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Secularization in the Centralization of the Cult in Deuteronomy

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IN THE CENTRALIZATION OF THE CULT
IN DEUTERONOMY

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One of the current popular trends in theology deals with the theme of secularization. The theme has been most generally associated with the name of Harvey Cox and his widely read book The Secular City.[1] Cox described the dimensions of secularization as the disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics and the deconsecration of values.[2] He looked to the Old Testament for illustrations of this idea of secularization and found it in the accounts of the creation, the Exodus and the Sinai Covenant. Ronald M. Hals, while agreeing with Cox that secularization can indeed be found in the Old Testament,[3] maintains that he could have used better examples than the ones he chose to illustrate it. One of the places where this secularization can be found according to Hals is in the centralization of the cult in Deuteronomy.

Since the discussion of secularization has important implications for the Church today, I have undertaken to delve into the matter to discover how much support this idea has among Old Testament scholars. In this research I have discovered that there has been a wide divergence of opinion in regard to

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[1](New York: MacMillan Company, 1965).

[2]Ibid., pp. 21-36.

[3]"The Old Testament Roots of Secularization," The Lutheran Quarterly, XVIII (February, 1966), 36-42.

the centralization of the cult in Deuteronomy. There are differing views as to when it might have taken place and even as to whether it took place at all. In dealing with the matter of cult centralization from the point of view of its effect on the life of the common people, however, several scholars have described this effect as secularization.

The whole concept of centralization has as its background the idea that at one time there were a number of local sanctuaries at which the people of Israel worshipped. Then at some time during Israel's history the cult was centralized in one location. This is seen by some as occurring as early as the time of Samuel and by others as late as the post-exilic period. Some see in it primarily a political purpose and others a religious one. The extent to which centralization was achieved is viewed in several ways. Some see it as merely an impractical ideal, never put into practice; others see it as having been achieved for short periods of time; others as only happening after the exile. And some have denied that it was ever really intended to happen at all. It is seen by some scholars that centralization, whenever and to whatever extent it occurred, would have affected the daily life of the people in ways which might be termed secularization as Cox defined it, although the purpose of the legislation was not secularization in itself. Centralization certainly did bring with it a different concept of Israel's faith. It radically changed the cultic life of the people. It promoted a humanitarian legal system.

The Local Sanctuaries

We first look at the situation which must have preceded any centralization of the cult which might have occurred. This will present the situation at which Deuteronomy seems to be directed. Brinker maintains,

> The conquest of Canaan by the Israelites was neither so united nor so swift nor so complete as would seem from a superficial reading of Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua.[4]

Robertson describes in greater detail what the situation must have been.

> At the insettling in the Holy Land they passed from being an organized community, centrally administered, to one that was decentralized and split into a number of religious communes. Several of these communes were separated from each other by territory still held by the Canaanites. To administer their dispersed territory the Israelites set up a number of sanctuaries some of which no doubt they took over from the previous inhabitants of the land.[5]

The shrines that existed at various places during the history of the nation of Israel are described in great detail by Brinker.[6] The shrines with which he deals were at Kadesh, Shechem, Gibeon, Shiloh, Bethel, Dan, Ophrah, Mizpah and Hebron. Each of these shrines had its own peculiar ritual and traditional legislation. In certain respects this legislation varied from sanctuary to sanctuary. And this situation

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[4]R. Brinker, The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1946), p. 34.

[5]Edward Robertson, "The Pentateuch Problem: Some New Aspects," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXIX (July, 1945), p. 121.

[6]Brinker, pp. 140-177.

is not seen as being characteristic of only the early period of the amphictyony.

> A multiplicity of shrines was characteristic of the whole period of Hebrew history until the Exile, and was not confined to the Northern Kingdom only. Dan and Beer-sheba flourished in the days of Amos. Bethel remained active even after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, and Shechem will probably have maintained a more or less uninterrupted existence. It is, therefore, inevitable that a multiplicity of legal practice and ritual usage should have existed concurrently.[7]

As we shall see later there have been quite different interpretations of just how long this situation lasted, when the attempt was made to centralize the cult, whether such an attempt was ever really made, and just how much success was achieved. That there were several sanctuaries is generally accepted. Some scholars, like Driver, held the view that the sanctuary at which the Ark was located certainly had the pre-eminence. Yet at the same time the evidence indicates that sacrifices were offered at places other than the sanctuary of the Ark, the only restriction being that these places should be properly sanctioned and approved.[8]

The situation that thus developed with several legally recognized shrines is described by Brinker:

> Each shrine would thus treasure its own records, consisting of the traditions of past history, collections of legal usages and descriptions of local customs, together with short chronicles of the history of the shrine and its priesthood. The nucleus of the traditions of the

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[7] Ibid., pp. 187-188.

[8] S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament. (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 86.

> past history of the nation as well as the legal matter will have been originally identical in a number of shrines. In the course of time, however, especially in the period of oral transmission, the narrating genius of a particular priest as well as the varying interpretations of the legal usages will have given the various sanctuary traditions a distinctive local colouring. These variations, however slight at the beginning, will have tended to increase with time under the influence of complex geographical and historical factors.[9]

To bring about centralization, therefore, it is obvious that some great changes would be necessary. Kaufmann observes that the idea of centralization, involving the destruction of the ancient sanctuaries, "flew in the face of sacred traditions hoary and venerable with age."[10] It is in the changes that this upheaval brought about that scholars have come to find what might be called secularization.

