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PRIESTS AND LEVITES IN EZEKIEL: A CRUX IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

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The question of the relation between priests and Levites in ancient Israel has long been a fundamental factor in the interpretation of the history of Israel. It was, of course, one of the five pillars upon which J. Wellhausen erected his version of the four-document theory of the composition of the Pentateuch, a theory which placed the so-called Priestly document last of the four, and originating in the exile. That *literary* theory was also and essentially a *historical* theory. The Priestly document was exilic. Indeed the comprehensiveness of Wellhausen's theory, in regard to both the history and literature of Israel, is well illustrated by the centrality of a chapter of the book of Ezekiel in his argument about the Pentateuch. The belief that Ezekiel 44 pre-dates the Pentateuchal picture of the relation between priests and Levites is perhaps the strongest single factor in the continuing adherence to the view that a priestly document, or redaction of the Pentateuch, arose in the exile. On the face of it, Ezekiel 44 appears to create for the first time the relation of Levites to priests which is instituted in Numbers 3:5ff. Our ultimate concern in the paper is to ask whether that is a correct interpretation of Ezekiel 44.

We must, however, first set our enquiry in a wider context. Within the limitations of this paper it is impossible and unnecessary to attempt an assessment of the vast literature on the subject of the priesthood in Israel's history.[1] But our enquiry, in its

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1. I have expressed myself more fully on the subject in my thesis, *Cultic Laws in Deuteronomy* (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, Belfast, 1980; to be published in due course by JSOT Press) 205ff. (References are necessarily to the unpublished thesis.)

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endeavour to re-assess the significance of Ezekiel 44 in relation to the wider question of the priests and Levites, does have a historical dimension as well as a literary one. In the first part of the paper I shall address what I believe to be a major fallacy in the commonly accepted view of the historical development of the priesthood. And in the second part we shall turn to an interpretation of the statements regarding the clergy in Ezekiel 44 itself.

I THE PRIESTHOOD IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

Three texts have dominated discussion of the history of the priesthood for the last hundred years, and the generally accepted interpretation of them - especially as they relate to one another - has not substantially altered in that time. The texts are Deuteronomy 18:6-8, 2 Kings 23:8-9, and Ezekiel 44.

Briefly stated, the understanding of the history of the pre-exilic period underlying these texts is as follows. The origins of the priesthood in Israel are disparate, and not genuinely connected with the tribe of Levi.[2] As various priestly families came to hold sway in different centres, it was the Zadokites, generally held to be of Jebusite origin,[3] who took control of Jerusalem. In this situation Josiah's reform suddenly placed the Zadokites in a highly privileged position,

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2. So J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885) 121ff.; *cf.* A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester* (Göttingen, 1965) 72ff. A. Cody and E. Nielsen, in different ways, have attempted, in fact, to establish a real link with the Levitical tribe: Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome, 1969) 55ff.; Nielsen, *Schechem: A Traditio-Historical Investigation* (Copenhagen, 1955) 280ff. See my assessment of these views in *Cultic Laws* 208ff. The differences between these scholars need not detain us as they do not affect our discussion.
3. See H. H. Rowley, 'Zadok and Nehushtan', *JBL* 58 (1939) 113-141. But notice, in contrast, F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) 208ff.

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because they alone were now recognized as legitimate. The country-priests, on the other hand, were deprived of their livelihood. This privileged position of the Zadokites was also a threatened position, however, because the country-priests, anxious to retain their livelihood, now pressed a priestly claim on a new basis, that of Levitical descent.[4] Thus Josiah's reform produced a situation in which country-priests were pressing a *Levitical* claim to serve at the Jerusalem sanctuary, *because* the reform had deprived them of their living.

There are two essential presuppositions of this view, *viz.* (i) that the only meaningful distinction within the priesthood is that between Jerusalemite (Zadokite) and non-Jerusalemite priests; and (ii) that the non-Jerusalemite priests are to be equated with the priests of the 'high-places' which Josiah destroyed.

1. *Deuteronomy 18:6-8 and 2 Kings 23:8-9*

The discussion takes us now into Deuteronomy, which has itself been a battle-ground over the question of priests and Levites.[5] The consensus view, upheld by J. A. Emerton, is that Deuteronomy equates priests and Levites, and therefore represents an earlier stage in the development of priesthood than P.[6] In taking this line, Deuteronomy is not merely reflecting a certain *status quo*, but is pressing precisely that Levitical claim to priesthood which was now, *ex hypothesi*, the sole hope of

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4. For the classical exposition of this view, see Wellhausen, *Prolegomena* 139ff. Scholars differ on the manner in which the different priestly families came to press such a claim. See Cody, *Priesthood*; Gunneweg, *Leviten*; Nielsen, *Schechem*. Again the details of these differences need not detain us.
5. Especially in the pages of *Vetus Testamentum*. See G. E. Wright, 'The Levites in Deuteronomy', *VT* 4 (1954) 325-330; J. A. Emerton, 'Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy', *VT* 12 (1962) 129-138; R. Abba, 'Priests and Levites in Deuteronomy', *VT* 27 (1977) 257-267.
6. See again *Cultic Laws* (227ff.) for an attempt to answer the point.

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the country-priests. The measures of Josiah explain in a general way the humanitarian injunctions relating to Levites in Deuteronomy (*e.g.*, 14:27-29). But in particular 18:6-8 represents Deuteronomy's programme for the absorption of the country-priests into the Jerusalem cult. 2 Kings 23:8-9, with its comment that, in the wake of Josiah's reform, the priests of the high-places came to Jerusalem but did not serve at the altar, is therefore a rejection of the programme of Deuteronomy, and indeed records its failure. Consequently, the issue of Zadokite supremacy and the question of the fate of the non-Zadokite priests are settled at last only by Ezekiel 44, which finally sanctions the admission of the country-priests to the Jerusalem temple, now dignified unreservedly with the title 'Levites',[7] but firmly restricts them to an inferior clerical status. This settlement then becomes the basis of the situation that is known by P.

It is in this reconstruction that I believe there is a major fallacy. It concerns the equation of the 'priests of the high-places' with the Levites of Deuteronomy, and the idea that Deuteronomy presses these priests' claim.

There are two main reasons why Deuteronomy 18:6-8 and 2 Kings 23:8-9 should not be thought to relate directly to one another. First, there is an inherent absurdity in the view that Deuteronomy, with its vehement opposition to illegitimate places of worship, should advocate the rehabilitation into the legitimate cult of priests whom its author(s) must have considered idolatrous.[8]

Secondly, a careful exegesis of Deuteronomy 18:6-8 shows that in fact it is not legislating for a permanent arrangement resulting from centralization, such as 2 Kings 23:8-9 reports.[9] The point depends on whether there is one sentence or two in vv.6-8. Most

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7. So too, by this stage, the Zadokites, following a kind of mutual osmosis; see Gunneweg, *Leviten* 130.
8. A point not lost on M. Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1978) 100; nor indeed on Gunneweg, *Leviten* 119ff.
9. For a full exegesis, see *Cultic Laws* 239-241.

