

- **Deuteronomy: Torah for the Church of Christ**
- ***Das Deuteronomium: Eine Thora für die Kirche Christi***
- ***Le Deutéronome, Torah pour l'Église de Jésus-Christ***
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RÉSUMÉ

Le Deutéronome, loin d'être seulement la loi de l'Israël ancien, peut affecter la vie des générations toujours nouvelles. Ceci découle de sa structure fondamentale qui transforme le discours de Moïse en parole écrite et qui présente le passage de Horeb à Moab comme le symbole de la réitération de la parole de génération en génération. L'enseignement mosaïque et le langage de la persuasion utilisé dans le Deutéronome trouvent leur fonction dans ces transitions.

Le message du livre est avant tout celui d'une promesse. Il est articulé autour de la promesse faite à Abraham et il peut être compris comme un récit

relatant comment le peuple progresse, depuis le pays de l'esclavage, via Horeb et Moab, jusqu'à l'installation dans le pays promis pour y vivre le culte «devant le Seigneur», au lieu qu'il choisira pour y faire résider son nom. Cependant, les manquements du peuple posent un problème dès le début (9.4–7). Pourtant, même ce problème se trouve surmonté en vertu de la promesse, qui est finalement semblable à celle de la nouvelle alliance (30.1–10).

Bien que le Deutéronome affirme la nécessité de la grâce divine, il fonctionne, d'un point de vue rhétorique, comme instruction et exhortation. Le code de loi et l'exhortation demeurent centraux. En tant que «Torah», le Deutéronome a pour but de former et d'édifier une communauté vivant dans la foi et la droiture et offrant par là au monde un témoignage concernant la nature du Royaume de Dieu.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Deuteronomium, weit davon entfernt, lediglich 'Gesetz' für das alte Israel zu sein, ist durchaus dazu in der Lage, das Leben immer neuer Generationen zu beeinflussen. Dies wird durch die grundlegende Struktur des Buches ermöglicht, in der die Reden des Mose zum schriftlichen Wort werden, und in welcher der Abschnitt vom Horeb bis nach Moab die jeweilige Bestätigung der Gültigkeit dieses Wortes von Generation zu Generation veranschaulicht. Sowohl die Lehre des Mose als auch die deuteronomische Sprache der Persuasion entfalten ihre

Wirkung in diesen Generationswechseln.

Die Botschaft des Buches besteht vor allem in einer Verheißung. Diese wird unter Rückbezug auf die an Abraham ergangene Verheißung entworfen, wobei das Buch als eine Erzählung betrachtet werden kann, welche die fortschreitende Entwicklung des Volkes schildert: d.h. vom Auszug aus dem Land der Versklavung über den Horeb und Moab zur Inbesitznahme des Landes und einem Leben der Anbetung 'vor dem Herrn' an dem Ort, den er für seinen Namen erwählen wird. Doch das Versagen des Volkes stellt von Anfang an eine Schwierigkeit dar (9,4–7), die aber von der Verheißung, die letztlich dem neuen Bund

vergleichbar ist, überwunden wird (30, 1–10).

Obwohl das Buch die grundlegende Notwendigkeit der Gnade Gottes betont, fungiert es doch aus rhetorischer Sicht als Anweisung und Ermahnung. Der Gesetzeskodex und die Ermahnung sind

die zentralen Elemente. Als 'Thora' hat das Deuteronomium die Rolle, eine Gemeinschaft des Glaubens und der Gerechtigkeit zu formen und aufzubauen, die der Welt Zeugnis ablegen soll von der Beschaffenheit des Königreichs Gottes.

I. The Word 'Dwelling Richly'

The title chosen may surprise some of us Pauline Christians, for whom the term 'Torah' may be too 'Jewish'. Yet 'Torah' is a biblical term, though it has got a bit lost in our uncertainty about what to do with the Old Testament. It is quite close to 'word', with all its positive connotations of prophetic warning, exhortation, instruction, growth. But there is a nuance in 'Torah' that I think we should not lose. It expresses a concern that God's people should have his mind, and that this should affect and shape all of their lives. That is what lies behind our choice of topic.

And for 'Torah', Deuteronomy is the primary text, the book of the law of God *par excellence*. Repeating the Ten Commandments (5:6–21), it follows them with six chapters of exhortation to obedience to God's covenant, then a law code (chs. 12–26) that develops the requirements there. Some recent study has seen the book as structured almost entirely around the Decalogue, the laws in 12–26 sequenced according to the order of those primary commandments.¹ The purpose is to create a covenant community, in harmony with God, and its members with each other. Torah is the word of God that aims to make his people perfect.

Torah, therefore (to anticipate), is a word of grace—as was the creative word itself. It is given to a people brought from slavery, and led through the wilderness, as they stand on the brink of entering their land, a new sphere of freedom in the service of Yahweh. It is a word of blessing, and life, a word that creates the community of faith. So this is not 'the letter that kills' (that is a misunderstanding of Torah). We are concerned instead with the word of the LORD living, and making alive, in the community he has made his

own. The Torah is for the Church of Christ, so that it might be perfect, and (through Christ, in the power of the Spirit) manifest the character of God to the world.

The Torah and the Story-Frame

The concept of Torah is distributed widely in Deuteronomy, initially at 1:5, then throughout ch. 4 (the greatest 'word' chapter in the OT), and importantly in chs. 27, 28, 29, 31. These chapters fall at or around beginnings and endings in the book, where Deuteronomy tells us what it fundamentally is. The theme of Torah falls into a storyline that may be expressed as follows. The Torah is given at Horeb (chs. 4; 5), mediated by Moses at Moab (1:5; 29:1[28:69]), written on stones on Mt. Ebal, close to Shechem (27:3, 8), at the heart of a covenant ceremony (27:9b); then written in a book (28:58), to be regularly read in a gathering to worship (31:9–13), and thus to all generations (29:14–15: 'not only with you who stand here with us today before the LORD our God, but also with those who are not here with us today'; cf. other 'children' texts, 4:40; 6:7–9).

