THE DAY OF YAHWEH AND THE MOURNING OF THE PRIESTS IN JOEL

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This article employs a synchronic approach to explore how the book of Joel affirms the legitimacy and centrality of Judah's Persian-era priesthood.[1] This date reflects the majority view of the book's provenance: see, for instance, the recent commentaries by Richard Coggins (2000: 13–17), James L. Crenshaw (1995a: 21–29) and John Barton (2001: 1, 7).[2] What interests me, however, are the symbolic constructions employed in the book and what Robert Carroll may have called its 'word-world'.[3] Residents of this literary world include priests. Oddly, however, they only appear in the first half of the book, in which they mourn the defunct sacrifices and are exhorted to institute rites of lamentation and fasting (1.9, 13–14; 2.15–17). In the oracles of salvation that begin at 2.18, the priests are not mentioned, but everyone gets to wear the prophet's mantle (3.1–2). The question of how the book as a whole imagines the role and status of the priesthood, then, is an important question.

Hans Walter Wolff (1977: 12–13) sees Joel advocating a spiritual path that concentrates on eschatological prophecy instead of empty priestly devotion to ritual and Torah. Many have criticized Wolff for this, including Barton (2001: 55–56, 65–66). Typically, commentators say that, for Joel, the liturgical rites are an acceptable and important vehicle to express an inner-felt spirituality, even if the rites are not an end in themselves. Often cited in this regard is Joel 2.13, which demands the sufferers tear their hearts and not their garments (Allen 1976: 79; Garrett 1997: 327, 346). The book at least draws on liturgical forms (Barton 2001: 21–22; Coggins 1982: 89; 1996: 81–82), although some commentators maintain that Joel was a cult-prophet or that his book (or parts thereof) was intended to be used in a liturgy (Kapelrud 1948; Carroll 1982: 49; Mathews 2001: 161). Even so, the conceptual significance of the temple,

1. A much briefer version of this paper was read at the Israelite Prophetic Literature section of the annual SBL meeting in Toronto on 24 November, 2002.

2. On the other hand, a date as early as the late-ninth century BCE is defended by Hailey (1972: 40). Garrett (1997: 286–94) tentatively proposes the seventh century BCE, while Stuart (1987: 226–27) thinks any of the invasions of Judah in 701, 598 or 588 BCE are likely settings.

3. He made frequent use of this expression in a brilliant series of lectures in the autumn of 1999 at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

priesthood and ritual in Joel is sometimes minimized. Arvid Kapelrud (1948: 182–84) thinks the priests are accorded no particular importance, even if they are not denigrated. While Duane Garrett (1997: 298, 304–309) observes that the prophet Joel saw repentance inseparable from temple lamentation (as in 1 Kgs 8.37–40), the cult and its functionaries hardly merit mention in Garrett's overview of seven main theological points of the book, other than in juxtaposing repentance with ritual penance (1997: 308). These points include: 'The Covenant'; 'The Day of the Lord'; 'A Biblical Worldview'; 'Natural Calamity and the Will of God'; 'Ethical Questions and the Issue of Repentance'; 'Prophecy and the Gift of the Spirit'. Even in Garrett's comments on 'The Future of Zion' (1997: 306–307), there is no mention of the temple or priesthood. I will demonstrate, however, that Joel employs a strategy which allows for the priests to be all but taken for granted as it depicts ritualization as having the capacity to overcome great social stresses.

It does this by reaffirming the structure of society and its power-relations through a dual portrayal of the 'Sacred' as the numinous 'Other' and as the ordered structures of human life. Therefore, the priests have an importance in this word-world wholly out of proportion to the actual amount of text devoted to them. By extension, then, the text affirms the status of the priesthood in the writer's society by reinforcing the view that they are essential players in the divine/natural/human economy of the cosmos.

Joel's literary world is marked by fantastic descriptions of catastrophe, but the exact nature of these crises is famously indeterminate. Most see the locusts of Joel 1.4 as referring to a real infestation, with either an accompanying drought or a figurative description of the insect-ravaged landscape suffering in the typical summer heat (Joel 1.10–12, 16–20). In Joel 2.1–11 a fantastic image of an invasion is found and some commentators, including Crenshaw (1995a: 122), Barton (2001: 70) and Willem Prinsloo (1985: 47–48), argue that this invasion should be seen as either a hyperbolic description of the same insect infestation of Joel 1 or a subsequent one.[4] On the other hand, Garrett (1997: 298–301, 333–39) finds real locusts in Joel 1, but human armies depicted figuratively in Joel 2. For Wolff (1977: 41–42), the real locusts of Joel 1 were the trigger for the prophet's envisioning of an apocalyptic army in the next chapter. A number of interpreters, however, say all actual and apparent references to locusts are metaphors for human armies (Ogden 1983; Andiñach 1992).[5] In this paper I will privilege none of the historical rationalizations of Joel's