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translations take it that there are two and that the apodosis of the first begins with the verb ושרת (v.7). On this view a new sentence begins at v.8. Thus "... if he comes...he may serve... He shall have equal shares...". Strictly, however, there is only one sentence, whose apodosis begins, not at ושרת, whose ו introduces a further 'if' clause, but at חלק (v.8). Thus '...if he comes... if he serves...he shall have equal shares'.[10] The significance of this interpretation is that the issue in Deuteronomy is no longer whether the Levite may come, but rather that, when he does, he may have equal shares (which, incidentally, fits very well with the whole thrust of Deuteronomy that the land has the capacity to provide for the needs of all the people).[11]

The real background to Deuteronomy 18:6-8 is, I believe, the issue of the relation of clergy who dwell in the country, in their Levitical and priestly cities (*cf.* Jos. 21), to the central sanctuary. M. Haran has well argued that the Levitical cities (now widely acknowledged to represent historical fact at some pre-exilic period) were not cultic centres, but purely and simply places of residence - thus explaining the absence of some important cult centres such as Jerusalem and Nob from the lists. That the place of residence is distinct from the place of service is well illustrated by the case of Abiathar, who, when dismissed from service as high-priest, returned to his fields at Anathoth (1 Ki. 2:26). Anathoth is found in the list of priestly cities (Jos. 21:18). That this was the pattern of priestly service in Israel is further supported by 1 Chronicles 9:25 which says explicitly that Levites were brought in regularly from their villages to Jerusalem to discharge their duties. Against such a background it is perfectly reasonable to interpret Deuteronomy 18:6-8 as a provision to clarify the relation between the priest's or Levite's dwelling-place and the sanctuary.[12] So Deuteronomy is not, after all, pressing

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10. The interpretation is supported by S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC), (Edinburgh, 1902[3]) 217; *cf.* A. R. Hulst, *Het Karakter van den Cultus in Deuteronomium*, (Wageningen, 1938) 61; A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (London, 1979) 278-279.
11. See *Cultic Laws* 243ff.
12. Haran, *Temples* 119-120. See also *Cultic Laws* 224.

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a claim that the Levites should be priests. Deuteronomy's use of terminology is, in fact, not designed to do so. The term 'Levites' is used to designate, in a general way, the 'priestly' tribe.[13]

It follows, then, that the interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:6-8 in relation to 2 Kings 23:8-9, which is so important for the reconstruction of the history of priesthood outlined above, breaks down absolutely.[14] The importance of this for the history of the priesthood in general cannot be overestimated. Nor, indeed, can the particular implications for the context in which Ezekiel 44 must be studied.[15] The belief that Ezekiel 44 represents a stage on the way to P's formulation of the relation between priests and Levites depends very largely on the conviction that the distinction which Ezekiel makes within the clergy in chapter 44 reflects the Zadokite priesthood's defensive assertion of supremacy in the face of the threat posed by the newcomers from the country. Wellhausen spoke of Ezekiel 44 as a '(draping) of the logic of facts with a mantle of morality'.[16] And in more recent times G. Fohrer

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13. See further below, pp. 23-24, and n.49.
14. It is not even certain that 2 Ki. 23 makes a blanket condemnation of the country-priests, since there is a variation of vocabulary in the chapter which may well be significant; *viz.* the use of הכמרים in v.5 ('idolatrous priests'); כהנים, v.8, and כהני הבמות, v.9. See R. Abba, *VT* 28 (1978) 4 and *Cultic Laws* 222-223.
15. It is very significant that commentators almost invariably set their discussion of Ezk. 44 in the context of the interpretation of Dt. 18:6-8 and 2 Ki. 23:8-9, outlined above: see A. Bertholet, *Das Buch Hesekiel* (KHAT 12) (Freiburg, 1897) 225-226; J. Herrmann, *Ezechiel* (KAT 11) (Leipzig, 1924) 287; G. Fohrer, *Die Hauptprobleme des Buches Ezechiel* (BZAW 72) (Berlin, 1952) 166-167; W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (London, 1970) 569; W. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* (BKAT 13/2) (Neukirchen, 1969) 1129ff.
16. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena* 124.

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has expressed himself very similarly.[17] The *status quo* is regarded as the Zadokites' actual tenure of Jerusalem. But if, in fact, the interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:6-8 offered above is accepted, then it follows that Ezekiel 44 has been viewed for too long through an *entirely* distorted lens, and a reappraisal is overdue.

II EZEKIEL 44 AND THE PRIESTLY STRATUM OF THE PENTATEUCH

The purpose of our remarks up till now has been to try to show that the texts Deuteronomy 18:6-8, 2 Kings 23:8-9 and Ezekiel 44 cannot be used to chart the progression in Israel from an equation of 'Levites' and 'priests' in Deuteronomy to the hierarchical distinction in P, via Ezekiel. We proceed now to ask whether there are signs of such a progression in the terms of the book of Ezekiel itself.

The starting-point for the discussion, historically speaking, has been the fact that Ezekiel 44:10ff. appears to introduce a hitherto non-existent distinction, subordinating the 'Levites' (v.10) to the 'Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok' (v.15), and grounding that subordination in a defection from the Lord which involved not only Levites but, more generally, the house of Israel (v.10). This would appear to be inconsistent with the picture in Numbers 3:5ff., according to which the subordination of Levites to priests existed from the time of the wilderness wanderings, and was based only on the setting apart of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, a choice which implied no adverse judgment on non-Aaronite Levites (Ex. 28:1ff.). And so this essentially literary argument is added to the historical argument we have already rehearsed in favour of the view that Ezekiel 44:10ff - and subsequently P - is an attempt to fend off a challenge by 'Levites' to the established Jerusalemite priesthood.

This is, of course, rather an over-simplification of the views that have been proposed for the relation of Ezekiel 44:10ff. to P, for it has been recognized that there is a major problem with the dating of Ezekiel's arrangements prior to those of P. The problem consists in the fact

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17. Fohrer, *Hauptprobleme* 143.