There are two important processes, or developments, in that brief account. First, there is a development from Moses' *speech*—unique, once for all—to a *written word*. And second, there is a development from Moses' generation to all generations. The key is the transition from *Horeb* to *Moab*. This transition is at the heart of both those developments (i.e. the generational and the communicative). It is of the greatest significance for the biblical idea of Word. Through 'Moab', generations after Moses, down to modern readers of Deuteronomy, are in touch with the Horeb event, when God addressed human beings on earth, by

means of the spoken word. God's speech, from particular times and places, comes still into the lives and meeting-places of worshippers today. The word of God is in principle unlimited; it can go forth and keep going forth from that time/this time and for evermore.

This structure of Deuteronomy establishes the priority of the divine word, in principle, for all times and places. Its coming at Horeb implies a 'givenness' about the word. The point has a reference to the modern hermeneutical debate, which tends to relativize the 'word' in favour of 'situation'. I do not intend to enter that debate here, but only to maintain the once-for-all character of God's 'speech' to Israel: God spoke into a time and a place, so that he might speak to all in their times and places. And as his speech came once in contention with other claims upon the hearts and minds of Israel (the 'other gods' of Canaan), it does so still, in contention with all such claims on the allegiance of human beings.

The coming of God's Torah to all by means of its coming once to Israel may be explained further by reference to the following four elements in the teaching of Deuteronomy.

i. *The Horeb event made alive in the word*

The fabric of the book consists in speeches of Moses. This omnipresent act of speaking is specified as 'teaching' (4:1 [*lmd*]). And this is conceived in turn as forging a connection between Horeb and the 'present'. Moses is by no means incidental in the story unfolded in Deuteronomy, but crucially accepts the key role of mediator between God and Israel, a role that is necessitated because the people cannot bear the immediate presence of God (5:23–27). This mediation, however, is not a once-for-all act, confined to that historical moment. Rather, it establishes a pattern which Deuteronomy seeks to provide for throughout the anticipated future of Israel. One element in this provision is the office of prophet, in which (alone among the functions which he assumes) he is to be succeeded (18:15–22). That office is complemented by the system of law-

administration first put in place by himself (1:9–18), and also provided for in the community after it came to the land (16:18–17:20). The purpose of these arrangements is that there should always be a means by which the word is present and effective in the believing community. This amounts to a mandate, therefore, for a 'ministry of the word', that is, receptive, understanding, re-expressing the covenantal call to faithfulness for now, 'today'!

The Language of Persuasion

There is a close connection between the theology and the rhetoric or style of the book. Deuteronomy's repetitious style is well-known, especially in the realm of exhortation to obedience. It has a rich vocabulary in this area, its 'laws, statutes, ordinances' (e.g. 4:1, 5, 8) appearing ubiquitously in its exhortation (or paranesis, to use a word almost exclusively applied to this book). Its repetitions reach also into other areas, and are a first rough guide to the things of greatest importance in its theology (cf. e.g. 'the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess'; 'the place the LORD your God will choose to put his name there'; 'purge the evil from your midst'; and see the long list in Driver²).

This 'wordiness' has made Deuteronomy the butt of sneers; but it is the essence of it, and it is profound. Deuteronomy knows the power of speech itself (as has many a demagogue, for good or ill). W. Brueggemann says of the power of deuteronomic speech (for example 6:6–9, cf. Ps 78), that it 'recruits persons into this community and into its faith . . . by a pedagogy of saturation'.³ This points to two distinct audiences, both inside and outside the community. There is a missionary slant in that 'recruiting persons' that knows that the language of faith has a power in the world, however much it may be scorned, and thought to have been tried and found wanting. 'Post-Christian' Europe has still to hear the discourse of faith, and the Church's task is to use it as if it had burst fresh upon the world.

As there is a missionary slant in the

language of Deuteronomy, so there is a pedagogical slant. The language also addresses 'insiders'. How is it that the same word finds targets inside the community as well as outside it? It is because the saturating, penetrating word knows the human heart. There is no final hearing of the language of faith. Deuteronomy knows the moral dimension of hearing, which, indeed, shades over into obeying. This is why it portrays the past failures of the people and exhorts them repeatedly to 'be careful' (literally 'guard yourself', 4:9) to keep the commandments. This most typical deuteronomistic phrase suggests a need for self-control in the attempt to remain faithful to Yahweh. Closely related is the command not to 'forget' (4:9). Memory, also a moral quality, is a dominant theme. The key 'memory' text is Deut. 8. Here, Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their establishment in the promised land are considered as accomplished. But the fulfilment of the promise brings, almost inevitably, a great moral danger, the danger that the people, now safe, might feel self-sufficient: '*I did it all myself!*' (8:17). Indeed Deuteronomy has this knowledge of human moral weakness at its heart; the word of the covenant is given to a people that cannot keep it, as is expressed clearly in 9:4–6, and in the Golden Calf narrative generally (9:8–10:11). Even so, the word comes precisely to these.

This is the context of the theme of the need to teach the next generation (4:9, 40). The theme has its best known development in 6:7–9, where the activity of teaching is pictured as pervading all of life. The passage is potentially perplexing in a book that leans so heavily on the need for obedience from the heart, which actually gains its strongest expression in the immediately preceding verses (6:4–6). Does Deuteronomy favour a kind of externalism after all, with its signs on hand and forehead, and its *mezuzoth* on doorposts? In fact the juxtaposition of these two passages (6:4–6, 7–9) demonstrates that 'word' and 'heart' are not at odds; knowledge of God in the heart is fostered by the teaching and learning of the

word (cf. 30:14). Furthermore, Deuteronomy knows no radical distinction between 'internal' and 'external': loving God 'from the heart' means teaching, regularly, formally, insistently. The human heart, even when 'born again', needs to be trained, encouraged, cajoled—*reminded*. Preaching is often not new information: it's just reminding people of what they know.

