

## PURITY IN MATTHEW, JAMES, AND THE DIDACHE

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Purity is a defining notion in Second Temple Judaism. It played a significant role not only in cultic circumstances such as temple or synagogue worship. Purity was influential in social relations and life in general. Thus Ed P. Sanders wrote: "Purity regulations were the most obvious and universally kept set of laws."<sup>1</sup> The origin of purity regulations is somewhat obscure<sup>2</sup> and need not detain us much longer except for the passing observation that purity regulations could be found not only in Judaism but also in many other cultures of the Middle East, and that they had no obvious hygienic or economic basis.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps of greater importance is the function of purity regulations to protect order and cohesion within social groups.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ed P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 214. For further references on purity see Werner G. Kümmel, "Äußere und innere Reinheit des Menschen bei Jesus," in *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (2 vols.; ed. E. Grässer and O. Merk; Marburger Theologische Studien 16; Marburg: Elwert, 1978), 2:117–29; Wilfried Paschen, *Rein und Unrein: Untersuchung zur biblischen Wortgeschichte* (SANT 24; München: Kösel, 1970); Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (SJLA; Leiden: Brill, 1973); John K. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980); Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (JSNTSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); Franz Mussner, *Die Kraft der Wurzel: Judentum – Jesus – Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), 93–103.

2. Both religious and sociological explanations are proffered, most of them coming down to a possible function of purity to protect from strongly perceived demonic powers. See, e.g., Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, 12; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991), 42–51.

3. Adrian Schenker, "Pureté – impureté," in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (ed. J.-Y. Lacoste; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 961–62: "L'exclusion d'animaux impurs des sacrifices et de la table est commune aux peuples du Proche-Orient ancien"; however, even though excluded species can vary, some, like pigs, are common to most of these cultures.

4. These observations go back to the comparative research of Mary Douglas, who observed purity regulations in various tribal cultures, and whose findings were subsequently adapted to the biblical purity systems. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); *ibid.*, *Natural Symbols Explora-*

The Jewish purity system was primarily a matter of Torah, mostly based upon legal material in Leviticus and Numbers. The classic reference is Lev 20:22–26. Canaanite behavior is revolting to God. He expels them from the land and gives it to his own people who are separated from the Canaanites. The Israelites now are to observe God's distinctions between pure and impure. To distinguish between pure and impure is to be holy as God is holy.

Consequently, the Law sets purity primarily into a cultic context. When someone, through mistake or happenstance, contracted impurity, he or she was not supposed to approach the sanctuary. Impurity erected a boundary between the place where holiness could be encountered, and the person touched by impurity. Within such a cultic reference frame, purity becomes an issue that first and foremost concerns Jewish temple worship. However, purity issues were not restricted to temple worship, but became increasingly important in Diaspora settings, even if in these contexts purity regulations underwent a curious mixture between allegorical and literal interpretation.<sup>5</sup> The decline of purity systems within Judaism of the rabbinic period may have one cause in the destruction of the temple.<sup>6</sup>

Cultic impurity is usually transmitted by touch, though not exclusively so. Sources of impurity are corpses, certain skin diseases, usually grouped under the term "leprosy," and different types of effluents like blood or genital discharges. Impurity can be removed through purification rites such as sacrifices and washing by immersion of the whole or parts of the body. Such rituals have to be performed within a defined time frame. Various types of impurities can be distinguished according to their severity, which in turn is measured by the difficulty in removing the impurity. Corpses are the source of the most serious impurity, but similarly the purification period of leprosy and menstruation is seven days. Lesser forms of impurity can be removed within a period of a day.<sup>7</sup> During the intertestamental period the concept of impurity was widened to include objects like food or vessels. Furthermore, the consumption of impure food has very serious

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*tions in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970). Douglas later revised her views at least partly, noting that the rules of defilement in Numbers and Leviticus probably do not serve to organize social categories. Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSup 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 152–57.

5. Thus Sanders, *Judaism*, 214, is quite wrong when he restricts most of the impurity rules to the temple. See Aharon Oppenheimer, *The Am Ha-Aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (ALGHJ 8; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 51–62. The *Letter of Aristeas* and Philo exhibit the strange mixture of allegorical interpretation of purity regulations mixed with the admonitions to keep them literally. For the relevant discussions of these texts see Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, 44–50.

6. Judaism after the tannaitic period seems to have lost interest in purity. Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakha: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (ConBNT 38; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2002), 6.

7. For a diagram of the various levels of impurity see *ibid.*, 5.

consequences beyond the usual rites of purification.<sup>8</sup> Thus Peter's exclamation οὐδέποτε ἔφαγον πᾶν κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον (Act 10:14) sounds like a credible concern with purity.<sup>9</sup>

A further source of impurity was sinful behavior (cf. Isa 1:16; Job 14:4; 15:14; Ps 51:7), sometimes also sins related to cultic actions.<sup>10</sup> Such impurity adds the notion of culpability of the impure person. And lastly, purity issues can be raised by genealogical questions.<sup>11</sup> This adds the notion of hereditary impurity, perhaps mirrored in the Johannine healing of the blind man through a rite of purification (John 9:2,6-7). Consequently, impurity as the boundary between a person and the sacred has a shifting relation to the notion of responsibility. While there are many forms of impurity that result from circumstances such as illness or disability, there are other forms of impurity that result directly from acts a person is responsible for. In such a system, impurity becomes an inescapable fact of life.