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that it is Ezekiel who makes the narrower restriction of the priesthood, *viz.*, to Zadokites, rather than merely to Aaronites. If the Jerusalem priesthood is Zadokite, and Ezekiel and P both emanate, broadly speaking, from that priesthood, how is it that P relaxes the narrow restriction which Ezekiel has introduced? There is no convincing answer to this that preserves the priority of Ezekiel.[18]

Consequently, a variety of other options have been taken up by scholars. Among those who have dealt in detail with the question are W. Zimmerli and H. Gese, both of whom view the relation of Ezekiel to P in terms of a rather complex history of traditions. Zimmerli, in attempting to establish criteria for determining the limits of Ezekiel's own work in chapters 40-48, believes that the 'leading' or 'showing' motif is of primary importance (*cf.* 40:4, 17) and that the role of Ezekiel in these chapters, as elsewhere in the book, is essentially that of an observer who reports to Israel what he has been shown by God. This means that any passages which suggest Ezekiel has a role in the initiation of the new cult, or indeed, which are legal in character, are secondary, since these form no part of the 'leading' or 'showing' material. Therefore 43:18ff. is secondary, and indeed represents the sorts of interests that characterise P. Passages which limit the priesthood to the Zadokites are later still.[19] For Zimmerli, then, while the genuine Ezekielian material antedates P, the material that deals with the priesthood comes from the same stable as P itself, and

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18. J. Bowman argued that P represented a compromise with the Levites, settling for a less rigorous claim ('Ezekiel and the Zadokite Priesthood', *TGUOS* 16 [1955-56] 1). But this is hardly convincing, when *ex hypothesi*, it was Zadokites who held the whip-hand in Jerusalem. M. Haran has commented on the impossibility of supposing that the granting of the priesthood emerged from Ezekiel, pointing out that the associations of Aaron are much wider than those of Jerusalem (*cf.* Jos. 21:9-19) ('The Law-Code of Ezekiel 40-48 and its Relation to the Priestly School', *HUCA* 50 [1979] 65.
19. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* 1101-1102.

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the passages which limit priesthood to Zadok are even later.[20] This puts the Zadokite restriction late in relation to P, and circumvents the problem of a progression from that restriction to the wider Aaronite one.

For Gese, things are rather more complex. Like Zimmerli he sees a growth within Ezekiel 40-48 in the sorts of claims that are made about the priesthood. He, indeed, isolates a 'Zadokite-layer' of redaction, which has refined the statements about priestly rights so that they apply to Zadokites only.[21] He is also anxious to take account of different strands of tradition within the P material. This means it becomes impossible to speak of any simple sort of relationship between Ezekiel and P. It is rather a case of finding those strands of the P-material to which Ezekiel most closely corresponds in the history of traditions. Gese believes, in fact, that Ezekiel 44:10ff., is closest to Numbers 18, but that it is impossible to say which came first.[22] He does not attempt a relative dating of the Zadokite and Aaronite restrictions.

Broadly, then, Zimmerli and Gese represent one kind of approach to the problems raised by the relation of Ezekiel to P. Over against these, mention may be made of M. Haran, who accepts that chapters 40-48 are basically the work of Ezekiel himself. For him the visionary and legal material certainly represent two distinct patterns but it does not follow that they emanate from different hands. Both patterns are imbued with the Jerusalem cult-tradition.[23] In contrast to Gese, he is prepared to speak of Ezekiel and of P as relatively homogeneous entities, both of which originated in similar, but distinct, priestly circles. P is, in fact, the earlier, and Ezekiel's code a 'late

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20. In comparing details of the legislation in Ezekiel with P, Zimmerli often finds reason to date P earlier.
21. H. Gese, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezechiel (Kap. 40-48)* (BHT 25) Tübingen, 1957) 67.
22. *Ibid.* 66.
23. M. Haran, 'Law-Code' 52-53.

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epigonic outgrowth' of the same school, which covers broadly the same material.[24]

In all of these approaches, particularly in Zimmerli and Haran, there has been a recognition that the Zadokite restrictions in Ezekiel must post-date the arrangements of P, which is an interesting development from earlier views about Ezekiel as a staging-post on the way to P.[25] Yet clearly there are important differences in these reconstructions. Are we to follow Gese with his view of the close interdependence of Ezekiel and P, or are we to take the line, following Haran, that each is relatively independent? The question is very much bound up with that of the unity of chapters 40-48. That is, are we dealing with the result of a gradual coming together of disparate elements,[26] or with the sustained reflection of a single mind? These are the real alternatives. The mere fact of chronological priority is not in itself greatly significant. Even granted the priority of P, the question is whether, nevertheless, P and Ezekiel are still products of the same sort of movement at a more or less similar time in Israel's history, or whether there is a considerable distance in time between them.[27] If we can show that

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24. M. Haran, 'Law-Code' 61ff. The basic similarity, yet persistent difference in details, suggests to Haran an absence of *direct* dependence of either Ezekiel or P upon the other. There are, however, a number of details (*e.g.*, the absence of the ark in Ezekiel) which suggest P's greater antiquity (*Ibid.* 64).
25. Wellhausen had considered it vitally important that Ezekiel be held to be prior to P. For him, his exposition of the matter depended completely on that logic: *viz.* that Ezekiel introduced what P presupposed (*Prolegomena* 124ff.). 'That the prophet should know nothing about a priestly law with whose tendencies he is in thorough sympathy, admits of only one explanation - that it did not then exist' (*Ibid.* 124). Modern critics have perhaps underestimated the significance of Wellhausen's logical point.
26. See Gese's programmatic statement about the disparateness of the material in chapters 40-48 (*Verfassungsentwurf* 8).
27. This is not to say that Haran is postulating a great difference in time. But the independence of Ezekiel, upon which he insists, does open up the possibility of a relatively long time lapse.

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Ezekiel does in fact reflect in a sustained way upon P, then the latter becomes the more probable.

1. *The Unity of Ezekiel 40-48*

The belief that there is secondary material within chapters 40-48 stems in very large measure from a feeling that legal sections are inappropriate in the context. We have noted already the literary argument which would accept as authentic only those parts of chapters 40-48 which are covered by the 'leading' and 'showing' motifs; *i.e.*, it is thought that in form the chapters essentially relate what was conveyed to Ezekiel, for his further communication to Israel.[28]

Converging with this literary argument, however, is an important theological one, *viz.* that legislation for right behaviour on the part of the people - and more especially the congratulation of the Zadokite priests in chapter 44 as 'those who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me' (v.15) - is incompatible with Ezekiel's uncompromising doctrine of salvation by God's grace only, and in the face of thoroughgoing and incorrigible sin on the people's part. The corruption of Israel must have extended to the Zadokites (*cf.* the accusation of 'the priest', 22:26). The legislation about the Zadokites, therefore, as well as being formally inappropriate is also theologically irreconcilable with one of Ezekiel's main thrusts. These two kinds of argument are ultimately inseparable. Perhaps indeed the literary one is not *purely* literary after all, but dependent upon the theological one. It is the theological argument which is potentially the more persuasive.

Yet it is almost certainly much overstated. It is true, of course, that Ezekiel's picture of Israel's chronic sinfulness is more thoroughgoing than that of any other prophet.[29] And his theology of the 'heart of flesh',[30]

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28. The most categorical statement of this point of view is by Eichrodt (*Ezekiel* 555-556).
29. Especially in chapters 16, 20, 23. Contrast in particular his view of the wilderness period (20:10ff.) with Jeremiah's picture (2:2-3).
30. Ezk. 11:19; 36:26.