4. For another way of reading Joel in terms of locusts and weather patterns, see Nash (1989: 74–80).

5. Stuart (1987: 233–34, 241–42) agrees, and compares Joel's stereotypical descriptions of locust infestation, drought, and invasion with Deut. 4 and 28–32. This, however, actually undermines his own argument that one can identify invasion as the real issue in Joel.

descriptions of disaster. Ferdinand E. Deist's view is that Joel's calamities are entirely hypothetical or the product of the imagination. He writes that Joel, 'was merely creating a *literary* world of calamities to serve as metaphors' to illustrate the Day of Yahweh (1988: 64, emphasis in original). Perhaps the prophet Joel did have some real-world catastrophe in mind, but the book presents a *literary* world, and it is only to the latter world that the modern critic has any direct access.

Another difficulty the interpreter of Joel faces is in determining what, if anything, the writer thought the people had done to deserve their fate. As noted already, Wolff (1977: 12–13) thinks the cult itself was displeasing to the prophet. Gösta Ahlström (1971: 69) sees Joel justly decrying the syncretistic state of early Persian-era worship in Jerusalem.[6] Paul Redditt (1986) finds Joel was initially not opposed to the priesthood *per se*, but to their lack of leadership or devotion to their duties. Douglas Stuart (1987: 230) relates Joel to the covenant curses in Deuteronomy and writes of a 'general national disobedience to Yahweh, regardless of whatever particular sets of violations may have been foremost in Joel's day'. James Nogalski (1993: 17–22) views Joel in the light of 1 Kgs 8.35–39 (= 2 Chron. 6.26–30) in which plague, invasion, illness, drought and famine are attributed to human guilt. Nogalski also argues that Joel is employing Hosea's images of guilt, interpreting Joel from the perspective of the book that immediately precedes it in the Book of the Twelve.[7]

Joel's own purposes and ideas, however, cannot *a priori* be considered identical to those expressed in other components of the Twelve.[8] Coggins (2000: 23, 24) argues that Nogalski's key words linking the end of Hosea with the beginning of Joel are too common to demonstrate the claimed connection. Ehud Ben Zvi (1996: 155–56) notices that there is no superscription for the whole collection, but each book has individual superscriptions and each offers its own 'plot' that can be considered self-contained. Variations in the order of the books exist in the versions and intertextual connections can be made between non-adjacent prophetic books and even with literature in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. Ben Zvi concludes that the components of the Book of the Twelve were most likely intended to be read for their own uniqueness within their shared ideological focus as parts of the Twelve. To my mind, one should be careful of building too much on Stuart's (1987: 230) discovery of Joel's allusions to covenant curses: these allusions are only one part of Joel's complex symbolic web, a web that nowhere unambiguously says the

6. Deist (1988: 69) also suggests that Joel 1.2–20; 2.18–27 serves an anti-Canaanite polemic.

7. For a summary of work on the Book of the Twelve, see Redditt (2001: 47–80).

8. Still, Coggins sees Joel addressing some inadequacies in the cultic practice of the day.

Judeans had broken the covenant. Presumably, the writer(s) and editors of Joel were familiar with literature that questioned why the righteous suffer. The story of Job immediately comes to mind as something of which they may have been aware. Barton (2001: 35–36), developing observations of Crenshaw (1995a: 18n.6; 1995b: 185–86), raises the question of whether the finished book of Joel is more a work of theodicy than a work of prophecy. As such, both scholars find Joel comparable in some respects to Job and even Jonah (Barton 2001: 35; Crenshaw 1995b). Graham S. Ogden (1983: 105) compares Joel to Ps. 59.3–4 in which a lament includes assertions of innocence. The expression, 'return שוב to me [Yahweh]' (Joel 2.12–13), is often taken as indicating that the people are urged to 'repent', implying they have sinned (e.g. Stuart 1987: 252). This word, however, needs not imply repentance, but a renewed and heightened devotion to the deity (Barton 2001: 35, 36, 76–80). Isaiah 44.22 can be referred to as a proof-text in this regard (Crenshaw 1995a: 40–41; 1995b: 188).[9] Joel's silence on the people's sins must not be drowned out by importing into its word-world the emphasis on guilt found in other literature and having this dominate our thinking about the book.