The Purpose of Centralization

Before moving into the specific results of centralization in order to discover the aspects of secularization which the movement fostered, we shall examine some of the views as to the purpose which centralization had and then the extent to which it was achieved. Nicholson has briefly summarized the large variety of interpretations which has been advanced on these two subjects:

> The demand for one central place of worship for all Israel has been considered by some as nothing more than the impracticable ideal of a group of priests living in exile and divorced from the realities of life in Palestine. Others believe that the centralization of worship

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[9]Brinker, p. 18-19.

[10]Yehezkel Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 288.

> was the means chosen by Josiah to abolish sacred prostitution which had its breeding grounds at the local high places. Some scholars see in it the practical outcome of the teaching of the 8th century prophets and their condemnation of the high places. Another theory is that it is the final outcome of a long process in which the larger and more important sanctuaries monopolized so much of the offerings of the people that the smaller local shrines suffered an ever increasing loss of revenue as a result of which the priests at these smaller sanctuaries legislated that worship should be centralized at one of the major shrines with a view to integrating themselves into the ministry there. These rural priests have been considered as the originators of the doctrine of the centralization of the cult for yet another reason, viz. that by the 7th century B.C., when the book of Deuteronomy was written, they had outgrown the cultic sphere proper and were now exercising more of a teaching ministry. Some scholars argue that the centralization of worship was the result of the miraculous deliverance of [Jerusalem] from Sennacherib in 701 B.C. whilst others argue that Hezekiah centralized the cult in Jerusalem in order to concentrate national feeling in the preservation of the capital in the struggle for independence from Assyria; that is, the centralization of worship had its origin in a political or largely political necessity rather than a religious one. More recently it has been suggested that the Deuteronomic dogma of the central shrine has its origin in the central shrine which was characteristic of the so-called amphictyonic period.[11]

In the course of this summary Nicholson has moved toward his own position, and it is with him that we begin to look at the various views of the purpose of the centralization. He feels that the groundwork for centralization was laid in the events surrounding the invasion of Sennacherib in 701.[12] In those circumstances Hezekiah found it necessary to concentrate worship in Jerusalem. Nicholson says,

> if the struggle for independence from Assyria was to succeed, the support of the nation as a whole was necessary

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[11] Ernest Nicholson, "The Centralization of the Cult in Deuteronomy," Vetus Testamentum, XIII (1963), pp. 380-381.

[12] Ibid., p. 384.

> and the nation was at this stage in grave danger of being weakened by the presence of foreign cults in the land. There must have been a tendancy towards widespread syncretism and a dampening of the nationalistic fervor so characteristic of the earlier years of Hezekiah's reign. Hezekiah, therefore, determined to curb such a tendancy among his people, broke with ancient practice and abolished the high places where, we may presume, these foreign cults were gaining ground. It was largely a political move though it would be unfair to attribute Hezekiah's action solely to political motives. . . . there was probably in Judah at this time a strong desire among loyal Yahwists to reform drastically the local high places.[13]

The political purpose here takes precedence although it is admitted that there were also religious motives involved.

Robertson also placed the political motive high in discussing the purpose of centralization, but the religious motive is placed even higher. In his view the movement for centralization came at the time of Samuel and had as its result the creation of the nation of Israel.

> The fashioning of a state out of the scattered tribes was no light task, but its necessary corollary, the unification of the worship of Yahweh, was greater still. This, as Samuel must have perceived, could only be brought to fruition by the erection of a national sanctuary. Yahweh in various ways and in some cases with idolatrous adjuncts was being worshipped at shrines and high places throughout the land.[14]

He goes on to tie the political and religious motives more closely together. "It was a condition essential for religious union that there should be only one Yahweh worshipped in the

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[13] Ibid., pp. 385-386.

[14] Edward Robertson, "Temple and Torah: Suggesting an Alternative to the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXVI (October-November, 1941), p. 189.

land . . ."[15] For Dobbie the political motive is more important. Religion was used for political ends.

> The purified, centralized worship in the capital thus had a political significance; and this too, so far as it involved prophetic stimulus, would be due more to the nationalist than to the moral and spiritual prophets who since Amos had conceived of the nation only within the ambit of a moral Providence.[16]

Dobbie further pointed out,

> The prohibition of Canaanite and Assyrian worship, and the metamorphosis of Canaanite agricultural festivals by reference to historic Israelite crises, are alike intelligible in terms of a growth of Hebrew nationalism, sponsored primarily by the monarchs. An indispensible mark of such political independence would be a severance from the official or characteristic worship of other nations.[17]

A greater number of scholars, however, see the purpose of centralization to lie more clearly in the area of religious motives. There is a wide range of opinions here, with some recognizing political implications and others ignoring that aspect altogether. Wright is reacting against Robertson when he says, "Deuteronomy was certainly not composed as a lawbook for the state, because it is not constitutional law in the proper sense of the term."[18] He does admit, however, that it was used

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[15] Ibid., p. 193.

[16] Robert Dobbie, "Deuteronomy and the Prophetic Attitude to Sacrifice," Scottish Journal of Theology, XII (1959), p. 79.

[17] Ibid., p. 81.