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like Jeremiah's 'new covenant', clearly presupposes a radical new act by God. But there is a danger, here as so often, of setting up a false dichotomy between grace and law. In reality, Ezekiel does not exclude the possibility that some have been obedient. Indeed, the dreadful command to destroy sinful Jerusalem (9:4ff.) makes a distinction between those 'who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it' (v.4) and the rest. And the former, having received a mark on their foreheads, are to be 'passed over' by God's executioners. This distinguishing judgment is admittedly not much dwelt on, but must put all Ezekiel's more sweeping condemnations into perspective. Similarly, the motif of individual responsibility in Ezekiel is pertinent. In Ezekiel 14:13ff. the point is made that righteous men cannot (or at least will no longer be able to) deliver their sons and daughters from wrath by their own righteousness (*e.g.*, v.16). Nevertheless it is recognized that they would 'deliver their *own* lives by their righteousness' (v.14). In chapter 18 we have the obverse: if fathers cannot save their children, nor can children be condemned for their fathers' sins. It is 'the soul that sins (who) shall die' - and here again salvation is portrayed as dependent upon what a man does. It is the man who 'does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to idols, does not defile his neighbour's wife..." etc., (vv.15ff.) who shall *live* (v.17).

It follows, therefore, that there is no clear theological criterion of secondariness as suggested by Zimmerli. The full message of Ezekiel on the manner or source of salvation shares with the New Testament a two-sidedness. Righteousness is indeed given by an act of God's grace; yet there is a sense in which it must be sought in what a man does (*cf.* Rom. 2:6, 13). Clearly there is a danger of commentators letting their theological preconceptions, indeed inadequacies, obtrude upon the task of exegesis. And Zimmerli's contention that the Zadokites cannot have been righteous is a case in point.

W. Eichrodt, too, arguing that much of chapter 44 is secondary, makes a false inference from a theology of grace, when he speaks of the 'priestly' ideals of purity and holiness as a retrogression.[31] In fact, ritual

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31. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* 564.

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holiness as such is never condemned in Ezekiel. When the prophet is ordered to go on an 'unclean' diet (4:9ff.) this is no abolition of cultic standards of purity, but part of the shock-treatment of both prophet and people which is designed both to convince them that the destruction of Jerusalem will indeed happen and to show that their God is still God even in a foreign land. In fact, Ezekiel's conscience in the matter is respected by God (4:14-15). And, moreover, in the new thing which God promises to do in Israel, not only will he give them a new spirit and a heart of flesh (11:19), but also '*they* will remove from (the land) all its detestable things and all its abominations' (11:18). In the realm of cultic purity it is the people themselves who are the agents. And the whole process of renewal has essentially these two sides: God's gracious act, and Israel's responsibility for the spiritual 'fabric' of the new society. Indeed, far from cultic holiness in Ezekiel 44 being retrograde, an idea of spreading holiness seems to be fundamental to the vision in chapters 40-48, as is suggested by 43:12 with its statement that 'the whole territory round about upon the top of the mountain shall be holy. Behold this is the law of the temple'.[32]

With considerations like these in mind, it should not be regarded as surprising that we find priest-laws in chapters 40-48. The new community is to be holy, and there are to be guardians of its holiness.

Some sort of theological consideration such as this may shed light on one of the knotty problems of Ezekiel 44, *viz.* the paradox of the installation (or confirmation) of Levites in positions of guardianship *vis-à-vis* cultic purity, at the same time as they are condemned for sin - indeed because of that sin. Fohrer draws attention to the fact that a concern for cultic purity underlies the installation of the Levites, but believes that the reference to their sin betrays a struggle for status within the priestly classes, and indeed reflects Ezekiel's own Zadokite status.[33] So the tension between the

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32. *Cf.* Zc. 14:20ff. Both passages might be seen, in terms of Biblical Theology, as the beginning of a reclaiming of the whole creation as holy to God.
33. Fohrer, *Hauptprobleme* 166.

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honouring of the Levites and the insistence that it is a *lesser* honour is explained in terms of clerical rivalries.

But two points may be made here. The first relates to the theological point made above. There is at the outset a certain arbitrariness in choosing to explain the paradoxes of the chapter in terms of personal rivalries rather than genuine theological concerns. It is in principle just as good a starting-point to ask how we should relate the condemnation of the Levites and the vindication of the Zadokites in terms of an overarching theology of the Book of Ezekiel. If we accept that Ezekiel knows both the grace of God as the absolute precondition for a renewed people of God and the responsibility from the side of the people to guard the purity of the cult, the tensions of chapter 44 begin to resolve themselves. The fact of the re-institution of a cult at all is rooted in the gracious decision of God. But given the human responsibility to put away the detestable things, it may not be inappropriate to take into account the 'track record' of the clerical classes. The natural sphere for this reflection on clerical achievement is the clerical Levitical tribe. And the need to reflect critically upon the success or otherwise of the established clergy can as well be explained by the bringing to bear of Ezekiel's theological canons as by historical upheaval.[34]

The second point relating to the greater and lesser honouring of Zadokites and Levites takes us back to our earlier remarks about the historical assumptions which underlie the judgments of many scholars about this chapter. We saw how widespread, yet ultimately erroneous, was the view that much of Ezekiel 44 was occasioned by the need of the Jerusalem Zadokites to maintain their position over against a strong challenge from the country. This assumption is now combined with a feeling that the Zadokites, who are approved in chapter 44, must actually have been involved in the degradations observed by Ezekiel in the temple (chapters 8-9). But the statements that relate to the previous

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34. I hope to show below that the terms of chapter 44 are not inconsistent with a long-established division between priests and Levites and indeed the confinement of the priesthood to the Zadokites.

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performance of the Zadokites must be examined carefully. First, we cannot assume the equation between Jerusalem priests and Zadokites. This is a corollary of our contention that the sanctuaries of Israel are not to be associated with the claims of particular families. Zadokites may well have dwelt elsewhere than in Jerusalem.[35] Secondly, the description of cultic abuses in chapters 8-11 carefully avoids laying the responsibility at the feet of the priests in particular. In fact the priesthood is not mentioned here. (See 8:6, 'the house of Israel'; v.7, 'seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel'; v.14, 'women weeping for Tammuz'; v.16, '... about 25 men...'). And the destruction mentioned in chapter 9 which 'begins at my sanctuary' (v.6) begins not with priests, but with 'the elders who were before the house'. When priests *are* named among those who have rebelled and led astray (21:26), the issue of Zadokite status is not raised.[36]

2. *Further Literary Considerations*

We have seen that there is no objection, in principle, to the presence of law in these chapters. To complete the picture, however, we must return to the question whether legal material is *formally* inappropriate here. Along with this we must consider the terminology used for the priesthood. The sections in question are largely the same in each case. And the varying terminology for priesthood is one of the major reasons for believing that there have been developments in the thinking about the role of priests and the claims made for them in chapters 40-48.