The Nearness of God in the Word

Deuteronomy's theology of the word is closely connected to its doctrine of the divine presence. God's presence in his word, not in idols, is developed in ch. 4 (note 4:7). The key to Deuteronomy's theology of presence has often been found, wrongly in my view, in its so-called 'name-theology'. That is, it is held that the book denies God's actual presence at the place of worship and substitutes the presence of the 'name' only, as a kind of representative hypostasis (12:5; cf. 1 Kgs 8:27–30).⁴ The 'name' has more to do with the rights of Yahweh to possession and worship in the land that he has given to Israel. The mode of the divine presence is indeed debated in the Old Testament, with an emphasis on the freedom of God in this respect (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:5–7; the point could be pursued in the 'priestly' literature too). But the idea of God's presence as a gift, in giving which he remains free, is developed in Deuteronomy in relation to the word. God's presence-in-word is an aspect of his freedom and spirituality, and thus a repudiation of idolatry, which follows immediately on the passage which records the revelation that Israel *hears* at Horeb (4:9–14, 15–20).

Word in Community

If God's presence in his word means that he is not encapsulated in idols, or even in temples, this never becomes a ground for dreamy individualism. The presence of God in his word comes about in the community of the chosen people, which has a visible form (4:6). When the word takes shape in Israel the world can look on, and see something about the wisdom of God. The Israel that hears the word is essentially constituted for worship ('before the

LORD at Horeb', 4:10–12). This is developed in the pictures of Israel at worship in chs. 12–26 (e.g. 12:18; 16:17). These passages show that the idea of word-in-community goes very deep. It penetrates the family life of the people, and is reflected in the festal pattern, which gives a structure for the perpetual life of the people. In the worship event 'all Israel' gathers. In its households all are included, social barriers broken down; masters, servants, and the 'landless' come together in a great levelling, or better, a great 'communitizing'. Israel takes its most characteristic form thus before God, worshipping, receiving his gifts, and embodying his word that creates a harmonious, liberated people.⁵

Torah for the Church?

To return to our opening question, can the Torah function in the Church as it did in Israel? The idea of the transforming word is also found in the New Testament, now seen Christologically. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you (pl.) richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom' (Col. 3:16); 'be (go on being) transformed (pl.) in your minds' (Rom. 12:2). The word has become the word of Christ. It is he who dwells in the Church, who constitutes it his people, and who gives the command: 'feed my sheep' (John 21:15–17). The *qahal* (the assembly of Israel) has become *ekklesia*—a people hearing the Word of Christ and growing in it (Acts 20:28), and (thus) witnessing to the world about the Lord who gives life to his creation. Even the 'Shema' (Deut 6:4) is Christologized: '... for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one LORD Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor 8:6)'.

Does this mean that Deuteronomy has no message of its own, nothing residual after the New Testament has subsumed its teaching in the person and work of Christ? At a minimum it impresses us with its urgent exhortation, its exemplification of the potency of the spoken word to captivate and transform; its declaration of the human tendency to unfaithfulness, yet its firm hold on the necessity and

possibility of reform. It is also unsurpassed in its images of the people of God in its true character, practicing the presence of God in its worship and openness to the word, uniting faith and worship, ethics and mission.

II. The Word of Life

We have seen that Deuteronomy provides a basis for the belief that the word of God spoken once to Israel could continue to have validity in succeeding generations. We now look more closely at what that message was, to see in what ways it might speak to the Church today. We consider first the message as one of *promise*.

The Promise to the Fathers as a Frame

The memory of Yahweh's promise to Abraham finds expression close to the beginning and end of the book (1:8; 30:20), and is a constant theme. This promise, moreover, is made by *oath*. The theology of Deuteronomy is entirely predicated on this *oath* of God. This sworn promise is that recorded in the OT in Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–6. The Israelites, perched on the brink of Canaan, are children of Abraham, about to occupy the land shown to him in ages past. Deuteronomy, therefore, has a panoramic view, beginning in the past and reaching into the future. The promise in Genesis is embedded in a story that belongs to all humanity, the story of its reintroduction to forfeited life and blessing. The chosen people are to enjoy again the good things of creation, and at the same time to be a people that is justified, or righteous, before God. The word of Deuteronomy is a word of *life*; a realization of God's creation desire to bless and give fullness. *Life* is the key; 'land' is a metaphor for it.

There is indeed, therefore, a story in Deuteronomy. It can be variously described. It can be seen as *three addresses of Moses*, broadly 1–4; 5–28; 29–30, followed by closing material in chs. 31–34. But this is a rather formal description, which does not highlight the key 'moments' in the book. Another way is to see the book through its well known *treaty*

form. But this also is somewhat static, missing the true vigour of the narrative progression.

The book is better seen as the story of the Torah, in its progression from Horeb to Moab and on into an indefinite future. The story may be elaborated as follows. The setting of Moses' speeches is in Moab, on the way into promised land. The conquest is already partly accomplished (chs. 1–3), the narrative partly repeating Num. 20–24. And now there is a pause for a purpose: to re-realize the covenant. The key texts and articulations of the narrative of the covenant are the following.

i. Deut 4:9–14; 5:2–3. These texts recall the covenant made at *Horeb*, the first destination after the people leave the place of bondage, Egypt (1:2). This covenant, though well in the past as Moses addresses the people gathered on Horeb, is nevertheless made with 'us' (5:2), as if the Moab generation was the same as the Horeb generation (which it strictly speaking is not, cf. 1:34–40; 2:14). The fusion of the generations is rhetorical, and signals the solidarity of Israel's generations, as those who benefit from the promise and the covenant. The Horeb covenant is symbolized by the placing of the tablets of the law (containing the Ten Commandments, 4:13) in the ark of the covenant (10:5).

ii. The Covenant Made With the People in *Moab*. The Moab covenant essentially consists of the words spoken by Moses there, as recorded in Deuteronomy. The identification of it as an independent covenant alongside that of Horeb is made at 29:1 (28:69 Hebrew). Its ratification is contained in 26:16–19: 'you have *today* entered into an agreement with the LORD; today the LORD has entered into an agreement with you'; cf. 27:9; 29:14(13). The two covenants are formally kept separate, having separate symbols of the divine word validating each (respectively the 'tablets' made at Horeb, and the 'book of the law' containing Moses' words, 28:58, 61). However, there is a conflation of them at the heart of Deuteronomy. The Moab covenant is a re-realization of Horeb. Those who enter it

are in effect standing once more at Horeb, the place of the first great decision of Israel to be Yahweh's people.