Joel's conceptual world is shaped more by cosmic themes of chaos and the restoration of creation than by themes of guilt or, for that matter, innocence. Ronald Simkins (1991) argues convincingly against recognizing a separation in biblical thought between human and natural history, a dichotomy he traces back to Hegel. Instead, God, nature and human life are inextricably linked. Simkins says that interaction between the deity, nature and humanity are key motifs of the 'combat myth' which is the model for the book of Joel. This familiar motif sees a divine warrior march against forces which threaten his sovereignty. The earth and nature convulse in a violent response to the champion's struggle. The victorious warrior returns to be enthroned and to speak from the temple. Nature, in turn, responds with its bounty as the heavens fertilize the earth, making it a fit home for living beings. Citing many biblical passages, including Pss. 96, 114 and 68.8–9, Simkins argues that nature is often portrayed as animate, active and conscious (1991: 58–75; 1993). Even though he takes a very unique approach to Joel, like most interpreters he historicizes the depictions of disaster. Joel 1 and 2 describe a real infestation while the drought imagery stems from the arid summer of Israel, all happening at a time when Judah was harassed by foreign enemies. The locusts of Joel 2 and the foreign nations in Joel 4 represent to Joel the same threat to divine sovereignty and the created order. The conflict myth is, therefore, a strategy which accords cosmogonic significance to real situations as the fulfillment of prophetic tradition. Moreover, the relieving of the threat

9. On the various meanings of 'return', see also Wolff (1977: 49).

symbolically re-creates the world (1991: 101–20, 225, 235–76).There is much to commend in Simkins's work, but I am not convinced that the mysterious invaders of Joel 2.1–10 are so unambiguously the opponents of Yahweh and his army who are described in Joel 2.11 (Simkins 1991: 160, 167). As I see it, the role of Yahweh in this combat myth is ambivalent. In 1.6–7, a 'nation' גוי assaults God's land destroying his vines and trees. Yet the Day of Yahweh in 1.15 is likened to destruction from the Almighty. In Joel 2.1–10 the terrible and mysterious invaders attack, while v. 11 overtly describes Yahweh's armies. I see little reason to understand v. 11 as talking about a divine opponent to the hordes described earlier. Indeed, in 2.25, the great locust army is said to have been unleashed by Yahweh, not against him. As the sole divine power, God can be both enemy and champion. The combat myth motifs are only part of a greater mythic complex which centres on the transformation of the earth *and* Yahweh.

The book of Joel ascribes natural and/or political crises (real or imagined) to divine action, especially as instances of the 'Day of Yahweh' (Joel 1.15; 2.1–2, 11; 3.3; 4.14). Many scholars have built on this awareness, among them Barton (2001: 59–60). This understanding recalls Mircea Eliade's (1959) thoughts on hierophany, the manifestation of the numinous 'Sacred' within the 'profane' world.[10] William E. Paden (2000) holds that such an understanding of the sacred, which he calls the 'mana model', has great explanatory power. This is especially so regarding the structured ways in which societies interact with select objects which they have empowered as focal points of the 'Sacred'. Yet, Paden also holds that the mana model needs to be complemented by another model he calls 'sacred order'. Herein sacrality is not alterity, but a perception of the inviolable order of society and its environment. Paden writes that Eliade developed the mana model in terms of world-making: the establishment of a fixed centre with links to the divine which grounded the world in the midst of chaotic non-being. Eliade's focus was on how this world-making employed cosmic myth rather than on the maintenance and defence of the system. Paden's 'sacred order' model describes this maintenance as 'a dynamic process of self-maintenance in the face of threatened or actual impurity, wrongness, or guilt' (2000: 211). It is in the sharp reaction to such disruptions that the sacrality of order really becomes easy to identify. Paden, therefore, categorizes various social aspects of sacred order and various human threats and infractions against it. He does not discuss at any length the threat posed by natural catastrophes, although his theoretical basis can accommodate such crises: he mentions demon-

10. Simkins (1991: 3–30) includes Eliade among those who artificially imposed a dichotomy between human history and nature in their characterization of ancient Israelite religion.

induced illness along with a more general sense of 'failures' of order and 'chaotic anomy' and the like (2000: 209–11). With this understanding, however, the profane is not merely the secular, that which is 'outside the temple, but rather what subverts it' by threatening order (Paden 2000: 209). When we use this model as a tool to understand Joel, therefore, one is confronted with an ambivalent Yahweh acting as the 'profane' enemy subverting sacred order! But resolving this existential nightmare seems to me to be what Joel, as a theodicy, is all about.