If purity was such a pervading concern in Second Temple Judaism, Jewish Christian writings would have to address this concern. They do so of course, but a look at the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle of James, and the Didache shows that these texts do so in quite distinctive ways that set them apart not only from one another, but also from many forms of Judaism known at the time.

## 1. MATTHEW AND PURITY

The Gospel of Matthew describes the purpose of Jesus's life and death in terms of the forgiveness of sins. Most clearly this happens in the annunciation of Jesus's birth to Joseph, when the angel appears to Joseph in a dream and declares about Jesus: αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (Matt

8. Schenker, "Pureté – impureté," 961, claims: "La consommation impure ne peut être purifiée." This would explain the acceptance of martyrdom over food controversies in 2 Macc 6-7; however, the issue there seems to go beyond mere impure food by referring to sacrificial meat.

9. Further evidence for the shifting concepts of purity and for an increasing restrictiveness is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See Hannah K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

10. Schenker, "Pureté – impureté," 962. Among such sins are necromancy (Lev 19:31) or worship of foreign gods (Hos 6:10; Jer 2:23). Sinfulness amounts to infidelity to God and can lead to impurity (Isa 65:4-6). It may well be asked whether such interlacing of purity issues with moral behavior finds its roots in a prophetic critique of the cult.

11. See Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Hayes' analysis suggests that behind genealogical issues of purity lies the idea that even though Gentiles are not intrinsically impure, since they have not entered the covenant, the mixture of Jewish and Gentile blood leads to impurity. Hence the offspring of such unions would be considered impure.

1:21). Matthew explains the meaning of the name Jesus in terms of salvation<sup>12</sup> and draws attention to it (γάρ) through a wordplay that becomes obvious only through the Hebrew language. It connects the name ישוע through the root שׁע with the Greek verb σφίξειν.<sup>13</sup> The careful construction of the angel's prophecy with three progressively weightier verbs in the future tense (τέξεται . . . καλέσεις . . . σώσει) and the fulfillment of the first two of these within the same pericope not only draws attention to the third verb but also heightens the expectation of the reader to its fulfillment. According to Matthew, the salvation offered through Jesus is the forgiveness of sins offered to the Jewish people.<sup>14</sup>

The forgiveness of sins is a christological prerogative. John the Baptist preaches repentance from sin as a way to prepare for the inevitable judgment (Matt 3:7–10), and indeed, people come to John and confess their sins (Matt 3:6). However, the purification rite John offers in his baptism<sup>15</sup> is not effective, and he knows so himself. His baptism is one of repentance, but it cannot wash away the sins. In Mark 1:4 John offers βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, but the Matthean John baptizes merely εἰς μετάνοιαν. It is going to be Jesus who will separate wheat from chaff by a baptism ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Matt 3:11–12). John's baptism is a warning against any easy expectations of salvation: neither confession nor a purifying baptism will achieve the forgiveness of sins that is the salvation offered by Jesus.

The Matthean description of how Jesus achieves his purpose of the forgiveness of sins is couched in language of purification at the Last Supper. Matthew prepares for this in several ways. First, there is the contextualization of the forgiveness of sins in the controversy with Jesus's opponents. In Matt 9:2–8 the authority and efficaciousness of Jesus's word of forgiveness to the paralytic are at stake. Both are proven, against the evil in the hearts of the opponents (Matt 9:4),

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12. For the connection between messianic hopes and hopes for salvation within Judaism see Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew* (WUNT 2/170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 69–73.

13. The wordplay seems to have been common enough with reference to Joshua. Philo (*Mut.* 121) knows of it even though his knowledge of Hebrew seems quite doubtful. See William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97), 1:210.

14. See Boris Repschinski, “‘For He Will Save His People from Their Sins’ (Matt 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews,” *CBQ* 68 (2006): 248–67.

15. Immersion as a purification rite is commonly known; see Lev 16:4, 24; 15; 1 QS III, 5–9; *Sib. Or.* 4.165; Josephus *Ant.* 18.117; *Life* 11 etc. See Gerhard Dellling, *Die Taufe im Neuen Testament* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1963). John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 49–53, suggests that John's baptism is less connected to purification rites for Jews since the baptism was a once-and-for-all event. Meier thinks that it might be more legitimately connected to the purification of Gentiles received into the Jewish faith. However, there is very little evidence to show that such a rite for the reception of Gentiles was common.

through the miraculous cure.<sup>16</sup> The story shows that Jesus takes up the prophecy of the angel already in his ministry.

A further step towards the purification at the Last Supper concerns Matthew's attitude to the temple<sup>17</sup> as it is exhibited in the Jerusalem narrative of the gospel. Jesus begins his stay in the temple of Jerusalem with the cleansing, or purification, of the temple, insisting that the dealers and money changers convert the temple from a house of prayer into a den of robbers (Matt 21:12–13). Then Matthew goes on to offer a vision of the temple as a house of prayer: the blind and lame are suddenly appearing in the temple, seemingly quite oblivious to the fact that as ritually impure people they do not belong there.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, children acclaim Jesus as the Son of David. When the chief priests and scribes protest at this, the Matthean Jesus offers the quotation of Ps 8:3 (LXX) to explain that the acclamation of the children is indeed God's way of preparing himself praise in the temple. If the money changers are representative of the temple as a den of robbers, Jesus shows how the temple can be the house of prayer intended by Isa 56:7. The opponents of Jesus align themselves with those who prefer the temple to be a den of robbers.

