective that is consonant with the concerns and worldview of the Holiness Code, namely, the *Land Ethic*, an approach to thinking about nature that focuses on ecosystems as the locus of value rather than human interests or individual animals.

Aldo Leopold, the founder of the *Land Ethic*,⁴ has been called a prophet by many later thinkers. J. Baird Callicott offers two reasons for this: “Leopold studied the Bible, not as an act of faith, but as a model of literary style. . . . And he thought far ahead of his time” (Callicott 1999: 7). The consonance of the worldviews of the Holiness Code and the *Land Ethic* could be attributed to Leopold’s study of the Bible (1989)—after all, it is hard to ignore content even if one is reading only for literary style. If this is so, then contrary to Callicott’s characterization of Leopold’s prophetic abilities, it is not his forward thinking or prognostications about the future that make him a prophet, but rather

his backward gaze to a past that articulated an ethical model with potential in a contemporary situation. Leopold as prophet reinvigorates an ethical worldview from the biblical text that has lost force in the modern world. Like the biblical prophets, he looks not simply to the future but also to the past for models of ethical action that can be given new life.⁵

Leopold articulated the Land Ethic based on his observations and interactions with the ecology around his farm in Wisconsin. These observations and interactions are organized by month, so the changing seasons and the cyclical nature of time are built into Leopold's experiences. Leopold's presentation of time in his writing is not unlike the Levitical model of cyclical time governed by ritual. Additionally, Leopold's Land Ethic espouses an ecological holism, meaning that the unit of moral considerability is the whole, not the part or the individual. Leviticus also concerns itself mainly with the whole—that is, the community of the Israelites—and the land itself. Again and again we see in the text that individuals who are considered **טָמֵא**, *tame'* ("impure"), are segregated from the community until they can regain their **טהור**, *tahor* ("pure"), status. And if becoming *tahor* again is not possible, then the individuals are excommunicated for the sake of the holiness of the community. Temporality and community focus are not the only overlaps between the Levitical worldview and that of Leopold's Land Ethic. As we will see, the Holiness Code can be read as embodying the logic of ethical development and the warrant for extending the community that funds the Land Ethic, but further explication of the logical structure of the Land Ethic is needed before we proceed.

Leopold summarizes his *Land Ethic* with the moral maxim: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold 1989: 224–25). This summary comes after pages and pages detailing his interactions with the land and his experiences with it over multiple seasons. Land is not the only subject of Leopold's ethics, but it is the largest part. One of the main questions that leads scholars to dismiss the Land Ethic is Leopold's lack of definition for the term "biotic community." Does it reference a whole (rather than an individual), and how would we value a system?

Callicott, one of the few academic proponents of the Land Ethic, attributes much of the dismissal to Leopold's concise writing style. Callicott offers an interpretation of the Land Ethic that fleshes it out with some of Leopold's other works, bringing two significant points about Leopold's terse style to the forefront while also unpacking the logical structure undergirding Leopold's thought.

First, Leopold begins his ethical section by referencing ancient Greek ethics, suggesting that land today is enslaved just as humans were in ancient Greece. As time has passed, society has decided to extend moral considerability to many different groups of humans who would have been excluded in the past. Here Callicott makes a cogent argument for the simple progressive view

of the history of morality that Leopold implies. Leopold suggests, Callicott points out, that moral consciousness can make huge leaps even if moral practice doesn't follow on its heels. Humans can come to the conclusion that enslaving each other is immoral long before abandoning the practice.

Second, Callicott points out that Leopold pushes us to think about the history of ethics in biological as well as philosophical terms. He defines an ethic as "a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence" (Leopold 1989: 238). There are clear echoes of Darwin here, which poses the question of how ethics originated and developed in complexity. Leopold embraces Darwinian morality, which is rooted in the sentiments. In contrast to the theological and rationalistic accounts of morality's origins, the theory of the sentiments more fully complements evolutionary theory. Briefly put, Darwin's account of morality begins with bonds of affection (sentiment) between parents and offspring, which are common to all animals. This very basic bond of affection and sympathy facilitates the creation of small, close-knit social groups—mainly kin groups. The family group enlarges by extending sympathies and affection to more distantly related individuals. As the family group grows, the social group grows and extends to even more individuals. In short, the parent-offspring bond becomes the fertile ground for thinking about others and considering them for inclusion in the community (Darwin 1874: 98–100). For Leopold, natural selection endowed humans with an affective moral response to perceived bonds of kinship, community membership, and identity. This affective response works against and augments our egoism. The common psychological narrative of the development of ethics is that one becomes aware of his or her own intrinsic value, then generalizes and analogizes from that awareness to include others. Thus a focus on the self is the beginning of ethical thinking, whereas in Leopold's Darwinian model of development, focus on relationships sparks ethical thinking. The fundament of Leopold's work is therefore the extension of familial kinship ethics to nonmembers, and even to nature. In fact, Callicott draws attention to the language of "evolutionary possibility" that Leopold uses to describe the extension of moral considerability to nature (Leopold 1989: 239). Though Leopold admits that the timeline may be long, the extension of human ethical categories to nature would mark the coevolution of human moral consciousness and action.