That resolution is initiated in the call to public lamentation and fasting in Joel 1.14; 2.12, 15. Interpreters often explain this as a public means of expressing anguish and submission to God (e.g. Garrett 1997: 326; Barton 2001: 56; Wolff 1977: 33). But what is the point of *communal* lamentation? Are the people not already in anguish? And by what perverse irony are the people asked to fast? *Are they not already starving?* Why does everything have to be turned into a ritual?

An answer might be found in the work of Catherine Bell, who writes that the power of ritualization has more to do with social power relationships than a perception of manipulated external reality. She describes ritualization as embracing a misrecognition or blindness. The ritualized body sees itself as responding naturally and appropriately to a situation, event or problem. What it does not see is how the ritual redefines those situations by imposing its own conceptual schemes. Even social power relations in the ritualization are not obvious to the participants, who largely assume them unconsciously. The ultimate authority is therefore identified as being beyond the ability of the community itself to control: in other words, from tradition or a god, thereby representing the structure of the cosmos. In the end a sense of social and cosmic reintegration is experienced as personal redemption becomes dependent upon communal redemption (1992: 98–100, 108–16, 197–223).

> Indeed, in seeing itself as responding to an environment, ritualization interprets its own schemes as impressed upon the actors from a more authoritative source, usually from well beyond the immediate human community itself. Hence, through an orchestration in time of loosely and effectively homologized oppositions in which some gradually come to dominate others, the social body reproduces itself in the image of the symbolically schematized environment that has been simultaneously established (Bell 1992: 108–109).

It should be possible to extrapolate from work done on real rituals to Joel's *literary* representation of calls for ritual responses to pressing circumstances. One can see a similar 'blindness' at work, as the ritualization imposes a collective scheme on suffering and implies the affirmation of the status of those lead the ritual. Moreover, one can also see the ambivalent

Yahweh redefined, a (re)creative act of the ritual body which is imagined as having a positive effect on the fortunes of the worshippers.

Bell's thoughts intersect with Paden's, and the sacred order model has some important points of contact with Simkins' views on Joel. Both of the latter require acknowledging a close relationship between the human world and nature, and this is indeed found in Joel. In 1.9 the offerings or libations have been 'cut off' הכרת from the temple, as was the wine from the drinkers in v. 5. In Joel 1.13, offerings are 'withheld' (מנע. A few commentators accuse the priests of abandoning the sacrifices (Allen 1976: 53; Simkins 1991: 145). Barton (2001: 55) rightly advises, however, that this cessation is part of the divine assault and is not merely the desperate measures of a starving people. Barton can be supported by reference to Joel 2.12–14 in which the people are admonished to 'return' to Yahweh in the hope that the deity will leave a blessing behind him: an offering and libation for God himself. In 1.9–12, this reciprocal relationship is played out in the phraseology. In vv. 9–10, the priests 'mourn' אבל the lost rites, as does the ground its destroyed fields.[11] The oil is 'exhausted' אמלל and the wine is 'dried up'. This last word is הוביש, from the root יבש. In v. 11 הבישו from the root בוש describes the agriculturalists' disgrace over the failed crops. In v. 12, הובישה describes the desiccation (and perhaps shame) of the vine.[12] Here too, the joy of cultic celebration dries up or is ashamed הביש, 'from humanity'.[13] Moreover, joyless 'humanity' בני אדם evokes the mourning ground of v. 10 אבלה אדמה, while the withered אמללה fig recalls the exhausted wine of that earlier verse. These word-plays and associations articulate a *symbiotic and organic relationship* between the land, the people and its priesthood.[14] Its attribution of painful emotions to the land and later to animals (cf. 1.18, 20) is not a mere personification. It expresses a closeness between humanity and the natural world that has parallels in other religions (Ebersole 2000: 214–22). This part of Joel recalls the

11. Clines (1998) writes that אבל may connote dryness when its denotation, mourning, is a reaction to drought. Barton (2001: 53) follows Clines.

12. The parallelism with אמללה suggests 'dry up', as noted by Crenshaw (1995: 101) although I disagree that 'be ashamed' lessens the poetic force.