(a) The legal material

Many scholars consider that the presence of legal material in what is essentially a vision is simply

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35. See above, p. 7 . But see *per contra* Abba (*VT* 28 [1978] 5) who attempts to exonerate the Zadokites by arguing that Ezekiel's polemic was directed against the idolatry of the northern kingdom only.
36. The issue that is raised here is that of the terminology for priesthood, which will be taken up below.

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inappropriate.[37] But this judgment is too cavalier, for several reasons. First, the presence of legal or ethical material in the context of a vision is not without parallel in the Old Testament. Both ethical challenge and specific instructions belong to the heart of Zechariah's visions.[38] Secondly, Ezekiel's picture of the renewed Israel has at its core the idea of a people that 'walks in (God's) statutes and is careful to obey (his) ordinances' (36:27; *cf.* Jeremiah's 'new covenant', still based on the *Law*, albeit written on the heart, Je. 31:33). For both these reasons it is not surprising to find specific ordinances in the section of Ezekiel that depicts the future.

But there is a third and rather more complex reason, based on the fact that a passage like 36:27 prepares us to find ordinances in 40-48, but drawing on the structure of the chapters themselves.

In a general way it may be argued that chapters 44-46 follow logically from chapter 43 and address issues which are raised there.[39] The return of the Lord to the temple (43:1-5) has the immediate effect of demanding a

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37. *E.g.*, Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* 555-556.
38. *Cf.* Zc. 3:1-7; and the juxtaposition of 6:1-8 with 6:9-14. It is interesting to note the connections in detail between Ezekiel and Zechariah on this point - *i.e.*, the centrality of a priest in a vision of the future, with a charge to discharge his duties well.
39. Zimmerli tries to show that 44:4-5 betrays the secondary character of what follows by its clumsy imitation of 43:1-6, *i.e.*, in that it reports for a second time that God's glory has filled the temple and that the prophet falls on his face (*Ezechiel II*, 1116). Yet in fact there is a perfect logic to the relation of the two passages, secured by 44:1-3. The prophet, having been shown the entry of God to the temple by the east gate, now witnesses the permanent closing of the gate precisely because God has entered by it. The prophet then has to be brought back into the temple court by the north gate. The new reference to the glory of God simply makes clear that it is the return of God to the temple that serves as a basis for the regulations to follow. Zimmerli's discovery of the work of different hands on these sorts of grounds reveals more about the kind of methodology he has

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new holiness in Israel. The programme is set in 43:7-9 (especially v.7, '...the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name...'). And immediately the implications of the idea of holiness are taken up. 43:12 is significant here with its extension of the area of holiness beyond the temple itself. There are particularly close links between the terms of 43:7-8 and 44:6ff. Both passages condemn the 'abominations' (תועבות) of Israel. But the essential connecting idea is that of Israel's past failure to make adequate provision for God's holiness, typified not only by actual idolatry, but also by the mere fact of the disposition of the Temple (43:8). There is, then, a two-fold aspect to the possible offence against holiness: outright idolatry on the one hand, but also a kind of negligence, close to that failure to distinguish between the holy and the profane which was felt to be a duty of the priests (*cf.* 22:26). And it is this two-fold aspect that is now taken up in 44:6ff. The regulations concerning the Levites belong to the attempt to rectify the dispositions of the Temple. It is the prophet's concern for the proper handling of the altar that turns his mind to the Zadokites' privilege of serving at it. The priests have, of course, already been mentioned in 40:45-46 and 42:13ff. But it is only as the application of the idea of holiness is developed fully in the wake of the Lord's return to the Temple, and in relation to the altar, that this question of the Zadokites' privilege is raised in such a way as to demand an answer. The question of the relation between those who may approach the altar and those who may not belongs integrally to a prophecy in which architecture and arrangements are so much a factor in the proper respect for God's holiness.

Viewed thus, the legislation about the priests in chapter 44 has an analogy in 45:1-7 where the rather cryptic statement of 43:12 is developed into detailed

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adopted than any real evidence of divergent authorship. (His work could be challenged in innumerable places on similar grounds; but a comprehensive reply to his massive work is beyond the scope of this lecture).

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provisions governing the extent of the holy area round the temple.[40] And similarly, considerations pertaining to regular sacrifices and sacrifices occasioned by the feasts of Israel form the substance of 45:13-46:24, these also finding an impetus in the mention of the sacrifices for the altar in 43:18ff.[41]

But we can look further at the structure of chapters 40-48 in our attempt to demonstrate the integrity of the legislative material. For it is possible to discern a certain movement within the section (particularly within chapters 40-46) which suggests a unity of concept. This movement begins outside the land (in 40:1ff., in which Ezekiel is brought in visions from Babylon), and continues gradually inwards until it comes to the altar itself. That is to say, in his vision Ezekiel is conscious first of being outside the city (40:2), then in the city but not in the temple area (40:5), then inside the temple area (40:6ff.), in the outer court (40:17), the inner court (40:28), the chambers of the priests in the inner court (40:44ff.), the vestibule of the temple (40:48ff.), the nave (41:1), and of entering into the 'most holy place' (41:4). Here a certain feeling that we have 'arrived' is produced by the fact that the 'man', who otherwise tends to keep silent, speaks. It is not, however, the first time that he speaks.[42] And in fact

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40. The question of whether the programme of Ezekiel expected a literal fulfulment is not relevant to our discussion.
41. The instructions to the prince in 45:8ff. and 46:16-18 regarding just dealing and the administration of his own inheritance (respectively) also fit well into the pattern suggested, since both relate to the maintenance of proper land divisions - *i.e.*, to the question raised at 43:12.
42. The obvious climactic significance of the man's utterance in 41:4 has been advanced as one reason for considering 40:45 secondary, where the man's utterance is held to spoil the effect of the real climax a few verses later (Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* 1024). This is an unnecessary inference. Zimmerli attempts to press the point on the one hand by suggesting the author of 40:45 has copied the style of 41:4, with a construction introduced by זֹה (= זאת), parallel to זֶה in 41:4, yet on the other by pointing to a deviation in style - *viz.* וידבר instead of ויאמר. Apart from

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one last step in this inexorable inward movement has still to follow, after some delay, at 43:13 (the 'altar' of 41:22 corresponding to the 'table of the Presence', Ex. 25:23-30).

