

### ***Understanding of Israelite Cult in Ps 51 – Contrite Hearts over Fried Bulls?***

Along with several other OT texts, Ps 51 has often been labeled as cult-critical or even anti-cultic. This understanding is the main reason behind scholarly consensus that the last two verses of the Psalm (vv. 20-21 in BHS) are a later addition, probably an attempt of an editor to balance the harsh criticism of cult in the previous verses (vv. 18-19 in particular). The present paper challenges this consensus. Its argument is cumulative, drawing support mainly from two areas – first the conception of cult in the OT, second the text of Ps 51 with the variety of its interpretations. In the first area, the paper argues that the main purpose of the OT cult and sacrifices in particular was not to get rid of or to make up for sins and iniquities, but to have fellowship with God. Of course, sin and all the uncleanness had to be dealt with before the fellowship with holy God could be enjoyed, but no ritual could cover for premeditated murder or adultery – the sins implied by the presupposed historical context of Ps 51. In the second area, the paper argues that the author of the text of Ps 51 seems to share this understanding of the OT cult. Using a cultic language and mechanisms (which also demonstrates a favorable attitude of the author towards the cult), the Psalmist cries for mercy, forgiveness, and renewal not instead of bringing sacrifices, but so that he could bring them, e.g. have fellowship with God.