This particular point is brought home when Jesus, after the Jerusalem controversies and the discourse against Pharisees and scribes, finally leaves the temple. Matthew has Jesus end his discourse in the temple with a lament over Jerusalem and the temple. Part of the lament is the allusion to Jer 22:5 with the reference to the temple's desertion in Matt 23:38: ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος. Matthew mentions the opponents of Jesus twice in this short phrase, drawing attention to them as owners of the temple. He indicates that at the end of the Jerusalem controversies Jesus's vision of the temple has come to an end and is left to those who would make it a den of robbers. When immediately after the lament Jesus finally withdraws from the temple (Matt 24:1), God himself is leaving the temple.<sup>19</sup> Now it is truly deserted, and its destruction is its natural consequence. But this also means that the place where purity means most, and where lost purity can be restored, is no longer available.

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16. Both elements are redacted to show the continuing power in the Matthean community. See Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form, and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (FRLANT 189; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 63–75.

17. See Boris Repschinski, "Re-Imagining the Presence of God: The Temple and the Messiah in the Gospel of Matthew," *ABR* 54 (2006): 37–49.

18. See Lev 21:18 for the prohibition. It is possible that Matthew contrasts the Son of David with the original David who entered Jerusalem by killing the lame and the blind (2 Sam 5:6–8), as suggested by Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on . . . Matthew*, 3:140.

19. See Repschinski, "Re-Imagining the Presence of God," 44–47, for the argument, that the withdrawal of Jesus from the temple amounts to a withdrawal of God's presence.

Into this context Matthew places his view of the salvific death of Jesus offered in the narrative of the Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29). Jesus's blood is a symbol of the covenant, and it is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). A strong cultic subtext informs Matthew's formulation. The word ἐκχυννόμενον occurs not only in connection with a violent death, but also in the sacrificial context of the Passover sacrifice of the paschal lamb.<sup>20</sup> Poured-out blood is a constitutive element of sacrificial rites in the temple, and those sprinkled with it are cleansed and purified.<sup>21</sup> Together with the mention of the covenant, Matthew alludes to Exod 24:1–11, which contains all the elements necessary for a sacrificial ritual of purification. Furthermore, the rite of Exod 24 concludes with a meal celebrating the new covenant. Thus, the Last Supper is a creative *re-lecture* of Exod 24. The reenactment of Exod 24 happens at the trial and crucifixion of Jesus when his blood is indeed poured out and all the people cry for his blood to come upon them (Matt 27:25). In a highly ironic narrative, the purpose of Jesus to save his people from their sins comes to pass as the people call for his death by asking to be sprinkled with his blood.<sup>22</sup>

If this is so, then the consequences for the concept of purity in Matthew are dramatic. Purification from sinfulness is no longer achieved through sacrifices offered in the temple. The whole system of purification in the temple is replaced by Jesus himself. Matthew reworks the idea of purification in the sense of forgiveness of sins in the very traditional language of sacrifice and covenant into a very untraditional statement of christological impact. Whatever the temple had to offer is replaced by Jesus. Jesus himself is priest and victim in the sacrifice of purification that is his death, sealing the new covenant.<sup>23</sup> In his death, Jesus replaces the cult in the temple.

If the temple cult is replaced by Jesus, one might expect a reevaluation of cultic purity in terms of christology as well. Matthew does not disappoint. The first example illustrating Matthew's attitude to cultic purity can be encountered in the healing of the leper (Matt 8:1–4). Purity is a defining issue in the peri-

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20. See Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (2 vols.; HTKNT 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 2:402; Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on . . . Matthew*, 3:475; Repschinski, "A Christology for Christian Jews," 260–61.

21. For an overview of such rites consult Christian Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen* (WMANT 94; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 222–88.

22. See Timothy B. Cargal, "'His Blood be Upon Us and Our Children': A Matthean Double Entendre?" *NTS* 37 (1991): 101–12; D. Sullivan, "New Insights Into Matthew 27.24–5," *NBJ* 73 (1992): 453–57, and for an argument from the readers' perspective Repschinski, "A Christology for Christian Jews," 263.

23. Matthew exhibits here a striking resemblance to the theology of Hebrews. See Martin Hasitschka, "Matthew and Hebrews," in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries* (ed. B. Repschinski and D. Sim; London: Continuum, 2008), 87–103.

cope. The leper asks to be purified (καθαρίσαι), and Jesus commands him to be purified (καθαρίσθητι), with the result that the man is purified at once (εὐθέως ἐκαθαρίσθη). The triple reference to purity puts the touching act of Jesus into even starker relief. The whole story does not just tell a story concerning a healing miracle, but makes a statement of astonishing impact. Jesus touches the leper, who is not to be touched but instead supposed to cry “unclean, unclean!” (Lev 13:45). And the leper is rendered clean. In redacting his Markan source, Matthew states that the sacrifice prescribed by Moses is no longer about the issue of purity but merely εἰς μάρτυριον αὐτοῖς (Matt 8:4). The majority of commentators sees the command to the leper as a witness to the Torah-faithfulness of Jesus, directed at those in the temple.<sup>24</sup> However, this is not entirely convincing. Jesus counteracts conventions regarding purity, and the encounter with Jesus is what purifies, while the ritual in the temple merely serves as testimony. Thus, it is highly plausible to take the dative in its adversative meaning,<sup>25</sup> as testimony against those who practice ineffective rituals of purification in the temple.