13. הביש ששון מן־בני אדם is difficult. I follow Wolff (1977: 32) who asserts that a dual association is probably intended, joy is withering, which results in shame. Simkins (1991: 139–41) says מן־בני אדם should be read 'by the sons of men' referring to foreigners, since 2.23 speaks of joy for the 'sons of Zion'. Crenshaw (1995: 102) refutes this interpretation. On the one hand, I link 'sons' in 1.12 to the successive generations of 1.2–3. On the other hand, 'sons of man' has a certain nuance of autonomy to it. In 2.23, however, the people are called the 'sons of Zion', i.e., the people of the sacred shrine. This lexical transformation follows the flow of the narrative as it turns from grief and separation from God to a happy reconciliation with the deity.

14. For a fuller discussion of the richness of the language in this passage, see the insightful study of Hayes (2002: 189–96).

ambiguous and rich Hos. 2.23–25. Here Yahweh answers the sky as the earth responds to 'Jezreel' (*God sows*) and provides its rich bounty that heals the wounded relationship with which the book is concerned (Landy 1995: 25, 46–47). In Joel, however, the language merges Israel and the land to highlight the rupture between them and God.

These textual features along with the bizarre imagery of invasion in Joel 2.1–11 are interpretable according to Paden's (2000: 215) view that territory is a sacred quantity because it is the very basis of a sustainable life. We can see the successful defence of sacred territory in Joel after 2.17. In 2.19–26, the enemy is driven into the sea and nature explodes with her bounty. In v. 27, God is in the midst of his people, Israel. In 4.16, he roars from Zion and is a shelter to his people. In v. 17, he resides in Zion. The holy city is inviolable: never again will a stranger pass through it. Verse 20 predicts that Judah will forever be inhabited.

Maintaining tradition is also important in maintaining sacred order. This 'system allegiance' replicates social scripts, to break with it is to 'rupture the world's a priori coherence' (Paden 2000: 216). In Joel, tradition has been broken with the cessation of sacrifice. Of course, the fast and lamentation are traditional forms of public expression that can be seen to replace the defunct sacrifices. It is also interesting how other themes of tradition reinforce this. Elders, those with the strongest connections to traditional knowledge, figure in the text, and not kings and governors (Joel 1.2, 14; 2.16). Even though Joel 1.2 and 2.2 affirm that no parallel to the crisis has ever happened, or will happen again, Joel 1.3 demands that the story become the content of a *new* tradition, passed on from generation to generation. Joel's well-known reliance on motifs and ideas found elsewhere in biblical literature may also be a device that affirms the validity and survivability of tradition in the face of unholy chaos.[15] This is especially so regarding Joel 2.13–14, in which the speaker raises the hope that a gracious, compassionate and long-suffering deity will relent. This passage, with its echoes of a number of biblical texts, including Exod. 34.6–7; Num. 14.18; Pss. 86.15; 103.8, 145.8 and especially Jon. 4.2, asserts a traditional conception of the relationship between God and his people (Crenshaw 1995a: 135–37; Dozeman 1989). In Bell's terms (see 1992: 108–109), a ritual affirmation of a merciful god would confront and eventually dominate the participants' experience of a capricious and violent god. It does the same for the reader of our text: God is now defined by his mercy, not his violence.

15. Joel's borrowings, quotes and/or allusions to other traditions are well known, see Coggins (1996). Simkins (1991: 267) explains this as Joel possessing a general familiarity with a shared 'prophetic tradition'.

Sacred acts in sacred places take place in sacred times. In Joel, all other times and places are negated. The regular ritual calendar is wiped away. Regardless of what day of the year that might be, it is dry season: the earth is scorched and burned. More terrifying, the sun is darkened and every place is a place of suffering and death. This is the 'Day of Yahweh', unlike any other (Joel 1.15; 2.1–2, 11). Joel's use of the concept may be far removed from its original setting (Prinsloo 1985: 36). In general, however, it refers to any of numerous historical and future days associated with dramatic acts of God.[16] In Joel the 'Day' sees the reformulation of liturgical gatherings. Thus, even with the cessation of the sacrificial rites, the text opens a sacred time and place: a sanctuary on Yahweh's day in the midst of chaos. The priests who can no longer maintain their status as officiates of the sacrifices retain their leadership role as organizers of the rituals that are left open to the beleaguered people: mourning and fasting. The personal has become collective. And, equally important, the cosmos becomes cohesive again as the rituals reassert that the ultimate source of power and cosmic integrity lies with God and, regardless of his apparent enmity, he is merciful, as tradition teaches.