The cyclical temporality and ecological holism in the Land Ethic are consonant with Leviticus's approach to time and its community focus. In Leviticus, especially in the Holiness Code, the community eclipses the individual. In fact, reading Leviticus as a single narrative suggests an ever-narrowing concern from the beginning of the text to the end. The priests are holy and create a holy space for the community, which must prioritize self-preservation at the expense of individuals. And after Leviticus 19, the family becomes a metonymy for the community, so that the social existence of the Israelites relies on the holiness of the family. I want to suggest that the Holiness Code

broadens in a way that we are often unaware of due to its emphasis on sexual deviations and its overt misogyny. In that broadening, talk of familial relationships extends the community to include the land itself. This extension of ethical concern becomes evident when we look at the passages where the land is personified and/or in parallel construction⁶ with daughters.

LANDED AGENCY: THE LAND IN THE HOLINESS CODE AS SEMIAUTONOMOUS AGENT

While Leviticus has garnered academic attention, much of that attention has been paid to the strange rituals, cosmology, and dietary laws. Of note is Jacob Milgrom's three-volume Anchor Bible commentary on Leviticus (1991–2001), which is encyclopedic in scope, but emphasizes ritual. And anthropologist Mary Douglas has written influential books on the analogical structure of thinking in Leviticus both early and late in her career (2002 [1966], 1999). Land in the Bible has also been thoroughly studied: much of that work has been organized around the idea of land as a theological-political category or as the necessary territory for a polity created by God. Walter Brueggemann (2002) and Martin Buber (1997) have written on the land as a central category of thought in biblical religion, as did both Wellhausen (1885: 92–99) and von Rad (Rad 1962: 296–305) before them. In order to think about land more generally as an entity with agency, my reading in the Holiness Code focuses on the land's personification in the text.

I am not the first person to notice that the land is personified in the Holiness Code, nor am I the first person to suggest that the land as central to biblical faith can also be the starting point for constructive theological and ethical work. In his 1996 book, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26*, Jan Joosten (1996) devotes a section to the personification of the land in his book, but due to the parameters of his project, he does not discuss the implications for other areas of study or contemporary ethical problems. I am also not the first person to suggest that the land in Leviticus is an agent. In her recent book *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, Ellen Davis concludes her chapter on Leviticus by referring to the personified land as a “semi-autonomous moral agent” (Davis 2009: 100). As the subtitle of this section makes clear, I refer to the land as simply a semiautonomous agent because “moral” as a descriptor of the land itself implies that the land has consciousness, takes initiative in acting, and possibly that it reasons self-reflectively about its actions. In short, I don't think that “moral” can be applied to the land, even though I think the land has some agency in the text, since it participates in moral discourse and outlining the framework of a moral world that requires maintenance. But still, the question remains: What is the definition of agency that the personification

of the land points to, and what are the implications of this recognition of the land as an agent for reading the Holiness Code through the lens of the Land Ethic? In demonstrating that the land in fact does have some agency in the Holiness Code, I will concentrate on a core set of verses that—taken as a group—show the land is independent from its inhabitants, comes under the same laws as humans, and has some similarity with humans in terms of needs and preferences.

Within the context of the sexual purity laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, we find two passages that suggest the land is an entity distinct from its inhabitants. Both of these passages are part of the summary sections in which YHWH warns Israel of the consequences of the listed sexual impurities and illicit relationships. In 20:22-24 YHWH says to Israel (NRSV),

You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. But I have said to you, you shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey; I am the Lord your God; I have separated you from the peoples.

The first verse in this passage is clear—the land vomits out inhabitants who don't keep YHWH's statutes and ordinances. In this first part of the passage, it is the land that responds to impurity by expelling the inhabitants who cause the impurities. There is also no conflation of the people and the land, or to put it another way, there is no identification of the people with the land. The land can belong to others, and in fact it has. In the second part of the passage, YHWH says that the people who lived in the land before the Israelites were driven out by YHWH's own agency. YHWH possesses the land and can give it to another people, but the land itself can also vomit them out for the impurities that accrue in it. The potential agency of the land is hinted at here but is also coupled with YHWH's agency. It is not clear whether inhabitants are expelled from the land due to YHWH's initiative or due to the land's response to them.