[18] G. Ernest Wright, "Deuteronomy: Introduction," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), II, 322.

as such by Josiah, but with the aim of instituting pure religious practices. Von Rad holds that "it would be mistaken to seek to understand the demand to centralize the cult merely as a tactical measure in cultic politics." The real reason was that the forms of the cult which existed at the shrines were no longer compatible with pure faith in Yahweh.[19] Driver, too, saw it as having an ethical and religious aim[20] which also served as a rallying point for the disorganized forces of the national religion.[21] Centralization was certainly not hostile to the cultus.[22] It rather sought "to establish the unity of Yahweh himself and the unity of His worship."[23] Even Dobbie came to see it as "an earnest attempt to cleanse the cult from the perversions and abominations which came into vogue with the submission of Ahaz to Assyria . . ."[24] Bewer describes the syncretistic worship which Deuteronomy tried to abolish through the centralization as follows:

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[19]Gerhard von Rad, Deuteronomy: A Commentary, translated from the German by Dorothea Barton (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 91.

[20]Driver, p. 78-79.

[21]Ibid., p. 89.

[22]Harold H. Rowley, "The Unity of the Old Testament," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXIX (February, 1946), p. 336.

[23]Henry H. Shires and Pierson Parker, "The Book of Deuteronomy," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), II, 412.

[24]Dobbie, p. 71.

> When the assimilation between Israel and the Canaanites became more complete and Yahweh became the God of the Canaanites, too, the Baal sanctuaries with their Baal worship were appropriated and adapted to Yahweh worship by the Israelite priests and people.[25]

A few scholars have held that Deuteronomy is not aiming at the centralization of the cult in one place but has in mind primarily the purification of the cult which already exists. Bewer describes the position of Oestreicher:

> Oestreicher maintained that the story of Josiah's reform in 2 Kings 22f. is interested not in the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem but only in its purification from all heathen and especially Assyrian elements both in Jerusalem and elsewhere, not in Kulteinheit but in Kultreinheit. The abolition of the high places and the bringing of the priests to Jerusalem were temporary measures to be done away with as soon as conditions permitted. . . . Oestreicher further maintained that the original D did not demand an absolute centralization of the cult at Jerusalem but only a relative one at several larger sanctuaries.[26]

Welch insisted on a similar view. For him the aim of the entire body of Deuteronomic law was "to insist on Yahwism versus Baalism, not on central sanctuary versus many sanctuaries."[27]

Clements takes still another position. He holds that the Deuteronomic lawgivers already had the central sanctuary of Jerusalem in mind, that it was already in existence and that Deuteronomy was composed "as an attempt at reforming and re-

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[25]Julius A. Bewer, "The Case for the Early Date of Deuteronomy," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLVII (1928), p. 312.

[26]Ibid., p. 306.

[27]Adam C. Welch, "The Problem of Deuteronomy," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLVIII (1929), p. 301-302.

interpreting the cult tradition of Jerusalem."[28] "In the law of the sanctuary, therefore, it seems probable that the Deuteronomists were conceding, and even extending, the old claim of Jerusalem to a position of primacy."[29] The situation was that descendants of Levitical groups from the Northern Kingdom had settled in Jerusalem and now sought to reform the cult.[30]

In all of these approaches the scholars take the position that whatever changes were made were designed to make the cult of Yahweh pure. They were not made to change the character of the Yahwistic faith. In a dangerous time the nation's security lay in a return to ancient traditions in order for Judah to escape the fate of Israel.[31] No one speaks of secularization as the goal of any Deuteronomic reforms. As we shall see, however, a number of scholars do see this as the effect of centralization in several areas of Israelite society.

The Extent of Centralization

There is yet another area in which there is a great variety of opinion among scholars and which has some bearing on an understanding of the nature of centralization. This is the matter of to what extent centralization was ever achieved,

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[28] R. E. Clements, "Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition," Vetus Testamentum, XV (1965), p. 301.

[29] Ibid, p. 304.

[30] Ibid., p. 310.

[31] John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 297-300.

when this might have taken place, and how long it might have lasted.

> The Book of Deuteronomy forms the chief battleground for critics of the [Graf-Wellhausen] theory since it very successfully conceals its age. The very old laws which it incorporates enable some critics to push the composition as far back as the age of Samuel (most recently Edward Robinson), whilst its impracticable idealism makes others (recently Pedersen) assign it to the early post-exilic period where it may be regarded as the law for the new and small community restored in Palestine.[32]

The argument concerning the impracticability of the centralization legislation generally centers around the demand that all males appear at the central sanctuary three times a year at the great festivals. It is held that this is simply a physical impossibility.

> Welch is much impressed by Hölscher's argument that the demand that everybody should go up to Jerusalem for the three yearly festivals is the impossible idea of impractical dreamers and not of practical legislators who would know that the little children and the domestic animals could not be left alone and that the fruit of the harvest needed to be guarded against robbers.[33]

Bewer goes on to observe here that "strangely enough this impractical command was actually kept all through post-exilic times."

It seems that this one problem is the center of the argument of the impracticability of centralization. No one seems to have dealt with this aspect from the point of view of the

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[32] L. H. Brockington, "Review of R. Brinker, The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel," The Journal of Theological Studies, XLIX (1948), p. 188.