The proposed ritual in Joel resists the idea that the system of exchange between God, nature and humanity is entirely extinct. An excellent example of this exchange, not to mention the 'recycling' of gifts, is found in Deut. 14.22–23, in which the tithe offered to God is to be eaten in the presence of Yahweh. God gives prosperity to the people, the people give back to God, the people eat what they have given (Burkert 1996: 148). In Joel 1.9, 13; 2.15–17, the priests bewail the failed sacrificial exchange system and the hope is expressed that God himself would restore it (2.14) by leaving an offering. They are to spend the night in sackcloth and convene a solemn assembly at the temple. Young and old must all gather: even the newly-weds must come (2.16). The people must 'sanctify' themselves קדשׁו (2.16). There is no other place to be but in the assembly. Even so, the priests, the ministers of Yahweh and his altar (1.9, 13; 2.17), have nothing to offer. Yet, a solution can be found.

Leviticus 5.1–13; 12.1–8; 14.19–22 describe a number of situations in which those of modest means are allowed to make less expensive sacrifices than those more well-off. In Joel, however, the people are left without the resources to make any kind of material gift at all. The belief that a deity is actually concerned with a worshipper's 'heart' and not his or her ability to provide expensive offerings or conduct ritual (cf. Joel 2.13) is not rare in biblical texts (e.g. Hos. 6.6; Pss. 40.7–8, 50.1–15, 141.2; Prov. 21.3) or those of other religious traditions (Burkert 1996: 143). In one sense, it allows

16. The bibliography on the 'Day's' tradition history is huge. See the brief review in Crenshaw (1995: 47–50) and the influential essays by Everson (1974), and Hoffmann (1981).

those with nothing at all to offer something acceptable to God: the inner purity upon which all effective sacrifice depends can sometimes be enough. Yet, in Joel this inner transformation is accompanied by a symbolic sacrificial substitution that reflects the actual 'economy' of the crisis. Such an attempt to placate an angry deity by offering symbols of the divine wrath itself is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. 1 Samuel 6.1–17 describes how the Philistines appease Yahweh with five golden models of the mice and five more of the haemorrhoids with which the Israelite god plagued them. The number five corresponds to the number of Philistine cities and lords. In a less humorous vein, other biblical texts refer to various effects of divine action as a form of ritual. The exile of Judah in 2 Chronicles is imagined as a 'Sabbath' for the land. Isaiah 34.5–7 and Jer. 46.10 describe God's violence against the nations as a sacrifice, as does Zeph. 1.7–8. Sacrificial and ritual concepts, then, provide a way of imagining the entire divine-human encounter: its breakdown and its restoration.

God used to give food, but now in Joel the deity gives starvation. Yet, the recommended ritual fast and lamentation assimilates even this suffering to the exchange system which grounds creation, tenaciously rejecting defeatism. Thus, the hunger and grief is symbolically returned to its source in ritual time and place on behalf of the people and, presumably, nature itself. The specification that the priests 'sanctify' the fast קדשו־צום (Joel 1.14; 2.15) seems almost redundant, as Crenshaw (1995a: 104) notices: fasts are inherently religious. Yet, this sanctification symbolically transforms the hunger: it is not destruction from, but communion with the numinous 'Other'. So, too, the lamentation. Ritualized tears in many non-Western societies are not empty formalisms and are no less real than the spontaneous crying acknowledged as 'true' emotional responses in the West (Ebersole 2000: 213–15). In Joel, the ritual weeping is part of the communalization of private grief which Bell (1992: 217–18) argues can be personally empowering, despite the complex relationship between the individual and hegemonic order that exists in ritual. Moreover, on a literary level the demand in 2.13 that the people rend their hearts and not their garments adds an image of symbolized violence closely following the invasion imagery of 2.1–11. In that passage, one can imagine hearts, along with other significant body parts, being physically torn. It is no wonder that the text demands that the ritualization of suffering take place at the temple, between the portico and the altar (2.17, cf. 1.14). Yet, what is transformed is not only the human and natural suffering and the cosmos, but the deity as well. He is no longer the enemy but the saviour. After 2.17 the transformation is complete: nature is restored as God gives the rain and sweeps the locust army away. Starvation gives way to full bellies, disgrace is ended and God is with his people once more (Joel 2.18–27). In 2.20, the destroyed enemy is called the צפוני 'northerner', echoing traditions

of a mighty northern enemy, or even the name of Mt Zaphon: the mythical home of the Canaanite gods.[17] In Joel, God the champion has disowned his threatening insect/military/supernatural horde. The dangerous, profane 'Other' is once again part of the sacred order.