iii. The blessing and the curse. These twin possibilities are 'set before' Israel in this Moab covenant (11:26–32; 27:15–26; 28). The whole narrative may be considered an appeal to Israel to make the right decision, that is, to follow Yahweh rather than other gods. Deut. 30:15–20 is a final exhortation to 'choose life!', a fitting climax to the main exhortations of the book.⁶

iv. The Book of the Law (the symbol of the Moab covenant) is deposited by the ark of the covenant (31:9–13), in a juxtaposition that expresses the unity of Moab and Horeb.

v. The Deuteronomic law is written on stones on Mt. Ebal (27:1–8), after the people enter the land (cf. Josh. 8:30–35).

vi. In due course the threatened curse will fall (in the exile, 28:63–68), followed by a return to the land in faithfulness (30:1–10).

In this rendering of the covenant condition of Israel, its whole life passes before it—before it has even happened! But the beginning and end are clear: Yahweh gives life to Israel—then gives it again! The promise to the patriarchs is maintained in spite of failure that leads to the exile.

Blessing/Life as the Aim of Deut— A Creation Realization

The book everywhere assumes God's intention to bless and give life. This is implied, for example, in the theme of the gift of the land, often lyrically expressed, and in the short 'blessings' in 28:1–14. These visions of a people enjoying the good things God has given are reminiscent of the blessings intended for the first human beings (Gen. 1:28–31).

The images of this blessing are rich indeed; the descriptions in 6:10–11; 8:7–10; 11:8–12; 11:9 belong in a genre of extravagant accounts of a land's bounty, expressing immeasurable abundance, for

example in the memorable phrase, 'a land flowing with milk and honey'.⁷ Their chief significance is that they are the gift of Yahweh and do not come by any other means. In this respect they resemble Ps. 24:1 ('The earth is the LORD's and its fullness'; cf. Ps. 104, whose theme is a wholly balanced natural world under the sway of Yahweh, in which all parts serve and are served by the others). The gift of Yahweh to Israel, however, is made in language that speaks of his special care: 'a land watered by rain from the sky . . . that the LORD your God cares for' (11:10–12), implying his special love for Israel by the same token. Something similar is intended by 6:10–11: 'cities you did not build', emphasising God's power to give everything, and at the same time his decision to give it to his chosen people.

The theme of the promise of land is utterly pervasive in Deuteronomy. The phrase (with variations) 'when you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess' is so typical in the book that it is often taken as a sure sign of the 'Deuteronomist'. The promise of land is given so that Israel might 'live long in the land' (11:9), that is, continue in it throughout many generations. Here it is an open-ended prospect of enjoyment of everything that may be enjoyed. Land becomes a metaphor for full living—though it is also actual.

The theme, therefore, is close to blessing itself. In his gift of the land we read that 'he will love you, bless you, multiply you' (7:13–14), and this is explicated in terms of all the essential parts of life—flocks, harvest, health. The account of the blessing also expresses Yahweh's personal involvement in 'natural' processes (giving rain, 'caring for' the land, providing the very houses for his people to live in, 6:10). His careful provision for the welfare of people shows that he is 'emotionally involved'. The language of love and blessing, though it derives from the treaties where it is political, nevertheless takes on emotive characteristics because of the personal way in which the narrative of God, land and Israel unfolds.

The blessing has at its centre the fact

that Israel is Yahweh's chosen people, his special possession (7:6). The covenant mutuality of their relationship is developed in 7:9–11, and in the passage that ratifies the Moab covenant: they are *Yahweh's people*, he is *their God* (26:17–18; cf. 27:9). The relationship is measured against the place of the other nations; Israel is the 'most blessed of peoples' (7:14), 'high above the nations' (26:19). They are *his inheritance*, and therefore his land is *their inheritance* (4:20–21). In their closeness to Yahweh they know *joy*, the typical quality of their worship (12:7, 12; 14:26; 16:14). And this picture of a joyful, worshipping people encompasses the idea of right relationships operating among them, signified in these texts by the inclusiveness that draws in the disadvantaged classes (see further below).

The foregoing has intended to show that blessing is the constant goal in Deuteronomy. It is always held out together with its 'shadow', its destructive opposite, the curse (7:13–14; 11:26–27; 28:1–14; 30:15–16, 19–20). The double possibility is always there—but the LORD wants life for his people.

Deut. 30:15–20 is a peroration, or climax of the paranesis, a fugue on the theme of 'life'. The noun occurs four times, the verb twice; and the similar idea of 'length of days' comes twice also. The main thrust is contained in vv. 15–16: 'love the LORD and you will live'; vv. 17–18 then give the obverse. The final exhortation follows: 'Choose life . . . and live!' (v. 19). And the whole is rounded off with a return to the oath to the patriarchs: 'love the LORD and live' (again)—and thus fulfil the oath to the patriarchs (v. 20).

The Moral Problem of Israel

The paradox of Deuteronomy is that the gift is a fixed, determined thing, yet it must be embraced by the love of the LORD's people, given back to him as he gave it. The problem that this entails lies in the character of Israel. Have they the moral capacity to keep the covenant? This question underlies the whole structure

and texture of Deuteronomy. It may be clarified by examining first the chronicle of Israel's failure as told in Deuteronomy, then the answer provided by Yahweh himself.

Israel's bad record in covenant keeping is illustrated in Deut. 1; 9–10. Deut. 1 is more than a mere prologue, but rather an overture, setting the tone for a story of moral fragility. Deut. 1–3 is a microcosm of the whole picture of Israel in the book. In it we read of a failure to take the land at the first attempt, followed by a kind of 'exile', that is, a return to wilderness, followed in turn by a new, full possession of the land. There is a similarity to the structure of the whole book in this, in which the anticipated first possession must be followed by exile, and only at long last by a further restoration (30:1–10). Deut. 1, therefore, contains the basic theological structure set forth by Deuteronomy.