[33] Bewer, p. 319-320.

difficulty which would seem to lie in an attempt to radically change long-accepted customs or the resistance which was likely to be encountered. This is an area which seems to need further study. Is there evidence that this program met with resistance? Perhaps this idea is behind the view that some take that because the Deuteronomic program was so impracticable if it is regarded as centralization, then complete centralization was not demanded. Robertson begins to move in this direction.:

> Much has been made of the requirement in Deuteronomy that all males should appear before Yahweh at the central sanctuary at the time of the great feasts. It has proved a veritable stumbling-block, because of its impracticality, and the search for another explanation of the meaning of the expression "the place that Yahweh shall choose to put his name there" or for another period than that of Josiah for the date of Deuteronomy, has hinged largely on this point.[34]

Brinker states it this way:

> even assuming that Deuteronomy was no more than a programme intended for the future, the planner must have realised the impossibility of such a demand being translated into practice. The only alternative, therefore, is that either Deuteronomy did not intend to abolish all shrines and leave one legitimate shrine, to wit, the Jerusalem Temple, or, if that were its intention, it could only apply to a date when Israel was far less numerous.[35]

The chief proponents of the view that Deuteronomy does not demand centralization at all have been Welch and Oestreicher. We have already quoted Bewer's presentation of Oestreicher's

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[34]Robertson, "Temple and Torah," p. 195.

[35]Brinker, p. 125.

position.[36] Oestreicher himself wrote, "An dem Ort, den Jahwe erwählen wird, kann also bedeuten: 1) an den einzigen Ort, den Jahwe erwählen wird, und 2) an jedem Ort, den Jahwe erwählen wird."[37] He goes on to explain his position thus:

> Sie allein genügen weit, uns zu veranlassen, die alte Anschauung preiszugeben und bei dem Ort, den Jahwe erwählen wird, nicht mehr blosz an eine einzige Kultstätte, das offizielle königliche Heiligtum, den Staatstempel in Jerusalem, zu denken. An jedem Ort, den Jahwe erwählt, ist Gelegenheit für den Israeliten zu opfern, oder, wie es das alte Altargesetz von Ex 20 ausdrückt, an jedem Ort, wo Jahwe seines Namens Gedächtnis stiftet.[38]

Welch maintains that "the book of Deuteronomy does not consider any other altar than the central one in the temple to be ipso facto illegitimate."[39] He finds evidence within the book of Deuteronomy itself to support his position.

> Now what these two passages [Dt. 16:21, 27:1-8] show is that, if not the whole, at least certain parts of the book date from a period at which it was still legitimate for the Israelites to worship at several shrines. And these parts were allowed to remain by men who were revising the whole in the interests of a principle which made every local shrine illegitimate."[40]

Von Rad recognized that this was a valid concern.

> it is being increasingly recognized that the demand for centralization in Deuteronomy rests upon a very narrow basis only, and is, from the point of view of literary criticism, comparatively easy to remove as a late and

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[36] Supra, p. 10.

[37] Th. Oestreicher, "Dtn 12,3f im Licht von Dtn 23,16f," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, XLIII (1925), pl 247.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Welch, p. 300.

[40] Ibid., p. 301.

final adaptation of many layers of material.[41]

Further support for this position is found in the seeming non-observance of strict centralization throughout the history of the nation. Brinker found that a multiplicity of shrines was characteristic of the whole period of Hebrew history until the Exile.[42] Johnston views the situation in a similar way.

> The study of the legislation of the Pentateuch seems to indicate unity of sanctuary. The study of the situation de facto shows us that other shrines did exist. Surely a reasonable way of combining the two is to say that the law allowed only one central sanctuary for the whole nation, but that in practice exceptions were made, based on the old law of Exodus xx, 24. This law allows "private altars," of undressed stone, to be erected in addition to the central shrine--not indeed according to the whim of the individual, but by God's express command--"wherever I shall recall the memory of my name." And this is precisely what happens in the historical books.[43]

Driver admits, "The non-observance of a law does not, of course, imply necessarily its non-existence;" but he goes on to point out

> still, when men who might fairly be presumed to know of it, if it existed, not only make no attempt to put it in force, but disregard it without explanation or excuse, it must be allowed that such an inference is not altogether an unreasonable one.[44]

Kaufmann seems to support this position when he states, "The

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[41]Gerhard von Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy, translated from the German by David Stalker (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1953), p. 67.

[42]Supra, p. 4.

[43]L. Johnston, "Reflections on Some Recent Views on Deuteronomy," Scripture, V(January, 1952), p. 15.

[44]Driver, p. 86.

novelty of the Deuteronomic law is not the conception of a great central sanctuary of unique importance and holiness." He speaks for many, however, when he goes on, "The new feature of Deuteronomy is its emphatic interdiction of all sacrifice outside the one chosen site."[45]

This last statement fits into the position which is most generally accepted today. Deuteronomy did in fact try to centralize the cult. But in the acceptance of that position there is still a wide variety of understanding as to when it happened and how long it lasted. A recent Roman Catholic scholar sees the movement coming quite early. Israel did in fact have one central sanctuary in the wilderness. After the settlement of Canaan, the situation which was described in the first section of this paper arose. A number of local shrines were set up. Now the movement for centralization in Deuteronomy reflects an attempt by the prophet Samuel to unite the nation.[46] Driver supports the idea that centralization came with the establishment of the monarchy without referring back to a time during the wilderness wandering when there had been only one sanctuary.[47] Robertson, whose position was quite similar to that of Johnston, saw that the centralization as achieved by Samuel was short-lived. "With the disruption of

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[45]Kaufmann, p. 173.