Paden (2000: 215–16) treats the maintenance of social hierarchy, role, status and group loyalty as essential elements in sacred order. In Joel, there is no overt condemnation of traitors, false prophets or the like: instead, group solidarity underlies the assemblies. Other than the elders mentioned in a few places (1.2, 14; 2.16), the priests are the *only* authority figures mentioned in Joel 1–2. They are accorded their special status as ministers of Yahweh and his altar (Joel 1.9, 13; 2.17). The ritualization process depends on them: their status is without rival or overt criticism. To accept the mercy of God affirmed in the ritual is to accept the social standing of the priests as orchestrators of the rites. On the other hand, role differentiation and status after 2.17 becomes ambiguous. The בני ציון 'Sons of Zion' are told to rejoice (2.23). Everyone will become prophets (Joel 3), but no priests are mentioned. If sacred order is most easily seen in the reaction to transgression, perhaps the priests need not appear in the salvation oracles because their social status has never really been challenged in the book: prophecy and priesthood are not conceived of as rivals to each other. Even without mention of priests, there remain allusions to priestly functions and temple imagery in the final half of Joel. The expression 'Sons of Zion' in 2.23 does not name the priesthood specifically, but it does call attention to the temple-site as a focus of Judean identity. In Joel 4.17, the people will know that Yahweh their god dwells in Zion, his holy mountain. No foreigner will transgress its boundaries. In one sense, the priesthood has become assimilated to the collective, presumably because the collective is the more important theme. Similarly, in 1 Kings 8, it is 'Solomon and the whole community of Israel' who offer sacrifice (vv. 3–5) at the new temple. After being forced to abandon the sanctuary by the divine cloud in vv. 10–11, the priests are not mentioned again. In v. 62, 'the king and all Israel' sacrifice once more, not the priests. Joel 3 seems to embody Moses' wish that all Israel could be prophets (Num. 11.29). But, taken together, Joel 2.18–4.21 also suggests the fulfillment of Exod. 19.6 that Israel is a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Even the destiny of Judah's enemies is predicted in priestly terms: the battle that will destroy them must also be 'sanctified' קדשו, just like Judah's fast (4.9).

Much of this suggests that Joel reflects quite strongly two other categories of Paden's sacred order, that of 'high definition membership' and honour as the maintenance of integrity (2000: 218–19). Joel does not

17. Many commentators recognize this, e.g., Crenshaw (1995: 151).

develop themes of identity based on the exodus, the covenant or patriarchal traditions. Yet, the land is God's in 1.6 and so are the people in v. 14. Judah is called God's 'possession' נחלה in 2.17, and later in the chapter they again are his people (2.17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27). Simkins (1994) holds that if there is any sin implied in Judah's actions, it is in Judah hiding the shame of having their land ravaged. They hide their disgrace by abandoning the worship of an apparently absentee divine protector. As noted already, however, it is God who abolished the sacrificial exchange. The symbiotic nature of the cosmos, however, implies that God's honour is linked to that of his people. This is evident in Joel 2.17 which directs the priests to ask Yahweh not to surrender Judah to the mockery and/or dominion of the nations.[18] The final rhetorical point they are advised to make is to ask, 'why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"' This implies that Yahweh is defensive about his own honour, as noticed by Barton (2001: 83–84). After raising the question, however, the text does not pause to say that the priests did what they were commanded. The prophetic voice immediately turns to describe how God has changed his mind (2.18) and that the shame of the land and the people will be put away (2.19, 27). This gap, however, is not fatal to the integrity of the text. Rather, it speaks volumes about how the text's producers relied on the reader making the necessary conceptual leaps from Judah's agony to God's potential dishonour, from prophetic demands to priestly *and divine* action. This involves the reader acquiescing and accepting the hierarchical order of God, the priests, and the populace, as the basis for the eventual restoration of the cosmos. As Joel 2.18–4.21 depicts, the reintegration displaces any discomfort over the unexplored causes of the disasters onto the oppressive foreign powers, who are belatedly identified as the enemy to all that is sacred.