In Leviticus 18:24-28, we find a similar passage. YHWH instructs Moses to relate certain sexual laws to the people of Israel and then gives the warrant for these laws:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of

these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you (for the inhabitants of the land who were before you committed all of these abominations and the land became defiled); otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.

In this passage, YHWH again casts out the inhabitants of the land and the land vomits them out due to the buildup of impurities. Possibly we should think of the exile of the nations from the land in terms of a two-stage process of eviction. The land becomes defiled and vomits them out, and YHWH observes this and takes initiative to act, finishing the eviction. This two-stage process sets up the land as an index of impurity, but also describes it as having an initial responsiveness to this impurity, which sparks action on the part of YHWH.

Another aspect of the personification of the land in this passage is that it is subject to the same kinds of punishment that humans are. The land becomes defiled by the actions of the humans living on it, but simply by being defiled it suffers the punishment of YHWH. What is the relationship between the land's being punished and the land's vomiting out its inhabitants? Is the expulsion of the inhabitants a reaction to both the human action and divine punishment? Does YHWH's taking action against the land in any way set up the response of the land to its inhabitants? What is at stake in this question is the characterization of YHWH's relationship to nature within the Holiness Code. The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 provides an interesting point of comparison, though I am sure that there are many other good comparisons in other theophanic texts. Exod. 15:8 describes the parting of the Sea of Reeds as follows:

At the blast of your nostrils [YHWH's nostrils] the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap,
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

Here, the waters respond to YHWH's actions, but it is clear that the initiative comes from YHWH. In the Holiness Code, it is unclear whether the land responds to human action, divine action, or both. But the text is clear on this point: the suffering of the land is a human problem, not a natural problem. Humans are the initial cause of the suffering, while the category of natural evil is foreign to the text's worldview.

Complicating the idea of the land as an agent is its appearance in parallel constructions with human agents. In Lev. 19:29, the land is described as coming under the same kinds of purity regulations as daughters. The verse instructs fathers on the treatment of their daughters. It reads, "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity." Both the land and women are described

as reacting to the same kind of mistreatment. They are each subordinates in the relationship, daughters to fathers and the land to humans, and they each respond to this mistreatment by changing states—the daughter to a defiled state and the land to a state of depravity. I do not wish to discuss the long history of interpretation regarding the possibility of cult prostitution in Israel. I am focusing on the relationship between the entities mentioned in the verse, and to that end, the main difficulty lies in determining what kind of action by an agent causes what kind of response. Does the father's action simultaneously cause the defilement of the daughter and the land, such that the daughter and the land are represented as similar objects for certain actions? Or is it a more explicitly causal relationship, with the father's action defiling the daughter and the daughter's actions afflicting the land? In each of the questions above, the inclusion of the land as part of the family relationship is assumed and, consequently, an ethical extension to the land of moral concern based on kinship ties. So it is not simply that the father-daughter relationship has consequences for the land, but rather, the land in the Holiness Code is considered the backdrop and regulating ideal for family relationships.

The land is also parallel to people in two passages in Leviticus 26. This chapter is characterized by blessings, curses, and the necessity of exile and repentance for the renewal of the covenant. The first passage is 26:34-35. It reads:

Then [after you have been exiled] the land shall enjoy its Sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate it shall have the rest it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were living on it.

The land is described as requiring Sabbaths, which are instituted as the final act of creation in the first creation account in Genesis (2:1-4a). YHWH rests after creation and institutes it for humans. Here in Leviticus we see the land needing a Sabbath from agricultural practices. And while it is a stretch, it could be said that, like humans, the land is participating in the Sabbath, and consequently in being holy, since holiness and purity are the ways that Leviticus describes being like YHWH. Sure, giving the land a Sabbath is part of the law for humans, but the land is personified to the point that it is said to enjoy its Sabbath; thus rest for the land is not simply part of the laws governing human relationships with nature. As a divine institution, the Sabbath applies to the land too.

Finally, in Lev. 26:42, the land is remembered as part of the covenant. YHWH says, "Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, I will remember my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land." The covenants with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham are named individually, and then YHWH mentions that YHWH will remember the land. The mention of the land along with these three people implies the land as part

of the content of the covenant; thus the mention of the land is a bit superfluous. But taken with the other passages that more explicitly personify the land, it is possible that this passage also does so, and that the land is viewed as a separate entity: not merely as the content of the covenant but also as a member of it.