[46]Johnston, p. 20.

[47]Driver, p. 85.

the kingdom the centralization of worship for 'all Israel' at Jerusalem ceased to have any meaning."[48] The situation remained one of many shrines throughout the time of the divided kingdom.

> The years slipped past, and the reunion of "all Israel," the sine qua non for the reintroduction of the Torah, was still on the horizon. Then in 721 Samaria fell. . . . It was the first real opportunity for a reunion. . . . Hezekiah was quick to take action, and although he had no jurisdiction over the North, he sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the passover unto the Lord, the God of Israel (II Chr. 30:1).[49]

Once again, however, the centralization was not complete. Nicholson has recently observed, "It is of course true that Hezekiah's innovation was not entirely successful; the high places flourished once again under Manasseh."[50] Josiah is the king with whom centralization is most often associated. And once again it was not complete nor very long-lasting. Although Canaanite and Assyrian practices were to a great extent removed by Josiah, yet Ezekiel 8-11 shows that they were all back again within a few years. "Drastic reforms do not at once win universal recognition."[51] This does not mean that the law of centralization was not in existence at the

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[48]Robertson, "Temple and Torah," p. 197.

[49]Ibid., p. 199.

[50]Nicholson, p. 386.

[51]Lewis Bayles Paton, "The Case for the Post-exilic Origin of Deuteronomy," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLVII (1928), p. 335.

time of Josiah.[52]

There were some, however, who had the position that centralization did not take place until after the exile and that Deuteronomy, whose program is centralization, did not even appear in this form until the post-exilic period. Hölscher was an early advocate of this view.

> The idealistic character of the Deuteronomic legislation shows that it did not originate in the pre-exilic kingdom of Judah, but in a time after the fall of Jerusalem. The Deuteronomic law did not grow up organically out of the old political and social life, but is an ideal program that with its bold demands seeks to master and transform reality.[53]

Berry is a more recent advocate of the late date of Deuteronomy.

> My position is that the code D was written at this time, that is, about 520, or, more probably, a few years later, as a result of the new movement in the national life. A code is quite as likely to be the result of new conditions as to be the cause of them.[54]

Paton reacts against those who hold this view that "centralization of sacrifice at Jerusalem did not exist before the exile; consequently, Deuteronomy's demand for centralization cannot be pre-exilic."[55] This is not to say that centralization was not important in the post-exilic age. On the contrary, it was a most important movement. But it had its roots in the pre-exilic period.

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[52] Ibid., p. 336.

[53] Quoted in Paton, p. 349.

[54] George Ricker Berry, "The Date of Deuteronomy," Journal of Biblical Literature, LIX (1940), p. 135.

[55] Paton, p. 345.

> It is inconceivable that so difficult a program as centralization could have been attempted in post-exilic times, unless it had been inherited from pre-exilic times. Post-exilic Judaism was not characterized by originality, but by the desire to discover and to reproduce the customs of the forefathers. It is contrary to all analogy to suppose that so colossal an innovation as the limitation of the cult to Jerusalem was the creation of the post-exilic community in Palestine, or of the exiles in Babylonia; and it is safe to say that the idea would never have entered into anybody's head but for the existence of this requirement in an authoritative pre-exilic book such as Deuteronomy.
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> Difficult as centralization of the cult was, nevertheless it was observed by the Jews during the entire post-exilic period down to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.[56]

The centralization of the Passover was the only feature which did not triumph in post-exilic Judaism.[57]

A number of other scholars have seen that Deuteronomy had influence both on the pre-exilic nation of Judah and also on the quite different situation which existed after the return from exile. Bewer felt that it was aimed primarily at an earlier period, but that was not all.

> D did influence the later development, profoundly, and especially the centralization of the cult which became an accepted fact after the exile. Far from falling aside as a working system after its time had ended, it really continued in force all along, as the Deuteronomic historians and editors, post-exilic prophets like Malachi, and the later prayers witness.[58]

Pedersen also sees Deuteronomy arising out of the seventh century situation, but for him the real significance came in

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[56] Ibid., p. 355.

[57] Ibid., p. 339.

[58] Bewer, p. 318.

the post-exilic period. "From that time the difference between the Israelite and the foreign element acquired its absolute character."[59]

> Whatever the historical relation between Deuteronomy and the reform of Josiah, the law is an independent expression of the greatest importance for the reform movement. It denotes its climax, because it demands the extermination of everything that conflicts with the recognition of Yahweh as the only God, and especially of all worship other than that offered to him on Zion. In this respect it became decisive for post-exilic times, and its whole spirit led directly to Judaism.[60]

The reform program of Josiah became a pattern for the exiles who had to live their lives in a profane environment.[61] As Kaufmann observes,

> The ultimate implication of the Deuteronomic reform was a new, popular cult without temple, sacrifice, and priest; this, however, could become clear only after the Exile.[62]

It is here that we begin to see the aspect of centralization that may be referred to as secularization.

Centralization as Secularization

In this section we shall examine some of the programs of the Deuteronomic reform which amount to a radical transformation of the religion of Israel. Many have seen this as the

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[59]Johs. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), III-IV, 585.