Israel's first failure to take the land is not accidental, therefore, but expresses something about its character. This is made explicit in 9:4–6, in which the nation is shown to have no claim on the land that arises from its own condition. The nations are driven from their land for lack of righteousness (*sedāqā*), but Israel is no more 'righteous' than they. There is a certain judicial connotation in the language here. Indeed, the terms 'innocence' and 'guilt' (for *sedāqā* and *rish'a*) may be read throughout this passage in place of the more customary 'righteousness' and 'wickedness'.⁸ (For an analogy in the legal section, cf. Deut. 25:1). This means that the divine decision to displace the other peoples is a judicial act. It implies no better qualification on Israel's part, rather a matter between Yahweh and the nations; they are guilty and therefore forfeit the land. The thought is in line with the universal judgment of Yahweh in relation to land possession that is found in Deut. 2. Israel itself, therefore, has no title of its own to the land given to it, but merely benefits from the judgment on the nations. It is not itself pronounced guilty in the same way that the nations are; nevertheless, it is conspicuously not

pronounced 'innocent', but rather is 'stubborn' and rebellious against the LORD (vv. 6–7), and therefore tantamount to 'guilty' before it has even entered the land, the arena of the covenant. The problem faced in Deuteronomy is how a people identified as 'guilty' can be given the land in the first place, on the basis of a covenant that requires faithfulness? Yet this people is to be the people in which the 'righteousness' (*sedāqā*) of Yahweh will be shown. The tendency of Deut. 9:4–7 could be read as a confirmation that 'righteousness' can only be counted to the people of God, as it was counted to Abraham (Gen. 15:6). However, though this passage shows that the grace of Yahweh is paramount in the relationship, the project of Yahweh to create a 'righteous' people is real and meant to be taken seriously.

This paradox pervades the book. The literary-critical treatments of Deuteronomy that distinguish systematically between 'law' and 'grace' sayings (especially where 'law' sayings are thought to come in after, from the pen of the 'legalistic' deuteronomistic writer of the exile, DtrN) fail to see how much the whole assumption of the argument rests on grace. Deut. 6:17–19 is often cited as a DtrN passage.⁹ Yet it is hard to see how the insertion of such a passage might be expected to overturn a structure in which chs. 9–10 have such a prominent place. Rather, Deut. 6:17–19 simply takes its place as part of the rhetorical strategy of the preacher. That is, the word of Yahweh is irreducibly a word of grace, but the command remains real. The structure of the end of the book is a further illustration of the fine balance kept between law and grace. Why does Deuteronomy not end at ch. 28, as the analogy with the treaty form might lead the reader to expect? Deuteronomy subverts the treaty structure by not stopping there; perhaps the celebrated structure has been adopted just to be transcended! If you cross Assyria—there is no 'chapter 30'! This brings us now to a consideration of these final stages of the book.

'New Covenant' in Deuteronomy: Deut 30 as the Key

The term 'New Covenant' does not appear in Deuteronomy (it occurs only in Jer 31:31). However, the theology of restoration in Deut. 30 is closely akin to it. The chapter may be divided as follows: 30:1–10; 11–14; 15–20. The first section, vv. 1–10, is crucial. It in turn may be divided thus: vv. 1–2, 3–7, 8, 9–10. There is a question throughout how to translate the recurring conjunction *ki* that is, is it temporal, 'when', or conditional, 'if'? The answer to this question has a certain theological significance. It is translated in the following regularly by 'when' (and by 'and', where this carries forward the meaning 'when').

Vv. 1–2: a temporal clause:

1 *When* all these things have happened to you, both the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, *and* you lay them to heart among all the nations to which the LORD your God has driven you, 2 *and* turn back to the LORD your God, you and your children, obeying him with all your heart and being, according to all that I am charging you with this day,

vv. 3–7: what God will do:

3 then the LORD your God will *restore your fortunes, have compassion* on you, and *turn and gather* you from all the peoples among which he scattered you. 4 Even if your banished ones are in the farthest land under heaven, even from there *the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back*. 5 The LORD your God will *bring you back* to the land which your forefathers once possessed, and you will possess it; and *he will make you more prosperous and numerous* than your forefathers. 6 *The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts, and those of your descendants, so that you love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your being, and thus live*. 7 The LORD your God *will send* all these curses on your enemies, those who hated and persecuted you.

Verse 6 stands at the heart of the whole passage. It contrasts with the similar 10:16 in its emphasis on *what God will do*.

Even as regards Israel's response to him, he is the one who enables them. This radically new action of God seems to be predicated on their past failure, a theme that was struck in 9:4–7. The line of thought continues:

v. 8 statement or command?

8 But as for you, you will turn and obey the LORD your God, and carry out all his commands with which I am charging you this day.

This *could* be a command ('imperfects' as imperatives); but it is still addressed to the future generation, so strictly it is a description of what will happen then, when God acts in a new way. And finally:

vv. 9–10: once again the 'if' or 'when' question:

9 The LORD your God will give you abundance in all that you undertake: in your own offspring, in the young of your livestock and the produce of your fertile land, for the LORD will turn again to take delight in you, as he did with your forefathers, 10 *on the day that* (= 'when', 'because') you once again obey him, by keeping his commands and laws, all that is written in this book of the law, and return to the LORD your God with all your heart and all your being.

I have interpreted the passage virtually entirely as a future act of God. This is in contrast to NIV, which avoids 'if' in vv. 1–2, but inserts it at v. 10; and conversely to NRSV, which has 'if' in v. 1 (and thus also v. 2), but 'when' at v. 10. These versions both introduce an element of conditionality, but do so at different points. In avoiding the direct conditionals, I am laying a lot of weight on v. 6, with its devastating reversal of the dynamic of 10:16 (also Jer. 4:4). This makes the impression unavoidable that God takes control in bringing about Israel's obedience.

The passage is thus very close to New Covenant theology, which (with or without the phrase itself) may be found in Jer. 31:31–33; 32:39–40; Ezek. 36:25–27. Here too the premiss is that Israel has failed to keep the covenant (Jer. 31:32b; Ezek. 36:22, 32—and even Hos 14:4). These

passages assume that the actual historical failure of Israel reveals its character, so that some new thing had to be done in order to renew the possibility of a covenantal relationship.