The contours of the land's agency in the Holiness Code are somewhat nebulous. The kind of agency that the personification of the land points to is defined mainly by responsive activity. The land responds both to human action and to divine action. Through its responsiveness, the land shows preferences for certain kinds of actions. While the land doesn't have a mental or emotional life, it is a separate entity that sometimes shares in having equal consideration with humans under the sexual purity laws and the Sabbath requirements.

I contend that the readings above are funded by thinking about the text of the Holiness Code through the Land Ethic. When we think from a Land Ethic perspective, our imaginations make connections at the *peshat* ("simple") or surface-level meaning of the text. For the most part, the interpretations above rely on grammatical relationships between words and the concretization of metaphorical language used to describe the land. While imagination is always part of the interpretive process, it often exerts its influence at the *derash* ("theological/exegetical") level of interpretation, where part of the task is to go beyond the text itself to reestablish its significance in the world.

CONCLUSION

By reading the Holiness Code through the lens of the Land Ethic, we uncover two models of ethical thinking about land that are in tension in the text. First, the land is an ecosystem that imposes its needs on the people who inhabit it. Through its responsive agency, the land can expel those who disregard its needs, and sometimes YHWH is part of this process of expulsion. Furthermore, the land is a preexistent ecosystem with regulations and needs that predate the current inhabitants (Israelites). In this model, the inhabitants are akin to an invasive species that must be controlled. The text offers a theo-legal method of control, suggesting that one function of the laws in Leviticus is to inculcate and habituate the Israelites with behaviors and attitudes that will help them live with the land. Second, we have another ethical model in which the land is subordinate to humans, and the familial language in the Holiness Code is suggestive of extending human ethics to the land. In this model, humans have priority and use their relationships with one another to think analogically about their relationships with nature. Ultimately, individuals transfer the value of their interhuman relationships to their dealings with nature. In this perspective, the ritual and legal structure of Leviticus as a whole has a pedagogical function. The analogical thinking that presents the

legal form of cultic life in the early chapters of Leviticus begins the process of extending ethics to the land in the Holiness Code, where we see the human-land relationship described in familial language. In short, for this ethical model, Leviticus both forms people who can think analogically and provides theological and ethical warrants for this kind of thinking.

At the hinge of these two ethical models—ecosystemism and extensionism—stands the *גר*, *ger* (“foreigner, sojourner”). While Lev. 19:33 is firmly in the Holiness Code, the entirety of chapter 19 bridges the cultic ritual with the outside world. The early chapters of Leviticus show natural objects being brought into holy spaces, while chapter 19 marks the move to bringing holiness into natural spaces. At this juncture, the *ger* not only reminds the Israelites of their past foreign status, becoming the warrant for the extension of ethics, but also points forward to the Israelites’ foreign status with respect to the land. Thus the Israelites are called to remember their own foreignness not simply to prod them to include the *ger* but also to suggest that their thinking about the relationship between human action and nature will rely on their memories of being strangers themselves, and these memories will enable them to act in conformity with the land’s needs. The *ger*, though silent in the text, speaks critically and constructively to the Israelites and the reader about the relationship between culture (cult, ritual, law, memory) and nature. The *ger*’s liminality situates him or her between nature and culture, pointing both backward and forward to Israel’s past experiences and future life with the land. This liminality with regard to conceptual categories and the law opens up a space of possibility for the *ger* to bridge the two dominant patterns of ethical thinking about the land in Leviticus.

NOTES

¹It was brought to my attention in writing this piece that this is only half of the citation. The full statement reads, “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the divine.” My own church only mentioned the half of the statement that I have cited. For more information, see Foster and Dunnivant 2004: 188.

²Except maybe the sorcerers mentioned in Leviticus 19.

³“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

⁴Aldo Leopold articulated the Land Ethic in 1949 in *A Sand County Almanac*. The 1989 edition in the bibliography is a reprint of the original.

⁵I realize that with this statement I am entering a long-standing debate about the historical development and significance of the cult and the biblical prophets’ relationship to both cult and law. On my reading of the book of Amos, 2:4-16 and 5:7-15 outline the social and ethical problems that have caused exile, and 5:21-27 criticizes ritual that is devoid of the accompanying ethical worldview. This makes my position sympathetic to Yehezkel Kaufmann’s in *The Religion of Israel* rather than Julius Wellhausen’s in *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*.

⁶I do not mean the technical term that is used to describe Hebrew poetics.