[60]Ibid., p. 588.

[61]Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, translated from the German by D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), I, 83.

[62]Kaufmann, p. 290.

real effect of this legislation. Even Brinker who places Deuteronomy at an early date admits that changes in religious ideas and practices were intended. It was a maturing of the things which had evolved from an early state.[63] For von Rad the Deuteronomic commandments lay down a new style of cultus and new way of life for the radically altered circumstances of the Settlement.[64]

This radically new cult style and way of life may also be properly described as secularization in several of its aspects. The immediate and most far reaching result of centralization was to empty the daily religious life of the people at large of all priestly influences.[65] This is indeed a form of secularization as Cox has described it. The life of the country population in particular was profoundly changed by the centralization of the cult.[66] Moshe Weinfeld has most completely dealt with this aspect of centralization.[67]

> Deuteronomy constitutes a great turning point in the religion and culture of Israel. The three foundations of Israelite religion: faith, the cult, and the law, have been refined in Deuteronomy and made more abstract, apparently through the inspiration of the scribes who left

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[63]Brinker, p. 37.

[64]Gerhard von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, translated from the German by E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 91.

[65]Kaufmann, p. 289.

[66]von Rad, Commentary, p. 89.

[67]Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy--the Present State of Inquiry," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXXVI (1967), pp. 249-263.

their impress upon the book.[68]

We shall follow the breakdown of Weinfeld in examining the specific aspects of secularization promoted by Deuteronomy's cult centralization program.

1. We will first look at changes brought about in the faith of Israel by the centralization. Weinfeld states,

> The abolition of the high places and provincial sanctuaries led to the purification of the cult from its syncretistic elements and, moreover, severed the daily religious life of the Israelite from its ties to the cultus and paved the way for abstract religious worship dominated by a book and liturgy of torah. The Israelite religion thus underwent a profound transmutation: a cultic religion had been transformed into a religion of a book.[69]

This was indeed a profound change in the religion of the people. It also involved a new understanding of the concept of God.

In the early days of Israel the cultic life had provided a place where the individual could find a place of supernatural shelter.[70] This was because Yahweh dwelt at the shrine. Indeed, for Robertson that concept remained even after centralization. It was just that Yahweh lived at only one shrine.[71] But most other scholars see the aim of the Deuteronomic legis-

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[68] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

[69] Ibid., p. 258.

[70] Hals, p. 40.

[71] Robertson, "Temple and Torah," p. 189.

lation as the changing of this concept. It promotes a desacralized world in which God could be found everywhere, not just in special places.[72] This means a new and more abstract conception of the Divinity. Now the sanctuary was chosen by God to cause his name to dwell there. The purpose was "to repudiate the notion propagated by the priestly-conservative circles that the sanctuary is the domicile of God. . . . God dwells in heaven and is only represented by the temple to which he has given his name."[73]

While it has been pointed out that often the idea of name in ancient times was almost equated with the person, that view seems to be rejected here. Wright states,

> While the name in ancient thought was a mere surrogate for the being or object it designated, and while in the case of deity or temple it was invested with particular holiness, nevertheless it is clear that the Deuteronomic use of the name was a polemic reaction against all attempts to localize God's being.[74]

Eichrodt amplifies this understanding:

> The Name, therefore, now acquires a more independent function as the representative of the transcendant God, by means of which he assures men of his nearness and the continuing efficacy of his power, while at the same time warning them that his exalted sovereignty will not tolerate any sort of restriction at the hands of man's egoistic desires. In this way, by a bold development of the rudimentary ideas already available, a form of manifestation was arrived at in which Yahweh himself was active, but within the limits which he himself desired, and

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[72]Hals, p. 41.

[73]Weinfeld, p. 258.

[74]Wright, pp. 411-412.

which could be spoken of in hypostatic language.[75] There is a polemical element here. The aim is to correct the theological idea that Yahweh is present at the shrine himself. Rather his name is present as the guarantee of his will to save.[76] The temple is important because it bears this name, not because God lives there.[77] Clements sees this as an attack on the Zion theology, denying that Mount Zion is Yahweh's chosen dwelling-place in the old mythico-cultic sense.[78] Von Rad[79] and Cross[80] claim that the position advanced is that Yahweh dwells in heaven and his name dwells on earth in the sanctuary. It is a protest against popular conceptions of the actual presence of Yahweh at the sanctuary. Kaufmann sees it as a matter of election.

> Cultic sanctity is not to be found anywhere and everywhere, not even in places that were consecrated by an anciety theophany, but only in the place that would be chosen by Yahweh in the future.[81]

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[75]Walter Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, translated from the German by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1967), II, 41-42.

[76]von Rad, Studies, pp. 38-39.

[77]G. Ernest Wright, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East," The Biblical Archaeologist, VII (December, 1944), pp. 75-76.

[78]Clements, p. 304.

[79]von Rad, Commentary, p. 90.

[80]Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach," The Biblical Archaeologist, X (September, 1947), p. 68.

[81]Kaufmann, p. 290.