Deut. 30 is the unexpected and paradoxical progression from the prolonged catalogue of curses in 28:15–68. We recall that, by strict analogy with the treaty, one would expect Deuteronomy to end at 28:68. The continuation is what makes it significant. In this juxtaposition is the source of all hope. Deut. 28 knows all imaginable suffering. It is salutary to read it having in mind some contemporary outrage against humanity; at the time of writing the horrors of Kosovo are fresh in mind, and Easter close. Chechnya has followed on its heels. How may Easter be celebrated with these things in the background? In answer one can only say: this is what Easter is about!

Deut. 30, therefore, faces on to God's final answer to the problem of humanity: resurrection and new life by his new, overriding action. Unexpectedly, Deut. 30:11–14 then returns, after the promise of the divine action in vv. 1–10, to an appeal for obedience. Yet this hardly disturbs the flow of the deuteronomic paranesis. The effect of it is apparently that obedience itself is made possible by the action of God; in the nearness of the commandment (v. 11), or word (v. 14), obedience has been made available by grace. In this way the line of thought that seemed to abolish the role of the human will suddenly reinstates it. Paul's argument in Rom 10:4–10 is hardly out of line with this.

In that passage Paul reinterprets Deut. 30:11–14 Christologically. He begins by declaring that 'the end of the law (*telos tou nomou*) is Christ, for the justification and righteousness of all who believe'; that is, the law finds its fulfilment in Christ. Paul's thesis, in his dialogue with the 'national righteousness' of certain Jews, is that the 'righteousness' that comes from God (v. 3) is 'the righteousness that comes from faith' (v. 6). And here the 'word' (Deut. 30:14) becomes Christ (Rom 10:6–7). That is, the word that is available

and accessible to bring salvation is Christ himself. Paul Christologizes Deuteronomy here (as he does for Deut 6:4 in 1 Cor 8:6). And he carries his argument on into vv. 9–10, concerning Deut 30:14: the word is in heart *and* mouth, that is, fully internalized *by means of* confession. The new act of God needed to secure Israel's obedience is in Jesus Christ, in whose blood is the New Covenant, by whose spirit we are brought into the obedience of faith. Torah is fulfilled by means of faith in Christ.

This is the measure, finally, of God's creation intention that human beings should have life. The word of life is Christ, the *logos* (with its echo of the Hebrew *dabar*), God's redeeming word to the world. In the new heavens and the new earth, under the rule of Messiah, blessing and life will be full and final, community perfected, and every tear wiped from every eye.

Does this extinguish the need for human responsibility here and now? This question has begun to be answered. It remains in what follows to show how Deuteronomy can continue to be a model for human living before God: the need for justice and righteousness is not suspended for this 'middle of time'

III. The Formative Word

The Place of the 'Laws' in Deuteronomy

We have seen the 'story' of Deuteronomy, that ends in failure followed by God's creation of a new community. But in a sense we have passed over the bulk of Deuteronomy, its very 'heart'. Is it possible that in the interpretation thus far, which has emphasized the failure of Israel, we have been failing to hear the true message of Deuteronomy, missing out on its character as Torah?

That 'heart' of Deuteronomy is the 'statutes, laws and commands'. Wellhausen's dismissive comment, that these were always coming but never arrived, was based on his view of the book as essentially a law code. He could not know that it was a covenant re-realization, since that was only discovered decades later. Even so, the law-code is

central. Here the well-known treaty analogy can mislead, for Deuteronomy is also like a law code (so Weinfeld, rightly¹⁰; and note also that Hammurabi's law code, conversely, has a historical prologue¹¹). The 'stipulations' section in the deuteronomic covenant, therefore, are not like treaty-stipulations, which are almost entirely about political loyalty to the overlord. While Deuteronomy does have that dimension, loyalty to Yahweh is cashed out in *laws*, and for the nearest similarities we have to go to other laws (such as Hammurabi's, as well as other codes from 3M through to 1M), that is, to a legal tradition which Deuteronomy's laws inhabit.¹²

Here, then, is a paradox: the covenant, apparently, can't be kept—but the bulk and substance of Deuteronomy consists in specific, detailed inculcation of right covenantal living. It is important to stress this: the function of the laws is not just there to show that Israel cannot keep them. The commandment has a real intent. This is clear when we notice what Israel is expected to do after they have returned to the LORD and he has 'circumcised their hearts': they will 'obey the LORD, observing all the commandments that I am commanding you today' (30:8; see above).

In order to understand this, it is important to keep separate things separate. The *story*, anticipating the failure of Israel and the need for God's new act of salvation, is an analysis of the relationship between God and human beings; *the laws and commands* give the shape of the human society that the covenant seeks to bring about. There is no paradox after all. Torah and soteriology do not compete. (They are ultimately united in Christ's kingdom—which is both now and not yet).

In this respect, the Old Testament picture, as represented by Deuteronomy, is similar to that of the New Testament. In Romans there is the same creative tension between the word of grace and the exhortation to live the righteous life (Rom. 6), an imputation of righteousness that is, in a sense, apart from law; yet the

New Testament too aims to create a community that has certain characteristics.

i. *Forming a community.* First and foremost, Deuteronomy addresses a community, not a set, or sum, of individuals. It is a *qahal*, the assembly of the LORD (23:1; the Hebrew is parallel to the Greek *ekklesia*). It is also a 'brotherhood', the most characteristic way of speaking about Israel in Deuteronomy. Even kings and priests are primarily 'brothers' in Israel, as are slaves (17:15; 18:2; 15:12).

The unity of this community is reflected in the forms of address itself (singular and plural). The singular address is dominant in the laws. Who is addressed by it? Is it the 'landowning, free, adult Israelite males', as Crüsemann thinks, deducing it from the allusions to other sections of the community in the third person?¹³ This seems to me to over-rationalize the singular address. On Crüsemann's view, some usages would be impossible, for example, 'thy stranger within thy gates', 'thy males (who go three times a year to worship)', 'thy cities'. Rather, it is Israel as such who is addressed. This has important repercussions. For example, in Deut. 16:18 the command 'thou shalt appoint for thyself judges in all thy cities' must be addressed to a corporate entity. The people as such is responsible for keeping, administering and enforcing the law.