Without exploring the issue, Paden (2000: 222) wonders how sacred order relates to ideological insecurity. Biblical scholars would do well to consider it too. In Joel, it seems as if tradition is used creatively to solve real or imagined crises which call into question accepted beliefs about God. We might label this literary process with Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's term, 'metamyth', a transformation of earlier mythology through the telling of a new narrative. She employs it in discussing the evolving Hindu myths of Rudra/Pashupti and Prajapati as 'nightmares' of sacrifice. These myths posit surrogates for human, and eventually animal, sacrificial objects. Finally, in some texts, prayers are said to a satisfactory substitute (1988: 88–89, 112–14). In Joel we do not have 'nightmares' of human

18. משל may be read as 'to rule' or as indicating mockery in parallel with חרפה. Some suggest a possible *double entendre*, e.g. Crenshaw (1995: 183), who still affirms 'to mock' is the stronger possibility. I think the word play should not be discounted at all.

sacrifice. We have instead a nightmare of a failed environmental, economic and ritual system. The book of Joel imagines how even this fear can be brought into the transformative world of sacred time and place and, in so doing restore hope. Joel's word-world provides a central image to describe the collapse of the stable universe 'outside the temple' that is predicted for the 'Day of Yahweh'. Yet, the reciprocity between God, nature and humanity, spoken of in images of withheld and hoped for sacrifices, casts human life itself as a liturgical process. The strategy which discovers a surrogate offering upon which recreation depends is at once traditional, ad hoc and integrative. Starvation and anguish become fasting and lamentation, torn 'hearts' symbolize shock and torn bodies. In the end, the foreign nations to be defeated in Joel 4 are the true surrogates: like the fast they are to be 'sanctified' for the war that will destroy them (4.9). In response to the cut-off wine of 1.5, the nations find themselves crushed in a winepress (4.13), symbolically reinstituting the previously withheld libations (1.9, 13, cf. 2.14). The nations are harvested as ploughs and pruning hooks become weapons (4.10, 13), and here is the symbolic return to cereal offerings. The nations' defeat is the prelude to the recreation of the primal paradise (4.14–21) as heaven and nature respond to one another again.

Because we have taken a synchronic view of the book of Joel, we have said little of the real priests of Joel's time, whatever time that may have been! The text articulates a functioning social hierarchy, the necessity of the control of territory, the numinous power behind the basics of life, and rituals that seek to address the rupture in the sacred order. This rupture, however, is addressed in terms which reaffirm social hierarchies, even if the structure of that hegemony is not addressed directly. Neither is that hierarchy challenged in Joel: the eventual invisibility of the priests in the oracles of salvation does not really constitute a charter to replace priests with a new focal point for religious life. As Bell (1992: 197–223) suggests, we should recognize how social power-relationships can be taken for granted in ritualization, although resistance to hegemony can never be fully suppressed. There is no indication of resistance to the priesthood, however, even if the fantasy of the restored earth means that everyone, young and old, will share in the prophetic gift (Joel 3.1–2). The priests, of course, are not excluded, but merely subsumed within this greater group. Indeed, it is the prophetic voice which directs the priests to act: 'The words of Yahweh which came to Joel' (1.1). The reader at least gives a hypothetical approval to this concept before reading further and, with that nod of acceptance, the role, social status, and efficacy of the literary priesthood are easier to accept, since that voice never openly criticizes the priests. It is easy to see this as a legitimatization strategy which served the purposes of ancient Judah's actual priests. Any crises that can be seen in

the hyperbolic descriptions of Joel 1–2, then, have their solution in the efficacy of the priestly leadership of the people validated by prophecy.

In articulating the dual aspect of the 'sacred', alterity and integrity, the 'prophetic' (or mythic) imagination can sometimes be seen to revolve around a conception of the temple and its liturgies as a microcosm of the cosmos and society.[19] A conceptual temple should be understood as being as real an influence on biblical writers as any actual building. Indeed, the two temples depend on each other! The prophet Joel and other writers and editors whose work is represented by the book bearing his name would only have needed awareness of the temple's cosmic significance and common rituals to produce the text. This awareness was probably shared by many of the literate in ancient Judah. It is, therefore, difficult to assert with any confidence that the prophet Joel was an actual functionary in the sacrificial religion. Of course, the reverse is also true: it is impossible to prove he was *not* a temple official! Similarly, we still cannot be sure if the book of Joel was meant to be read in a liturgy. But what we can be confident about is that the book easily serves the interests of the liturgical institutions and that it suggests no replacement for the temple itself as the centre of Judean religious life. Indeed, the book affirms that the temple is necessary to the very stability of the cosmos and its relationship with its creator.

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19. Cf. Mic. 1.2–3, in which Yahweh is in his 'holy temple' then 'comes down' from his place to tread on the earth's 'high places'.

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