This new conception of the Divinity also meant a reinterpretation of the significance of the Ark of the Covenant. According to early popular conception it was the seat of the Divinity, but if his dwelling is no longer on earth, the Ark becomes nothing more than a depository in which the tables of the covenant are laid.[82]

> Whilst Deuteronomy lays no very great stress upon the significance of the ark, it makes perfectly explicit what it thought about it. It was simply a box for keeping the tablets of the law, the Ten Words, and there is not one word or hint that it had anything to do with the cherubim-throne of Yahweh, or that in any fashion whatsoever it symbolized or represented his presence.[83]

Here we have an obvious "demythologizing" and rationalizing of the old view.[84]

2. The cult, the laws and institutions with a sacro-ritualistic character, also underwent a pronounced change in the legislation of Deuteronomy. Von Rad describes the situation:

> the people who lived outside Jerusalem were at one fell swoop deprived of their little sanctuaries. Attention has often been drawn to the hardships involved in this measure. It killed off much of the old cultic usage. Through it the life of the peasant population, which up to then had been sheltered by many sacral institutions, was suddenly thrust out into the dimension of the secular. It cannot be said that Deuteronomy was unaware of the problems which this readjustment raised, for a great part of what it tries to do is precisely to give men a helping hand in their now secularized lives by regulat-

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[82] Weinfeld, p. 258.

[83] Clements, p. 302.

[84] von Rad, Studies, p. 40.

ing and guiding them.[85]

The judiciary is one area where secularization took place. By virtue of its sanctuary or high place, nearly every Israelite town was regarded as, in a measure, holy.[86] Provincial sanctuaries also performed judicial functions. Now with the abolition of the sacral sites there was a judicial vacuum which the law was designed to fill by appointing state judges in every city.[87] Secular juctices were to act in all matters of minor importance. In difficult matters reference was to be made to the central sanctuary.[88]

Part of the judicial system affected by centralization was the concept of cities of asylum. Weinfeld sees complete secularization here. These cities were previously temple cities which provided asylum as sacral places. Now they were to become secular cities with the exclusive function of protecting the manslayer from blood vengeance.[89] While von Rad admits changes were indeed necessitated because the altar of Yahweh was now too far away,[90] he questions whether it was a complete and sudden secularization.[91]

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[85] von Rad, Theology, II, 344.

[86] Kaufmann, p. 176.

[87] Weinfeld, p. 259.

[88] Brinker, p. 209.

[89] Weinfeld, p. 259.

[90] von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, p. 255.

[91] von Rad, Commentary, p. 129.

The military is another area affected by secularization according to Weinfeld. Previously subject to severe sacral discipline along with the taboo concept of herem, it was now rationalized and given an educational motive.[92] With this view von Rad seems to disagree. He does admit that here, too, there was significant change, especially in greater humaneness.[93] However, he sees secularization as having come more because of the establishment of the monarchy. There was no longer a charismatic leader and the army became more and more mercenary in character. After the time of David the old sacral form of warfare apparently broke down "under the impact of rational and tactical, that is, secular, considerations."[94] But the effect of Deuteronomy was to re-introduce the Holy War which had fallen victim to "dissolution and secularization with the emergence of the mercenary army in the period of the kings."[95] Holy War in Deuteronomy is "not secular, but cultic."[96] It is thus clear that secularization was not the purpose of Deuteronomy.

Weinfeld also describes several changes brought about by Deuteronomy in the area of the sabbath and holy seasons.

> The sabbath is disassociated from its mythical origin and is given an historico-religious and social rationale. It

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[92] Weinfeld, p. 259.

[93] von Rad, Theology, I, 74.

[94] von Rad, Studies, p. 46.

[95] Ibid., p. 61.

[96] Ibid., p. 45.

> is not God's primeval rest from his creative labors which serves as the basis of the sabbath law, but man's rest and the rest of his slave and bondwoman (Deut. 5:14). God ordained the sabbath rest not because he ceased from his labors on the seventh day of creation (Exod. 20:11) but because he freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:15); thus they must permit their servants to rest from their daily toil.[97]

He also saw the festivals and holy seasons freed from their mythico-ritual setting. The paschal sacrifice becomes a communal meal offered at the central sanctuary. The other festivals were reestablished on the exclusive basis of ceremonial rejoicing and votive offerings. All the rituals dependent on provincial sanctuaries are ignored. Sacral donations assume an anthropocentric character. The new recipients are the donors themselves and the indigent elements of Israelite society.[98] Brinker also notes that in Deuteronomy the offerings are "predominantly, if not solely, meals of communion. They are of a joyous nature. 'To rejoice before Yahweh' is the term applied for the bringing of sacrifice."[99]

A special area of consideration in this regard is the slaughter of animals. "By limiting all animal sacrifice to the single, central sanctuary Deuteronomy is forced to reduce the local slaughter of animals to a secular matter."[100] Before Deuteronomy animal food scarcely entered into the diet of the

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[97] Weinfeld, p. 259.

[98] Ibid., pp. 259-261.

[99] Brinker, p. 131.