Further evidence of Matthew’s christological approach to cultic purity is provided by Jesus’s ease of communicating with Gentiles like the centurion of Capernaum (Matt 8:5–13) or the possessed men of Gadara (Matt 8:28–34). Particularly the last instance is telling in the description of the men as living in tombs and consequently being very dangerous (Matt 8:28). The evil spirits themselves raise the christological stakes by calling Jesus the Son of God (Matt 8:29). Interestingly, the whole story is full of agitation, first of the men and their spirits, then of the pigs, then of the herdsmen and the citizens. In the midst of all this, Jesus remains the calm eye of the storm who just once speaks to give the extraordinarily brief exorcising command ὑπάγετε (Matt 8:32). In this sense it is much more a story of reaction to Jesus than it is a story about Jesus himself. It does not raise issues of purity explicitly, but this subtext is underlying much of the account. The upshot of this story is that evil spirits cannot withstand or challenge the Son of God. Fleeing from his presence, they have no other recourse than to throw themselves into what is unclean and destroy themselves.<sup>26</sup> Again it is in the person of Jesus where pure and impure separate.

A further example of Matthews approach to cultic purity is the controversy concerning the eating with unwashed hands and the ensuing instruction of crowds and disciples (Matt 15:1–20). The controversy proper (Matt 15:1–9) is

24. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1993–1996), 1:199.

25. Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Biblical Languages: Greek 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 98.

26. The text does not, as Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 228, and many other commentators with him suggest, imply that Jesus yields to the demons’ request to enter into the pigs. The Matthean ὑπάγετε (8:32) is a significant redactional change from the Markan καὶ ἐπέτρηνεν αὐτοῖς (Mark 5:13).

partly taken over from Mark 7:1–13, but heavily redacted.<sup>27</sup> Matthew shortens Mark's version considerably by omitting Mark's description of Jewish customs of purifications. Matthew presumes knowledge of these. Secondly, Matthew tightens the story's structure by creating three pairs of opposites: Pharisees and scribes are opposed to Jesus (Matt 15:2a.3a), the disciples transgressing the tradition of the elders oppose the Pharisees and scribes transgressing the commandments of God (Matt 15:2b.3b), and finally God's command opposes the disobedient Pharisees and scribes (Matt 15:4a.5a).<sup>28</sup> From the structure of the passage alone it becomes clear that Jesus, his disciples, and God all are on one side, while Pharisees and scribes are on the other side.

As the frontiers are clearly marked, Matthew keeps the issue of purity from debate with the opponents of Jesus. The Markan reference to κοιναῖς χερσίν (Mark 7:5) implying some degree of impurity<sup>29</sup> is replaced by οὐ νίπτονται (Matt 15:2). Matthew keeps the discussion of the opposition between the tradition of the elders and the commandments of God separate from a discussion of purity. This achieves a neat argument for Matthew, since he suddenly does not have to deal with a perceived contrast between purity and the Law as Mark's story still implies. For Matthew, God's Law (τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ) is not opposed to purity regulations, but to the misguided traditions of the opponents (τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν, Matt 15:3). Consequently, Matthew's concern with purity does not touch upon the washing of hands before dinner.

However, Matthew does not ignore the underlying purity issues altogether. In the teaching of the crowds he draws out the consequences with regard to purity of the just concluded controversy (Matt 15:10–11). Suddenly it becomes clear where Matthew sees the real function of a concept of purity. It does not concern eating, but whatever leaves a person's mouth. And in the ensuing instruction of the disciples what is coming out of a person's mouth is defined in ethical terms with sinful behavior that is closely related to the second table of the Decalogue (Matt 15:19).<sup>30</sup> The context for the strongly ethical approach is now mentioned

27. Repschinski, *Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew*, 154–63.

28. Daniel Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 216–17.

29. On κοινός and its implications of "impurity" see Walter Bauer *et al.*, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 553. Parallels for such a use include "impure": 1 Macc 1:62; Rev 21:27; Rom 14:14a; Acts 10:14; Heb 10:29; *Diogn.* 5.7b. That Matthew understood Mark's use of κοινός in terms of purity is amply evidenced by the ensuing instructions of crowds and disciples.

30. Die διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί are an introduction to a catalogue of vices all related to the Decalogue. See Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on . . . Matthew*, 2:536–37. They ask whether this might be for mnemonic or catechetical reasons. This is perhaps a possibility, but in view of the preceding controversy and the affirmation of the Law in his



five times in 15:11.18. 20 as the issue of purity. At the same time, this community instruction is put into the context of a very strong critique of the Pharisees.

Matthew seems to avoid the discussion of purity and impurity in the context of food or ablutions. In the controversy with the Pharisees he treats purity as a non-issue. On the other hand, within the community purity is quite obviously still a live issue where some sympathize with the Pharisaic position. Thus Matthew notes the way the disciples are taken aback at Jesus's strong criticism of the Pharisees (Matt 15:12). Matthew, however, gives purity a strongly ethical bend that is tied into Law observance. Yet again, Matthew does not take over Mark's clear statement that Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). This is explainable by Matthew's Law observance. If purity issues are a legal matter, then they cannot be discarded. If Matthew takes the Law as seriously as implied by 5:17–20, then the illicitness of some foods and the purity regulations remain a live issue. On the other hand, the strongly ethical interpretation of the concept of purity ties into Matthew's willingness to interpret the observance of the Law through the prophets<sup>31</sup> at the authority of Jesus.