(Incidentally, the plural address is also to all Israel, of course. The changes from singular to plural are rhetorical. Oddly, it seems that the plural focuses on individuals, while the singular focuses on the single, corporate unit).

ii. A '*kingdom*' community. The way in which this community is governed, as set out in 16:18–18:22, is very important for an understanding of the book. The ruling principle is *justice* (*sedāqā*, 16:20), that is, the establishment of right relationships among members of the community. Justice is the result of the community keeping Torah. The human king is firmly subject to this justice, this Torah, not above it (17:14–20). The pattern in these chapters,

indeed, which evidently intends to ensure that power is not concentrated in a single individual or group, is what is called in modern times a 'separation of powers'. Deuteronomy, therefore, legislated for a rare thing, a kingdom without a human king whose word was law. The kingdom itself is reserved to Yahweh.

In this context, does one of the officials stand out as the greatest? If any, it is probably the prophet—who comes last in the sequence, and with whom Moses himself is most closely identified (18:15)—, even though the strictly administrative functions belong to others.¹⁴ Here is a programme for social organization that is fundamentally open to the word of God.

iii. *A community of righteousness, loving justice.* Obedience to Yahweh cannot be guaranteed by such arrangements, however. Ultimately justice must be willed by all the people. There is, therefore, a nice balance between institutional structures and the common will to obey the commands of the covenant. The structures are designed to mitigate the possibility of abuse; but Yahweh's will is done only when people actually hear and do his word.

The call to faithfulness in Deuteronomy goes right to the heart, the seat of the righteous life. Certain laws illustrate the point. In Deut. 24:13, 15 there are appeals to the creditor and employer respectively to treat their fellow-Israelites well, with a recognition that there is a level of action that cannot be enforced by the usual processes of law, but that is motivated by a proper fear of Yahweh. He it is who can confer 'righteousness' (or perhaps 'innocence'): 'it will be righteousness to you/sin in you'. The one who is the ultimate judge is judge of the heart. The inner and outward are one, the motive and the act. (This is not far from Jesus' 'But I say to you . . .' Matt. 5:21–48). The conferral of righteousness in these texts is similar to that which is given to Abraham (Gen 15:6). But it is significant that this gift comes in the context of compassionate behaviour to the other person.

There are other laws where the mere

act is not enough, but where the person is expected to go beyond the letter of the law to the love that should lie behind it. The lender should lend generously (15:9); the farmer must generously leave produce in his fields for the needy (23:24); the one who finds the neighbour's ox must not pretend not to see, that is, he must care for the interests of the other (22:1–4). The laws in 24:8–22 are strengthened with motivations to obey, especially the reminder that Israel was once a slave (vv. 18, 22). There are reasons deep in the order of things why Israelites should behave in a certain way. On the day of writing these words, I read in my newspaper that the UK has the richest executives in Europe, but also the lowest rates of severance payments for low-paid workers. This is the sort of thing the deuteronomic law has things to say about! But it is at the same time an approach of law to Gospel, for it proclaims the will of God for human society.

The demonstration of righteousness in the covenant community as pictured in Deuteronomy is one of the book's remarkable features. Here is the community of 'no poor' (15:4), and no marginalized people.¹⁵ Israel at worship embraces the Levite, the widow, the orphan, the stranger. This is the essence of pictures like 12:12, 18; 14:22–29; 16:14. The inclusive picture of the people at the feasts (16:1–17) seems to be achieved by the laws of debt- and slave-release occurring shortly before the laws concerning them (15:1–18).¹⁶ In these astonishing images word and expression become one and the same. Righteousness (*sedāqā*) is enacted, enfleshed before the eyes. Obedience, worship, justice and love are all encapsulated together and inseparably. The synthesis of worship and ethics reminds of the prophets (cf. Amos 2:8; Jer. 7:9–10). There is no true worship apart from the expression of justice and righteousness within a faithful community. The familiar exhortation 'not to forget' is present in this connection too (14:27; 16:12). Again, the level reached by Deuteronomy is the heart. The inner and outward lives are continuous.

iv. *The community is, therefore, fully 'political'.* The people of God in the Old Testament was embodied in real time and space. Israel was a nation among nations, possessing land, waging wars, subject to leaders, implementing laws, having institutions that manifested at one and the same time its political and religious constitution (especially the temple of Yahweh, which challenged not only Baal and other gods, but also those who invoked them in the cause of their own power, such as Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kgs 18–19). In all these ways it was like its neighbours. And it is in this context that the displacement of other peoples must be understood. The 'kingdom' community holds land claimed and formerly ordered by others. In its claim to land, it is a people-in-contention. This is not merely partisan. Rather it challenges a form of society where human power was self-justifying. In its depth and breadth, it manifested what a people of God should be in the world.

v. *It is also a spiritual people.* If Deuteronomy's message has political implications, this must not be understood as a separate dimension from its spiritual character. Political and spiritual are indivisible in this vision of the world. Yahweh's Torah runs through humanity from top to bottom, from the individual's most private thought to the structures and actions of the 'state'. This explains the motivations addressed to the heart, joined to a programme of laws (6:5; 10:16). It is a mistake to take the appeal to the heart in Deuteronomy as an evidence of personal, still less private, religion, in opposition to the corporate or political. That old false antithesis was superimposed on the Old Testament and ought to be laid to rest. (By the same token Jeremiah was regarded, wrongly, as the founder of 'individual' religion, though he proclaimed a New Covenant for 'the houses of Israel and Judah' [Jer. 31:31], and foresaw the raising up of a 'righteous branch for David'). For Israel to love God from the heart means a whole society living on the basis of devotion to him, so that *sedaqa* is not merely a princi-

ple enshrined in law and system, but willed and protected by every Israelite.