The passage that relates to the altar is, in fact, the mid-point of the whole movement in 40-48, marking not only the end of the inward movement, but also the beginning of an outward movement; and this outward movement, significantly, is in terms of regulations. That is, 43:18ff. contain 'regulations pertaining to the altar' (חקות המזבח); then 44:5ff. have 'regulations pertaining to the house of the Lord' (חקות בית יהוה). The outward movement continues in chapter 45, with its measurement of the holy district, *i.e.*, land that specially belongs to the sanctuary, and the statement of its relation, not only to the Temple itself (thus elaborating 43:12) but also to the land beyond, *viz.* the prince's portion and the tribal portions (v.7). (Such a movement is not in and of itself, but rather always has in mind the relation of the holy place to the land. This explains why 45:13 - 46:24 still deals to a large extent with offerings and worship. A central concern here is precisely how the prince (45:9, 22 etc.) and the people (46:9) participate in the worship.) The last two chapters in the section have an outward movement of their own, with the image of the stream flowing out from the temple and eventually filling and fertilizing the whole land (47:1-12); and finally, a division of the land (47:13-48:35).

In all this the description of the altar, together with its regulations (43:13-27), is of central importance. We saw that it formed the logical climax of the inward-moving description of the temple. It is, therefore, essential to the vision. Yet the passage also reflects a change in idiom. The altar is not presented simply as something which Ezekiel saw, as had been the case with the

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the mere lack of consistent criteria on Zimmerli's part, the unusual זֹה may well not be considered the mark of a copyist. In reality the extent to which the man's first utterance detracts from the second can be overstated, in that the non-self-evident character of the chambers in 40:44ff. probably demands some explanation; and finally, as we shall argue, 41:4 is not the absolute climax of the movement into the temple.

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other stages in the vision; but rather the description is in the mouth of the Lord himself. This sort of change of idiom is often felt to support the view that there is no place for regulations in a vision, and therefore that a passage such as this is secondary.[43] Hence the significance of the fact that the whole description of the altar is in the mouth of God, and that the transition from description to regulation comes within a passage that is entirely in one and the same idiom, *viz.* the idiom of the supposedly doubtful regulations, and, as we have seen, at the logical mid-point of chapters 40-48.

Thus our examination, in broad outline, of the structure of chapters 40-48 supports the conclusion which we reached on the basis of Ezekiel's theology, *viz.* that the regulations form an integral part of the prophet's vision.

(b) The priestly terminology

We must now take up the question of the terminology used for the clerical classes in Ezekiel 40-48. We have seen above (pp. 10 - 12) that many scholars, principally Zimmerli and Gese, have seen in the terminology evidence for a Zadokite re-interpretation of earlier conditions. There are six passages to be considered in this connection, *viz.* 40:45-46; 43:19; 44:9ff.; 45:4-5; 46:20-24; 48:11-13.

It is clear that there is a degree of fluidity in the terms used. 40:45-46 makes a basic distinction between 'priests who have charge of the temple (הבית)' and 'priests who have charge of the altar' - with v.46 adding that these latter are in fact 'the sons of Zadok'. 46:20, 24 present a slightly different contrast, between 'the priests' and 'those who minister at the temple (משרתי הבית)' and 45:4-5 refers to the lower clergy as 'Levites', while not calling the priests 'Zadokites'. The other passages, with slight variations, define the distinction within the clergy as between the Zadokite priests and the 'Levites'.[44]

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43. *E.g.*, Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* 1089.
44. 43:9 in fact only mentions the Zadokite priests, without referring to the Levites, yet clearly the thought here too is the right of the Zadokites as opposed to other 'Levites'.

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Now there is a certain unanimity in the texts, in that a fundamental division between those who serve at the altar and those who serve in other lesser ways is recognized throughout. It is reasonable to infer from this that at the time when Ezekiel wrote he was familiar with a division within the clergy corresponding more or less to the priest - Levite distinction as laid down in Numbers 3 (P). Scholars are broadly in agreement on this point.[45] The real question, however, is how to interpret the *significance* of the differing terminology? The prevailing tendency (as exemplified by Zimmerli and Gese) is to maximise the significance of the fluctuations, discerning the activity of Zadokites anxious to re-interpret an existing, recognized distinction in favour of themselves. Thus 40:46b is seen as a gloss on 40:45, 46a, making the polemical point that the class of priest that serves the altar corresponds or should correspond to the Zadokites alone.[46] 44:9ff. is then interpreted as the main statement of such a contention, in terms of which the other statements about priests are adjusted.

However this is not the only way of interpreting the terminology. R. Abba, for example, points to the very passages we have mentioned as evidence for the possibility that not merely a distinction within the clergy but precisely the Zadokite-Levite distinction was inherited by Ezekiel.[47] Such a view is by no means forced by 40:45-46. It merely interprets the gloss in v.46b - if gloss it is - as having far less significance than Zimmerli, Gese and others would see in it - an afterthought appended for the sake of precision rather than the weaponry of polemical warfare.

There is, however, a major consideration which supports the interpretation favoured by Abba. It can be shown that the

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45. See, *e.g.*, Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* 1131.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Abba, *VT* 28 (1978) 6-7. Abba points out that the kind of distinction made between upper and lower clergy in 40:45, 46a corresponds closely to that which is presented in Nu. 3.

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terminology for the priesthood in the Old Testament can fluctuate according to the particular exigencies of texts without implying corresponding fluctuations in the view of priesthood itself. In Joshua 18:7 we read that the 'Levites' have no portion in the land because the 'priesthood of the Lord' (כהנת יהוה) is their inheritance. This rather loose terminology, which applies the idea of priesthood generally to the Levitical tribe, has been compared with deuteronomic usage.[48] Yet the word כהנה is in fact typical of literature normally attributed to P, and of Ezra-Nehemiah, and usually has a narrower meaning. We must suppose that the term is used in the looser sense in Joshua 18:7 because the passage is not immediately interested in the inner relations of the priestly classes.[49]

When we have recognized this it is possible to discern a rationale in Ezekiel's terminology which explains its variations without recourse to the idea of competing views of or claims to priesthood. In general it may be said that Ezekiel can use terminology for priesthood which does not lay stress on the Zadokite-Levite distinction in texts where the primary concern is other than the inner relations of the clergy. In both 40:45-46 and 46:20-24, the passages which refer to the division within the clergy in non-Zadokite terms (though 40:46b has a Zadokite afterthought), the primary concern is architectural, not the definition of roles. In 43:19, however, and of course in chapter 44, the primary concern is the altar, and here, on the hypothesis that the Zadokite privilege is already of long standing, we might expect the precise terms of the distinction within the clergy to be insisted upon. Similarly, 48:11ff. is concerned with the role-relations within the clergy, for although the passage primarily describes the geography of the holy city and land, there is a difference between the

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48. *E.g.*, Emerton, 'Priests and Levites' 132.
49. *E.g.*, Ex. 29:9; 40:15; Nu. 3:10; Ne. 13:29. See also *Cultic Laws*, 232. The use of כהנה in these cases is more strictly applied to the priests as opposed to the Levites. I have argued elsewhere that the terms of Jos. 18:7 show that the distinctions made between the views of priesthood in D and P are falsely based. Deuteronomy, like Jos. 18:7, applies the term 'Levites' to the whole priestly tribe, without implying that its author was unaware of distinctions within the tribe (*Cultic Laws* 232ff.).