Matthew's reason for this ethical orientation of purity appears in the story immediately following the discussions of purity around the controversy of eating with unwashed hands. The story of the Canaanite woman also occurs in Mark 7:24–30. But Matthew's changes are telling. Apart from making the woman a little more unlikable,<sup>32</sup> Matthew also inserts a short dialogue between Jesus and the disciples, thus establishing the story more firmly as a story about the community. The problem of Gentiles asking for access to the Jewish community was a matter of lengthy deliberations, as is suggested by the imperfect ἠρώτων in Matt 15:23. Jesus's answer to the disciples shows where the problem lies: Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24), yet here an annoying Gentile intrusion into this arrangement takes place, and the woman is not to be dissuaded from her intent of worshipping (προσεκύνει, Matt 15:25) Jesus.<sup>33</sup> By having just directed purity concerns into an ethical direction, her inclusion into

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Gospel it is more likely that Matthew's redactional synchronization of his list with the Decalogue has theological reasons.

31. See, e.g., Matt 5:17; 7:12; 9:13; 11:13; 12:7; 17:3; 22:40. Alexander Sand, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Evangeliums nach Matthäus* (Biblische Untersuchungen 11; Regensburg: Pustet, 1974); Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. D.R. Bauer and M. A. Powell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 179–96.

32. So noted by David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 223.

33. At this point one has to question Sim's assertion that none of the Gentiles really become disciples of Jesus. Whatever is meant by this expression, the Canaanite woman is a worshipper of Jesus. See Sim, *Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 223.

the group of believers becomes suddenly possible, albeit under severe restrictions: As in Mark, the simile of the bread for the dogs from the table of the children is used, with the woman not at all questioning the designation "dogs." However, Matthew changes her readiness to eat not, as in Mark, the crumbs of the children, but the crumbs from the table of the masters (τῶν κυρίων, Matt 15:27). It is the recognition of the masters that lets Jesus exclaim about the greatness of her faith. Matthew's redirection of purity concerns towards ethics makes table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles possible. It is, however, a table fellowship in which the Jews are clearly the masters. Quite ingeniously Matthew uses purity as a tool of inclusiveness for his community.

The look at the cycle of stories in Matt 8 and the discussion of Matt 15 show how much purity is still an issue of concern to the Matthean community. It seems that at least some in the community had sympathies for the Pharisaic approach to purity. However, Matthew goes another way: He links purity with ethical behavior and ties it in with law observance, so that purity, law observance, and a life according to the ethical norms expressed in the Decalogue and in the great commandments become synonymous to an extent that Matthew can express the final judgment in exclusively ethical terms (Matt 25:31–46). However, this reinterpretation is not arbitrary. It depends on the authority of Jesus whose death is the purifying sacrifice that brings salvation to his people. The Son of God whose blood is sprinkled on his people is the one deciding over purity and impurity.

## 2. JAMES AND PURITY

It has long been recognized that there are significant parallels between Matthew and James. Mostly these concern similarities in the teaching of Jesus as presented by the Sermon on the Mount and the teaching proposed in the Letter of James.<sup>34</sup> However, occasionally James is considerably closer to the Lukan parallel than to Matthew, and even where James and Matthew are close, neither wording nor order of the various sayings are identical. This leads to the conclusion that Matthew and James may share a common tradition, but not necessarily knowledge of each other.<sup>35</sup>

However, comparing the idea of purity in James and Matthew one quickly discovers that James has but a fleeting interest in the matter, if any at all. In Jas

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34. These are conveniently listed by Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 734–5. There are some possible parallels outside of the Sermon on the Mount: Massey H. Shepherd, "The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 75 (1956): 40–51.

35. This thesis is widely shared today. An example of its explication can be found in Patrick J. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (JSNTSup 47; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

1:27 there occurs a reference to θρησκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος,<sup>36</sup> which is quite odd considering that the concept of purity usually applies to persons, not, however, to religion. In 4:8 the command καθαρῖσατε χεῖρας is probably not meant literally since it parallels the command ἀγνῖσατε καρδίας. Apart from these instances, one might not even guess that James knew anything about purity at all. And so it does not come as a surprise that some authors suggest that even in these instances, James does not really have traditional purity concerns in view.<sup>37</sup>

But such a solution seems unlikely. Even if in Jas 1:27 καθαρὰ would not suggest a cultic context or background, θρησκεία most certainly does so.<sup>38</sup> If this is so, then it is highly unlikely that the Epistle does not want to suggest traditional notions of purity. Similarly, in Jas 4:8 the command to purify one's hands stands in such close connection to the issue of drawing near to God that it is hard not to assume at least some subtext of purity. The parallel with the command to sanctify the hearts deepens this impression.

Granted that James does allude to traditional Jewish purity issues at least twice, the question of their weight and direction remains. James's purpose and train of thought are notoriously difficult to discern, particularly with regard to Jas 1.<sup>39</sup> However, the careful chainlinking<sup>40</sup> of the whole of Jas 1 through catchwords suggests that the author saw the seemingly disparate material as somehow connected.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is also striking how the material found in Jas 1 returns in variations throughout the letter. Among these are the themes of overcoming temptations (1:2–4, 12; 5:7–11), the pleading in faith (1:5–8; 4:3; 5:13–18), the reversal of rich and poor (1:9–11; 2:1–7; 4:13–5:6), the contrast between evil desires and grace (1:13–18; 3:13–4:10), the warnings against the misuse of the tongue (1:19–20; 3:1–12), and the doing of the Word (1:22–27; 2:14–26).<sup>42</sup> Apart from the thematic material, figures of speech in Jas 1 also return throughout

36. The LXX uses the verb μιαινω occasionally to denote that someone or something is rendered impure: Lev 5:3; 11:24; 18:24; Num 5:3; Deut 21:23. The expression ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν in the same verse is also regularly associated with ritual purity.