It follows too that the community envisaged is not identified with any one particular manifestation of it. This, it seems to me, is the error of the 'centralization' interpretation of Deuteronomy, which has conceived the book as an apologia for the nationalism, or 'statism', of the late Judean monarchy. Deuteronomy anticipates, in contrast, an Israel that is forever recalled to its true nature, generation by generation, by means of the teaching of Torah. It cannot be 'statist', because Yahweh remains free in his sovereignty. This is why 'the place the LORD will choose' should not be equated simply with Jerusalem. The reticence of Deuteronomy on this (whatever date is ascribed to it) is not due to the need to maintain a fiction of Mosaic authorship, but rather belongs to a pattern of opposition to the kind of 'Zion'-theology that was manifested in practice by most of the Davidic kings, north and south. (Israelites together are 'children of Yahweh' here [Deut. 14:1], not the Davidic king).

Therefore the 'kingdom' portrayed in Deuteronomy is always *in principle* open to new forms, to being reconceived. Deuteronomy can even be said to be eschatological. This is not in the same way as Daniel, for example, with its visions of the destruction of successive earthly kingdoms. Rather, its images are paradisaical. It calls God's people to participate in a history that moves towards the fulfilment of the divine purposes in creation. Accordingly, it is prophetic, radical, foreshadowing the kingdom of God in many wonderful ways, but refusing to allow 'Israel' (or anything else) to be identified with it.

vi. *A community with a mission.* By the same tokens, Deuteronomy's Israel is called to be a community of witness: the nations shall look and see what God is like. If this means anything it must mean that the once-for-all political-religious entity that was Israel can witness to the world of nations, perpetually, as to fundamental matters of right and wrong, and of bearing

authority in world and church. The ancient *qahal* ('assembly') of Israel embodies a claim of God upon the worldly authorities of all times and places, as also upon the *ekklesia* of Christ as witness to it.

Conclusion

How then can Deuteronomy guide the church in a modern age? If this book, so central to Old Testament law and theology, is to be a guide, it must speak both to the hopes enshrined in the Gospel of Christ, and be a guide to right conduct in the world. Deuteronomy's own carefully preserved tension between the practical and the ideal allows it to do both these things. The church, hearing the word of God, witnesses to the authorities concerning their obligation to do justice. That role of the church is unpopular in the modern climate, in which the state prefers to confine the church's voice to the margins of private morality, and has arrogated to itself the responsibility for deciding what it is right to teach, and what constitutes justice. Yet this secularizing of the functions of authorities that derive, in Christian theology, from God, merely sharpens the need for witness. It needs little demonstration that there are flashpoints here, in social policy, in education, in economics. Ironically, the 'Christian' heritage of states seems to lie closest to hand when it justifies a war, the arena in which both church and state need to tread most carefully.

The church can never again identify with state, as if the kingdom of God could be brought on earth by force. To imagine so would be to fall into the trap that Deuteronomy avoids, namely of identifying the kingdom closely with a particular form of human rule. The preaching of the kingdom calls every human authority to obedience, yet at the same time is driven by a vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Such a view is consonant with the preaching of Jesus, who proclaimed the kingdom of heaven—thus distinct from the rule of Israel's current

oppressors—yet refused to identify it with any of the options for revolution available in his day. Roman Israel, though oppressed, was in its own way the oppressor (of the weak by the strong), and therefore, like its remote ancestors, not equal to the task of being the people of God.¹⁷ The dilemma is not easily resolved. The task of witness is less glorious than the wielding of power, yet that is the way that always lies ahead, open and possible. As we do good in the world, and try to embody it as church, we also proclaim that the one is coming who will wipe away every tear and establish the new heavens and the new earth revealed in the Gospel and the resurrection of Christ.

Notes

- 1 G. Braulik, 'The Sequence of the Laws in Deuteronomy 12–26 and in the Decalogue', in D. L. Christensen ed., *A Song of Power and the Power of Song* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993) 313–335; ET of 'Die Abfolge der Gesetze in Deuteronomium 12–26 und der Dekalog' in N. Lohfink ed., *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (BETL, 68; Louvain University Press, 1985) 252–72.
- 2 S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1895) lxxviii–lxxxiv.
- 3 W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 722.
- 4 G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*; (London, SCM Press, 1953) 38–39; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 191–209.
- 5 N. Lohfink, 'Das deuteronomische Gesetz in der Endgestalt: Entwurf einer Gesellschaft ohne marginale Gruppen' in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur* (SBAB 20; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995) 205–18.
- 6 The theme is ably developed by J. G. Millar, *Choose Life!* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).
- 7 See the description of Egypt in the *Tale of Sinuhe*, ll. 80–90 (J. B. Pritchard ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton University Press, 1969) 19.

- 8 Cf. G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium I* (Neue Echter Bibel; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986), 74–75.
- 9 E.g. N. Lohfink, 'Kerygmata des Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks', in J. Jeremias and L. Perlitt eds. *Die Botschaft und die Boten: FS H. W. Wolff* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981) 98.
- 10 Weinfeld, *Deuteronomistic School*, 148.
- 11 *ANET*, 164–65.
- 12 For the biblical law codes in relation to an ancient Near Eastern legal tradition, see R. Westbrook, 'What is the Covenant Code?' in Bernard M. Levinson ed., *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law; Revision, Interpolation and Development* (JSOTSup, 181; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 15–36, and responses to him in the same volume.
- 13 See F. Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of the Old Testament Law* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 220.
- 14 Cf. Jon D. Levenson, 'Who Inserted the Book of the Torah?' *HTR* 68 (1975), 203–33; 227–28.
- 15 Lohfink, N., 'Das deuteronomische Gesetz in der Endgestalt: Entwurf einer Gesellschaft ohne marginale Gruppen' in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur* (SBAB 20; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995) 205–18.
- 16 Braulik, 'Sequence of Laws', 325–26.
- 17 See N. T. Wright in Wright and M. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus*, (HarperSan-Francisco, 1999) 31–52. This is a short statement of positions argued at length in his *The New Testament and the People of God* and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress / London: SPCK, 1992, 1996).

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