CROSSING BORDERS
THE KEDUSHA AND THE SANCTUS: A CASE STUDY OF
THE CONVERGENCE OF JEWISH
AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times there has been much talk of a ‘religious revival’. What is meant by this is that following an extended, involuntary absence, religion is once again back in the media. Although it is not that long ago since some in the West believed that the issue of religion would in time disappear of its own accord, religion is increasingly making headline news again as a result of fundamentalist currents and political and military developments around the world. Admittedly, this reawakening of interest is motivated less by the essence of religion itself and more by sensationalism and the desire to play with people’s fear of the irrational. However, it cannot be denied that the rediscovery of the ritual in many western societies is widespread. In view of the increasing complexity of human life and humankind’s estrangement from institutions that contribute to a sense of identity, the organising and healing power of the ritual is being recognised, valued, and commercially exploited by many parties. But there is so much more to religion than this. Its rituals target the totality of mankind and the world. This applies in particular to the dimension of lending meaning to life through retrospection, recollection, and orientation towards what is yet to come in both verbal and non-verbal rituals that are conducted in a community setting. This dimension, which is inherent in both the Jewish and Christian faiths, is not a feature of many other world religions. In this respect, one can really only speak of a liturgy, in the truest sense of the word, with regard to these two religions (cf. Gerhards 2001, 25–44). However, Judaism and (western) Christianity have a long tradition of enlightenment, which also plays a role in shaping their respective philosophy of religion and theology. Moreover, these two religions generally find themselves in an environment that is
increasingly shaped by atheism. This in turn leads to counter-currents in both religions that seek their salvation in a rejection of all forms of dialogue by completely cutting themselves off from the ‘world’. Such trends are also evident within Christian ecumenism and it is possible that they will also put a strain on the dialogue between Jews and Christians. In order to counteract this development, interest in getting to know not only one’s own tradition, but also the traditions of other denominations should be fostered at all levels. In other words, it is first and foremost a question of understanding another tradition—not only another tradition within one’s own Christian or Jewish community, but another tradition in the biblical religion to which one does not oneself belong (Gerhards 2003, 183–211 esp. 202f).

The focus here is not, however, on the question of the dialogue of the religions, which, by implication, always plays a role. It is instead a matter of how liturgical studies can help us better understand the interrelations or non-existent relations between the religions, i.e. it is a matter of conducting an appropriate comparative exploration of the liturgical traditions of Judaism and Christianity. In this regard, both Jews and Christians alike naturally assume a degree of presuppositional knowledge, a fact of which one must be aware. It is only on the basis of the hermeneutics of another liturgy (cf. Lurz 1999, 273–290) that one can academically address the question of comparable dimensions or even transitions. Recent studies of sources have rendered rash judgements about dependencies, parallels, and identities obsolete (cf. Leonhard 2006). On the other hand, the close study of the relevant texts and their literary, cultural, and historical contexts throws up new questions that might help make the nature of liturgical activities and the relevance of their exploration plausible outside the small circle of specialists and enthusiasts.

The intention is to illustrate this point using an example from Christian liturgy, namely the Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer, which is taken from Isa 6:3. Although no new findings are to be expected, it is hoped that this illustration will raise some new issues for discussion.