37. As an example of such a view see Franz Schnider, *Der Jakobusbrief* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1987), 53, 103.

38. See LSJ 806; Bauer *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 459.

39. Thus François Vouga, *L'épître de Saint Jacques* (CNT 2/13a; Genève: Labor et Fides, 1984), 66, complains with regard to Jas 1: "Les moments de la parénèse ne se suivent pas un ordre immédiatement évident." See also Luke T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 174.

40. For the detailed analysis of the links through keywords see *ibid.*, 174.

41. Attempts to divide off Jas 1:2–18 as a rhetorical *exordium* are unsuccessful because of the internal links of the whole chapter, but also because 1:19–27 remains an unaccounted for fragment. For such an attempt see Hubert Frankemölle, "Das semantische Netz des Jakobusbriefes: Zur Einheit eines umstrittenen Briefes," *BZ* 34 (1990): 175–93.

42. Johnson, *Letter of James*, 175.

the letter. The most obvious of these is the use of contrasts.<sup>43</sup> Thus the chapter is arguably a unit that works to establish topics and figures of speech for the remainder of the Epistle. James 1 functions as an exposition to the whole work.

One further feature that gives cohesion to Jas 1 is the use of metaphors. These are *ἔοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης* (1:6), *ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου* (1:10–11), *ἔοικεν ἀνδρὶ κατανοοῦντι τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ* (1:23–24). All three of these metaphors are negative, and all three function as a warning against something that might go wrong with the members of the community. After the greeting in Jas 1:1, the first thing that can go wrong is the lack of patience in temptation. Patience is a work of faith, and in faith can ask God for gifts (Jas 1:5,7). Lacking faith, a person is like an ocean wave, fickle in its ways (1:6–8). The second thing that can go wrong is the reliance on earthly goods. Thus Jas 1:10–11 warns rich people with the image of a flower wilting in the heat of the sun. Against the lack of patience and the reliance on riches the author sets the grace of a God who gives *πάσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον* (Jas 1:17). The gifts of God are amply proven by a reference to the creation (*κτίσις*) in which God gives birth to the believer (1:18). The fickleness of the ocean wave and the heat of the sun are contrasted with the God as the father of light who is without variation or change of shadow (1:17).<sup>44</sup>

The next section admonishes the readers to become doers of the Word planted within them (Jas 1:19–25). The metaphor contained in this section speaks of a person looking at his face *τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ* in a mirror (Jas 1:23). The reference to *γένεσις* is of double importance. On the one hand, it probably refers to a person's birth, on the other hand it evokes creation as well and as such is a throwback to Jas 1:18 and the gifts of God. The mirror is like the changeable ocean wave and the wilting flower: once seen one forgets immediately what one has seen. Only the look into the perfect law of freedom that does the Word will not forget (Jas 1:25).<sup>45</sup> Thus the section is intimately connected to the preceding material.

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43. Timothy B. Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora: Discursive Structure and Purpose in the Epistle of James* (SBLDS 144; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 56–105, argues that “polar opposites” working throughout James are established in chapter 1.

44. The obvious connection of 1:17 to the two preceding images does not put to question the often proposed interpretation of *παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα* as *termini technici* of astrological phenomena. For a discussion of such possibilities see Vouga, *Jacques*, 57–58. A little more cautious, also in view of the significant textual variants, is Johnson, *Letter of James*, 196–97.

45. The confusion this metaphor creates among commentators is simply astonishing. Ralph P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1988), 49, translates Jas 1:23 as “the face that nature gave him” and misses the point; it is precisely not the face that nature gave the person, but that God gave the person as one of his good gifts. Similarly Johnson, *Letter of James*, 207, 214, argues that the mirror remains the same, but what one sees in the mirror shifts

The following two verses (Jas 1:26–27) conclude the section by drawing its suggestions together. Again James alludes to those that merely hear the Word and do not do it, thus showing themselves to be changeable waves, wilting flowers, or forgetful mirror watchers. But this time, he puts this kind of behavior into the context of worship. James now contrasts the worthless worship of the hearers with the pure and unblemished worship of the doers. Thus what the whole chapter has been leading up to is now made explicit. At the heart of the metaphors used in Jas 1 is the exhortation to a worship what is pure and undefiled and that renders a person undefiled as well.

The astonishing feature of James is, however, that the idea of pure worship is not a mere cultic procedure of ablutions, or even faithfulness to the Law. Purity of worship is achieved in acts of charity to widows and orphans. Charity is circumscribed with the word ἐπισκέπτεσθαι. In LXX usage this word refers almost exclusively to God visiting or saving his people. Widows and orphans are the “classic recipients”<sup>46</sup> of God’s and Israel’s care and take up the theme of the reversal of rich and poor alluded to in Jas 1:9–11. Thus the assistance of the needy becomes the singular way of achieving a worship that fulfills the demands of purity. James replaces rites of purification with ethical demands and puts them into the context of ritual purity.

A similar use of the purity imagery can be noted with regard to 4:8. Firstly, James puts purity into the context of approaching God, who in turn himself approaches humans. Thus the context is cultic at least in its overtones.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the purification of hands and the sanctification of hearts<sup>48</sup> are constructed in parallelism and, consequently, are meant to signify the same fact. The reference to double mindedness (διψυχοι) creates the bridge back to Jas 1:8.