[100] Hals, p. 42.

poorer section of the population.[101] Previously beef, mutton and goat's flesh could only be eaten when the animal had been ceremonially killed. "But now the flesh was secularized, and men were free to eat it when and where they would, only taking care that the blood of the animal was drained on the ground."[102] This pouring of the blood on the ground amounts to a profanation of the slaughtering and marks a sharp distinction between sacrifice and slaughter. This is the new feature of Deuteronomy.[103] That sacrifice was formerly identified with slaughter is evident from the fact that the same verb, zābhah, was used for both acts. Now since the eating of meat at home is no longer to be a holy rite, it is unnecessary for the participants to be ceremonially clean.[104]

3. The third area of secularization, the law, will be discussed in a general way. This particular area could profit from a very detailed study of the legal code of Deuteronomy, item by item, in order to gain a better understanding of how this approach compares or contrasts with that of Exodus. Weinfeld sees that the laws governing human relations appear

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[101] R. H. Kennett, Ancient Hebrew Social Life and Custom as Indicated in Law Narrative and Metaphor (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 38.

[102] W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937), p. 255.

[103] Pedersen, p. 340.

[104] Wright, "Deuteronomy," p. 415.

in the book of Deuteronomy in a more humane light than their analogies in earlier sources. It marks the transition from the narrow casuistic and statutory law corpus to the humanistic law code. The purpose of the book was not to produce "a civil lawbook like the book of the covenant, treating of pecuniary matters, but to set forth a code of laws securing the protection of the individual and particularly of those persons in need of protection."[105] In another article Weinfeld described the aim of Deuteronomy as the instruction of the people in humanism. The law serves to concretize the moral and humanistic principles which are the educational goals of the book. He finds the humanist outlook even in the ritual laws. Wherever the centralization is prescribed, the inclusion of the Levites, the poor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow in the rejoicing before God is included. These groups are to be included in the ceremonial meals. It almost gives the impression that the chief purpose of the sacrifice is to aid these destitute. The author seems to be unconcerned with offerings wholly consecrated to God; he emphasizes those which extend benefits to those without social standing.[106] Shires and Parker also note that human need, rather than "superstitious and even religious grounds," is made the basis for the triennial offering at the temple. This humanitarianism is

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[105]Weinfeld, p. 261.

[106]Moshe Weinfeld, "The Origin of the Humanism in Deuteronomy," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXX (1961), pp. 242-244.

so striking because "the author could so frequently have appealed not to brotherly love but to ritualistic requirements."[107] The provision of cities of asylum already referred to also is seen to have a humanitarian purpose. Greenberg interprets these provisions to be an attempt to "control vengeance by making it possible for public justice to intervene between the slayer and the avenger."[108] In this humanitarian emphasis in the law of Deuteronomy we can see, with von Rad, that "a great part of what it seeks to do in its paraeneses serves the purpose of giving the people a guiding hand for their life out in the exposedness of the secular world." The drastic secularization which came through the centralization served the life of the people in the post-exilic period.[109]

The Question of Implications

It certainly seems clear from the foregoing that secularization was part of the centralization of the cult in Deuteronomy. There is a new understanding of God in which he is more transcendant. Thus all the things once associated with his presence--e.g., the Ark--take on new significance. The cult is radically transformed. Rural priests, once associated with the local shrines now had primarily teaching functions. The

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[107] Shires and Parker, pp. 425-426.

[108] Moshe Greenberg, "The Biblical Conception of Asylum," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXVIII (1959), p. 125.

[109] von Rad, Theology, I, 80.

daily life of the people was no longer so closely connected with the cult. Slaughter was permitted with no cultic significance; the judiciary and cities of asylum became secular institutions, and the sabbath and holy seasons had a more communal and humanitarian cast, as did the entire system of laws.

There are several areas that need further study, however. It would be good to find reactions to the position of Weinfeld. There do not appear to be any yet. If his views are upheld, then it would be necessary to take more seriously and study more carefully the question of the age for which this law was intended. Kennett[110] suggests that this legislation represents a compromise between the radical reforms wanted by the great prophets and the popular prophets who opposed change. If so, did Deuteronomy then follow and superceed the prophets in such a way that they should be read only in its light, or should Deuteronomy be read only in the light of the prophets? In his letter to the exiles Jeremiah mentions only secular activities. Other of his statements seem to stand in radical opposition to the cult. How does he fit into the picture of Deuteronomy here drawn?

The matter of the implications for Christianity in this understanding of Deuteronomy has not really been examined. Does Christianity follow in the Deuteronomic tradition, or is there a radical break? Only brief and passing references were

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[110]R. H. Kennett, Deuteronomy and the Decalog (Cambridge: University Press, 1920), p. 15.

found. Wright suggests that the concept of Divinity in Deuteronomy "may be a clearer witness to truth than some modern conceptions of churches as 'houses of God.'"[111] What of the concept of God? How do the concepts of the presence of Christ among the gathered believers and in the Eucharist and the work of the Holy Spirit fit with the Deuteronomic picture? Weinfeld does ask, "If it were not for the abolition of the high places, who knows whether monotheistic believers might not be still offering sacrifices and pouring libations?"[112] Is his suggestion valid? Paton maintains, "The ideal that religion is righteousness, not ritual, is not yet accepted even in modern Judaism and in Christianity; . . ."[113] This is supposedly in harmony with the view that Deuteronomy is a compromise between radical and conservative prophets. Is this true, either of Deuteronomy or of Christianity? How might Deuteronomic understandings of the cult and the humanitarian purpose of the law aid Christian understanding? None of these questions are really touched upon by the sources consulted, but they are certainly areas where further study holds promise of great benefits.

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[111] Wright, "Significance of the Temple," p. 76.

[112] Weinfeld, "Present State of Inquiry," p. 258.

[113] Paton, p. 353.

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