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allocations to the priests and to the Levites which bears upon role, in that the 'sanctuary of the Lord' is in the midst of the allocation to the priests (v.10). 45:4-5 is probably to be put in the same category, the 'lower' clergy being called 'Levites' even though the priests are not named Zadokites. This passage, clearly informed by 44:6ff., speaks strongly against seeing the distinction in terms of Zadokite polemic.

3. *The Interpretation of Ezekiel 44:6ff.*

We have now seen a number of reasons for dissatisfaction with the usual interpretation of Ezekiel 44, according to which it marks a stage in the development of priesthood between Deuteronomy and P. We have seen that the important texts which underlie that reconstruction (Dt. 18:6-8; 2 Ki. 23:8-9) have been wrongly interpreted as representing the claims of the Jerusalemite priesthood. We have noticed that there are reasons for thinking that at least some of the material in Ezekiel 40-48 - and particularly that which refers to the Zadokite precedence in cultic things - postdates some or all of the P material that deals with priesthood. And we have argued that the main criteria which are appealed to in the attempt to show the composite character of Ezekiel 40-48 are not convincing. Rather, there is an essential place for legislation within the section, and the terminology, though it is variable, is seen to be self-consistent when adequate account is taken of the individual contexts.

These points taken together demand that some attempt be made to interpret Ezekiel in a way that does not depend upon the concept of a Zadokite struggle for the control of Jerusalem nor presupposes a close relation in time to an emergent P. If Ezekiel 40-48 is a unity, and *parts* of it are admitted to betray knowledge of P, then perhaps the whole section reflects upon it. But if the purpose of Ezekiel 44 is not to establish a distinction between (Zadokite) priests and Levites, what *is* its purpose?

The first question that is raised here relates to the nature of the offence committed by the Levites (vv. 10, 12) Does Ezekiel have in mind an offence which we can identify within the Old Testament? Many suggestions have been put forward on the point, but it is best to admit that if Ezekiel had any particular offence in mind at all, it is

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unidentifiable.[50] It is unsatisfactory to explain the Levites' crime in terms of pre-Josianic high-place worship for the sorts of reasons urged earlier, *viz.* the error of postulating a particular link between Ezekiel 44 and 2 Kings 23:8-9.[51] It is possible, of course, that something arose during the exilic period among those who had remained in Judah (perhaps between the two deportations). But here we speculate. And in any case, the interpretation which I wish to offer does not depend upon an identification of the offence. Three more points may be made in this connection. (i) The Levites themselves are not held responsible for the introduction of foreigners into the temple personnel nor are they equated with them. Rather, it is the whole house of Israel that is at fault (44:6; and *cf.* chapters 8-11). It is precarious to suppose, because of the vagueness of the terms relating to the association of the Levites in guilt, that the so-called degradation of the Levites implies they were in any special way implicated in that sort of offence.[52] (ii) On the contrary, the appointment of the Levites is a new provision designed to achieve greater purity than before.[53] The service of Levites is therefore contrasted with that of the foreigners.

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50. It is often said that the involvement of non-Israelites in the cult, condemned in 44:7-9, stems from the appointment of Gibeonites (Jos. 9:27) to perform certain tasks in connection with the sanctuary. This was proposed by E. König ('The Priests and the Levites in Ezekiel XLIV. 7-15', *Exp T* 12 [1901] 300) but is rightly opposed by J. D. Levenson (*Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* [Harvard Semitic Monograph Series, 10] [Missoula, Montana, 1976], 135-136) on the grounds that the terms used of the Gibeonites cannot really underlie Ezk. 44. Zimmerli, in addition to Jos. 9:27, mentions as possibilities descendants of Solomon's slaves, or foreigners who entered the cult under Manesseh or Amon, but concedes that no answer can be found in Ezekiel (*Ezechiel II* 1126)
51. As does, *e.g.*, Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960) 444. And see above, pp. 5ff.
52. *E.g.*, Levenson traces the offence of 44:6-7 to Jerusalem's appointment of non-Levitical priests in 1 Ki. 12:31-32, and attempts to trace a tradition of anti-Mushite concerns in Nu. 12 and Nu. 25:6-18 (*Restoration* 136ff.).
53. This is seen by Fohrer, *Hauptprobleme* 166. He thinks

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(iii) The expression נשא עון, 'bear iniquity' (v.10) is a technical term used to describe, in a general way, the nature of the service of the clergy in the sphere of atonement for sin. It appears in Numbers 18:1, referring to the priests, and in Numbers 18:23 to the Levites, where there is no thought of actual offence on the part of either. This last point is suggestive. Interestingly, Ezekiel confines his application of the expression to the Levites. Is he using existing phraseology as a vehicle for his own distinctive slant on the roles of the clergy?

All these considerations counsel against seeking a particular offence of which the 'Levites' are guilty - and again therefore against interpreting our verses in terms of polemic, or against an immediate historical background.

There are reasons for thinking that Ezekiel 40-48 in general is indeed a reflection, in various ways, upon Israel's existing traditions. Zimmerli, for example, has taken the view that the possession of the holy mountain in Ezekiel has become the counterpart of the possession of the land in earlier literature.[54] Haran, as we have seen, has noted various points at which Ezekiel 40ff. might well depend on P.[55] And in numerous places Ezekiel could be regarded as consciously recapitulating prescriptions pertaining to the cult from parts of the Pentateuch usually ascribed to P. Very significant in this respect is chapter 43, with its provisions for the measurements of the altar (vv. 13ff.) and sacrifices of atonement for it (vv. 18ff.) (*cf.* Ex. 27:1ff.; 29:35ff.). If Ezekiel 43 is consciously reproducing an abridged parallel to Exodus

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it paradoxical that they should be installed for this reason at the same time as being punished for sins. But there is no such paradox in the light of the first point made above.

54. Zimmerli, 'Le nouvel 'exode' dans le message des deux grands prophèts de l'exil', *Homage à Wilhelm Vischer* (Montpellier, 1960) 221. Levenson adopts a variation of this, seeing a merging of conquest traditions with mythological ones (*Restoration* 9).

55. See above, p. 12, n.24.

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27-29 the mention of the limitation of the priesthood to the Zadokites would be indispensable - for this would be the corresponding element to the restriction of altar-service to the sons of Aaron (28:1ff.; 29:44ff.).