If the readers of Jas 4:8 are exhorted to purify hands and sanctify hearts, the context of Jas 4:1–10 gives a glimpse of why purification is necessary. In 4:1–3 James speaks of wars and conflicts in the community that have their roots in desires and lead to murder and envy.<sup>49</sup> Obviously James uses the words in

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from the face to the perfect law. The confusion has its origin in the misinterpretation of the parable, where both equate the natural face with the face presented by the perfect law of 1:19. However, the metaphor does not run this way. It compares not what one sees, but it compares the instrument that makes one see: κατανοοῦντι . . . ἐν ἑσπέρῳ (1:23) and παρακύμας εἰς νόμον (1:25).

46. See Johnson, *Letter of James*, 212, with references.

47. Johnson, *Letter of James*, 284; differently Schnider, *Jakobusbrief*, 103, who sees a prophetic as opposed to a cultic tradition behind Jas 4:8.

48. Both words used here occur frequently in reference to cultic purity. For ἀγνίζειν see Exod 19:10; Num 8:21; 19:12; 31:23.

49. On the connections of this imagery with the Jewish Two Ways tradition see Huub van de Sandt, “James 4,1–4 in the Light of the Jewish Two Ways Tradition 3,1–6,” *Bib* 88 (2007): 38–63.

exaggeration. But if war and murder are exaggerations, they highlight the problems behind them. In 4:4–6 it becomes obvious that the war is one that involves friendship with the world and friendship with God as polar opposites. Only one of them can be chosen, and James's call to purification and sanctification is a call to choose friendship with God over friendship with the world. To be purified and to be sanctified means that one is no longer δῖψυχος, that one has taken the necessary decision to end war and conflict, the decision for friendship with God. This decision finally involves the self-humiliation before God in order to be raised by him.

In order to fill the rather abstract concept of friendship with the world with content, several solutions have been proposed.<sup>50</sup> But quite apart from the particular meaning given to φονεύετε or μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε (Jas 4:2) and φιλία τοῦ κόσμου (Jas 4:4), the words evoke the world of ethics. Thus the call to purification of hands and sanctification of hearts call for a decision to be made between particular behavior towards others that James sees as springing from desires, and the behavior towards God that consists of weeping and mourning and humiliation but will finally lead to exaltation by God. The language of reversal<sup>51</sup> puts perspective on the wars and conflicts arising out of desires. It is reasonable to assume that with the reversal before God the reversal of the behavior among the community members is in view, where the lust for possessions gives way to humility before one another.

Again in this short allusion in Jas 4:8 it becomes clear that James is interested in the concept of purity and willing to use it as long as it illuminates the moral standards of behavior concerned with social justice. If in Jas 1 the traditional biblical appeal to widows and orphans highlights the demands of purity, here it is the war between the haves and have-nots. However, in and of itself, purity is not a concern to James.

### 3. THE DIDACHE AND PURITY

While the Didache may indeed be a document reflecting a Jewish Christian orientation,<sup>52</sup> it also exhibits compromises made when accommodating Gentiles

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50. Martin, *James*, 143–44, suggests misguided faith. Johnson, *Letter of James*, 286–87, amplifies this with suggestions of a background in Jewish Wisdom literature and Hellenistic literature and suggests that a double moral standard is at issue, one for dealing with God and another for dealing with people. Matthias Konradt, *Christliche Existenz nach dem Jakobusbrief: Eine Studie zu seiner soteriologischen und ethischen Konzeption* (SUNT 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 125–35, sees the issue of rich and poor in the background.

51. Johnson, *Letter of James*, 286.

52. For the state of research, see Jonathan A. Draper, "The Apostolic Fathers: The Didache," *ExpTim* 117 (2006): 177–81. For the minority opinion that the Didache is a cohesive and complete early Jewish Christian document see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope,*

into the group (Did. 1:1). Such compromises are little known to Matthew.<sup>53</sup> Most clearly this appears when Didache treats the concept of purity. The first instance of teaching that may be related to purity occurs at the end of the teaching on the Two Ways with a reference to ὄλον τὸν ζυγὸν τοῦ κυρίου and τὴς βρώσεως (6:2,3).<sup>54</sup> Occasionally it has been speculated that this is a Jewish appendix. Consequently, the yoke would refer to the Jewish Law.<sup>55</sup> Even though this might fit well with the following reference to the food regulations, the context suggests much more a reference to the teaching of Jesus as explicated in the preceding chapters.<sup>56</sup> But if the yoke as the Law of Christ is paired with reference to food regulations, the author also suggests that the community under Law of Christ is still observing some form of food regulations, even if, as Did. 6:3 suggests, compromises are necessary.

But the reference to compromises is a telling one, because it shifts the focus to a considerable extent. If the Jewish purity system was to ensure the correct worship, the Didache emphasizes the believers and their ability or inability to keep these rules. The emphasis on purity is not to ensure proper worship, but to encourage moral behavior among the believers. But the cultic connection is not entirely lost. The severe prohibition of the εἰδωλόθυτα is legitimized with reference to λατρεία of dead deities. For the author of the Didache, purity, like the teaching of the Two Ways, is a desirable idea in order to reach perfection, but in the end the author gives in to the realities of his community and suggests an observation of both *iuxta modum*. Similar advice can be found in the baptismal instruction to use living water (7:1–3).

Thus purity in the Didache is an issue related to the practical life within the community. The only place where purity is explicitly mentioned clarifies this further. When the Didache speaks about how to achieve the necessary purity to celebrate the Eucharist (Did. 14), it speaks about the confession of sins (τὰ παραπτώματα), taking up the teaching of the Two Ways (Did. 4:14), as a pre-

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☞ *Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50 – 70 C. E.* (New York: Newman Press, 2003); for more general arguments concerning the Jewish background of the Didache see Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (CRINT 3/5; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002), and the various essays in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (ed. H. van de Sandt; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005).