One further factor which suggests that this is the right approach is the parallel that can be discerned in Ezekiel 40-48 between Ezekiel and Moses.[56] Ezekiel may indeed begin as a mere outsider in these chapters, but he does not remain so. And it is neither coincidence nor editorial ineptitude when, at 43:6, the Lord begins to speak directly to the prophet, by-passing the intermediary. For now he would stress the key role which Ezekiel is to have in the new arrangements. As in the case of Moses, God speaks directly to him. Like Moses he has a priestly status (*cf.* Ex. 24:6ff.). Like him he is to preside over the institution of the cult, including the setting apart of the priests for their duty, and even continues in the priestly role in 43:20ff. having presented the Zadokites as priests. This confirms the impression that the Zadokites in 43:19 are deliberately invoked to correspond to the naming of the sons of Aaron in Exodus 28-29. As Ezekiel is a new Moses, so is Zadok the new Aaron.[57]

We have thus seen several factors which suggest that Ezekiel 40-48 reflects upon the traditions not only of P but of the whole Pentateuch. If, as Zimmerli has suggested, the possession of the holy mountain corresponds to the possession of the land, then that theme is accompanied in Ezekiel as in the Pentateuch by the institution of the cult, legislation pertaining to it, and the promise of blessing (Ezk. 47 taking up a number of the themes of Deuteronomy). Ezekiel 48 fills out the picture

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56. Noticed by Zimmerli, *Ezechiel II* 1101. Zimmerli, however, thinks such a portrayal of Ezekiel is from P, and secondary in Ezekiel. He goes on to express surprise that in 43:20ff. it is Ezekiel himself who is to fulfil the priestly role, having named the Zadokites as priests (*Ibid.* 1102). Yet this is fully consistent with Ezekiel's Mosaic role (Ex. 29:35-37).
57. Numerous more detailed examples of recapitulation could be cited, *e.g.*, the division of the land in Jos. 13ff. and in Ezk. 48. Nu. 16-18 also underlie Ezk. 40ff. in their legislation for the separateness of priests and Levites. Note the verbal connection

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by taking up the land-division motif from the Book of Joshua.

We are now in a position to answer the question we posed earlier,[58] *viz.* whether we need to think of Ezekiel 40-48 and P as being close in time and interdependent. And we must answer that Ezekiel 40-48 could well have been written long after those parts of P to which it particularly relates. The division between priests and Levites is therefore already well-known (the priestly right having as a matter of historical fact narrowed from Aaronites in general to Zadokites in particular; *cf.* 1 Sa. 2:27-36; 1 Ki. 2:35). Ezekiel merely re-iterates it.

Yet this still leaves a central question unanswered. Why does Ezekiel imply that the Levites' subordinate role is traceable to offence on their part if he does not have a particular offence in mind, but is rather merely re-stating the *status quo*? This question cries out for an answer if we are to sustain an alternative interpretation of Ezekiel 44 to one which is based on the idea of Zadokite polemic. Yet it is not possible to do more than be suggestive. We have noticed that Ezekiel used the phrase נשא עון only of the Levites. It may be that this is motivated, in the context of a picture of increasing holiness accompanying increasing penetration of the Temple and proximity to the altar, by a reluctance even to think of עון in connection with those who minister at the altar. The attachment of עון to the Levites and not to the priests would then call forth some explanation, provided in terms of actual sin on the Levites' part.

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between Nu. 16:3, 7 and Ezk. 44:6 (רב לכם), each time in a context which subordinates the Levites to the priests. *Cf.* also Nu. 18:22, where the Levites 'bear iniquity' in relation to the envisaged offence of the Israelites against the sanctuary. It is for reasons such as these that Gese thinks Nu. 18 and Ezk. 44 must have developed within a similar tradition (see above, p. 11). Given the tendency of Ezekiel to recapitulate here, however, it is better to think of Ezekiel as reflecting upon the various parts of the 'P' material.

58. See above, pp. 12-13.

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Perhaps those very theological emphases which we have already had occasion to note in Ezekiel can help us.[59] As we saw, Ezekiel is capable of presenting history within a highly schematized framework. His portrayal of Israel's history in chapters 16, 20 and 23 is unique among the prophets in dating Israel's persistent idolatry from Egypt itself, in contrast to the idealization of the wilderness period in Jeremiah 2:2-3 and Hosea 2:16-17 (14-15, EVV). On such a basis Ezekiel might well have no difficulty in finding an accusation against the Levites, without necessarily having in mind any particular occasion. It is more difficult on this view to account for the righteousness of the Zadokites. We saw, of course, that the 'heart of flesh' passages (11:19; 36:26) presupposed a real possibility of right living, and that in the new community the responsibility for maintaining the purity of the cult would be on the side of the people. Indeed, Zadokite righteousness, we argued, could have had a basis in fact.[60] Yet it is probably not necessary to take such a view. Rather we might appeal again to the idea of schema, and suggest that Ezekiel is not really interested in an actual flawless record on the Zadokites' part, but rather that for service in the new community such a record becomes, in an idealized way, the priests' qualification. Even Ezekiel 20, that record of Israel's failure, has a vision of a community bringing acceptable sacrifices, and here in chapter 44 we have a picture of the worthy mediators of these sacrifices. While on this point, mention should again be made of Numbers 16-18, which centres on the rebellion of the Levite Korah against the Aaronite priestly privilege. All the legislation in these chapters may be said to flow from that event[61] and confirms the Levites squarely in their inferior position, though at the same time dealing positively with them (*e.g.*, in giving them the tithe, 18:21-25). We have noticed already that the appointment of the Levites is related to some possible cultic abuse by the Israelites at large. In all these ways Ezekiel 44 corresponds to Numbers 16-18. That is, it is a confirmation of the

59. See above, pp. 13-14.
60. See above, p. 14.
61. See G. J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Leicester, 1981) 133ff.

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Levites in their lower position while dealing positively with them. The likeliest explanation is that the prophet takes up the broad thrust of Numbers 16-18, and finds there the ground for his accusation of the Levites and his congratulation of the Zadokites.

By way of a final prod to the imagination, is it possible that Ezekiel is also - or rather - interpreting the relation between the priest and Levites in terms of that other emphasis of his, the responsibility of each succeeding generation for its standing before God (as expounded in 14:12-20 and chapter 18)? The relative roles of the priests and Levites may be of long standing. But the position of any class in God's eyes is always freshly dependent upon obedience.

Those, then, are possible pointers to the interpretation of a passage with a basic paradox - the establishment of the Levites in a place of honour, by the very accusation that they have 'gone astray'. I hope I have shown that the attempt to resolve the paradox in terms of Zadokite polemic does not stand up to the serious investigation of the history of the pre-exilic priesthood, and therefore that Ezekiel 44 should no longer be regarded as one of the mainstays of an exilic or post-exilic dating of P. The task of furnishing a convincing alternative interpretation is more difficult. But hopefully some suggestions have been given as to the correct direction of such an interpretation.

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