53. See Boris Repschinski, “Matthew and Luke,” in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries* (ed. B. Repschinski and D. Sim; London: Continuum, 2008), 50–65.

54. Kurt Niederwimmer, *Die Didache* (2nd ed.; Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 153, speaks of the “interpretatorischen und ergänzenden Charakter” of this appendix to the Two Ways teaching.

55. Alfred Stuiber, “Das ganze Joch des Herrn’ (Didache 6,2–3),” *StPatr* 4 (1961): 323–39.

56. See Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 155–56. A similar use of ζυγός is found in Matt 11:29.

requisite to guarantee the purity of the θυσία.<sup>57</sup> These sins are being explicated further as ἀμφιβολίαν μετὰ τοῦ ἑταίρου (Did. 14:2). Very concrete quarrels<sup>58</sup> within the community are the things that will render a Sunday sacrifice unclean (κοινωθῆ). In order to legitimize such a demand for purity the Didache finally quotes Mal 1:11.14, a fitting conclusion to an argument on purity that is concerned with θυσίαν καθαρὰν (Did. 14:3).

Yet as much as Did. 14 may be concerned with purity, it merely repeats the argument already made in Did. 10:6 about the restrictions concerning access to the Eucharist. There Didache stated: εἴ τις ἅγιός ἐστιν, ἐρχέσθω· εἴ τις οὐκ ἔστι, μετανοεῖτω. Again access to the Eucharist is under discussion, and again it is restricted to those who are in need of conversion, presumably because of sins that need redressing.<sup>59</sup> However, here the purity of the Eucharist is not mentioned, although purity concerns seem at the back of the argument in Did. 10:6 as well. Instead, the focus rests on the holiness of those having access to it.

Quite similar to Matthew, Didache takes up purity concerns and interprets them ethically. However, quite distinct from Matthew, the purity teaching in Didache concerns the community and its celebration of its liturgies. Its direction is inward. Therefore, purity becomes an issue of separation of those who are worthy from those who are not. While Matthew ingeniously uses purity to guarantee the inclusiveness of his community, Didache emphasizes the exclusivity of its liturgical celebrations.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The three texts under consideration all deal to some extent with purity. With Matthew the attention to the concept of purity is certainly greatest, and it also yields the greatest theological value. To conceive of purity in terms of christology and to declare Jesus the final and definitive sacrifice that purifies the believers is a great theological achievement. Apart from Matthew only Hebrews makes this leap in the New Testament. The consequence for the believer in Matthew's Christ is far reaching. Even though Matthew never quite says so explicitly, implicitly the whole system of purity comes to an end in Jesus. If Jesus through his death purifies the believer, there is no need for further purifications or indeed food

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57. For our investigation, the question of whether θυσία refers to the breaking of the bread or to the eucharistic prayer is negligible. It is questionable whether the author would have intended such a fine distinction; see Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 237. The concepts of purity and of sacrifice are closely related, and thus the one may have provoked the other.

58. The lexical meaning of ἀμφιβολία as "being beleaguered from two sides" does not quite fit either context or use in connection with ἔχειν . . . μετὰ. Thus "quarrel" seems to make the most sense; LSJ, 90; Bauer *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 55.

59. The demand for holiness seems an additional condition quite apart from the baptism mentioned in Did. 9:5.



laws. Matthew makes this point by his treatment of the earthly Jesus approaching people of varying degrees of impurity. The concept of purity is harnessed into showing how Jesus is indeed the Son of God and Messiah for a Jewish community that is ready to include Gentiles among its group.

James and Didache show less interest in the issue of purity. This may be due in part to their greater dialogue with Gentile converts within their respective communities. Purity is no longer stringently argued as a theological *topos* but becomes one of many metaphors to illustrate the right behavior in the community. What renders pure is almost entirely related to people's ethical behavior. Furthermore, when Didache speaks about purity it does not speak about people but worship. The moral behavior affects the quality of worship, and consequently immoral behavior has to be kept apart from worship. The sacrifice does not purify the believer, but the believer can render the sacrifice unclean, a belief that is popular even in today's churches.

If all three writings under discussion deal with the issue of purity, Matthew is perhaps the closest to the Jewish traditions of purity. However, there is no denying that in the last consequence, all three writings break with the traditions as well, Matthew by reinterpreting them considerably, James and Didache by mostly ignoring them. Of course one may ask why purity could be so easily dispensed with even in texts much closer to Jewish traditions than Mark's Gospel, to name but one. One reason may well be the destruction of the temple and the concomitant disappearance of many of the rituals legitimizing cultic purity. But there may be another reason for this as well, and it has to do with christology.

A belief in an earthly Jesus who touches and heals sick people, lepers, sinners, and generally unclean people, calls purity concerns into question. If this earthly Jesus is subsequently put to death but believed to have been raised by God, then even the most serious cultic impurity loses its persuasiveness. If the greatest challenge to cultic purity is the contact with a corpse, then the belief in a bodily resurrection puts not just death into question, but also severely relativizes any questions of purity associated with death and corpses. It seems to be the very nature of resurrection faith to delegitimize any notions of cultic purity. Matthew, I think, has sensed this to some extent. Consequently, he tried to save purity for coming generations in connecting it with the death of Jesus as a saving and purifying sacrifice. Others, like James and the Didache, relegate the concept of purity to a metaphor qualifying certain behavior, or just do away with it completely.