

**CALUM
CARMICHAEL**

**THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS**

THE NINTH SACKS LECTURE

**OXFORD CENTRE FOR
POSTGRADUATE HEBREW STUDIES
1983**

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*The Ninth Sacks Lecture
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To attempt to say something novel about the ten commandments might seem rather bold, but to go further and present a radically new view about their origin is to invite immediate scepticism. A philosopher friend in Oxford, John Kenyon, has just completed a book on David Hume and the problem of induction. His wife, Vanessa, has provided a most apt title for it, *Scepticism Within Reason*. I hope this stance will be the one taken in assessing my thesis.¹ I might just add that any evaluation will turn on a rigorous examination of the textual evidence. The words of a wife of a Professor of Celtic languages in Glasgow University, in proffering advice to his students, are very much to the point — ‘Text before Tosh’.

What prompted me to look anew at them was the one about the sabbath day in the version in Ex 20 : 8-11. A link is drawn between remembering to keep it apart and what God did at the creation of the world. In six days he accomplished his work and on the seventh he rested. Consequently, we are informed, he blessed this day and hallowed it. Critical scholarship has judged the link not to be original. The provision of a reason for observing the commandment, the example of God at creation, is held to be an addition to it. The assumption is not overly speculative. After all, the rule about the institution in the Deuteronomic version (Deut 5 : 12) cites a different reason, the memory of the events of the exodus, for observing it. The assumption is nonetheless incorrect.² I shall argue that once a certain process of rule-making in biblical antiquity is understood (it is, of course, not an exclusive one), the linking of a rule to a narrative tradition about the exodus or about the beginnings of things is, explicitly or implicitly, an original feature of its formulation. Indeed my claim is this: the ten commandments were first presented as the outcome of reflection upon an event of the exodus and those of creation.³ A sophisticated literary exercise, one

¹ It has to be stated that any outsider choosing to exercise his native intelligence on conventional theories about the decalogue would be bewildered by the array of expansions and abbreviations that are supposed to surround some assumed original form of it. For these theories see J. J. Stamm and M. E. Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research* (London, 1967) 18–20, and E. Nielsen, *The Ten Commandments in New Perspective* (London, 1968) 78–86.

² An elementary consideration is easily overlooked: a requirement to act positively (keeping the sabbath, honouring parents) is much more in need of an explicit reason for obeying it than is a prohibition not to do something.

³ Note how they have the form not simply of a series but also of a narrative: ‘I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out For in six days . . .’ etc.

that might be compared to the formation of proverbs from stories, historical incidents and the like,⁴ explains how they came to exist. They are not the product, in any very illuminating sense, of a development in the history of law.

This last point is worth dwelling on. It makes no sense to think that at some historical moment, say, in the age of Moses, rules against murder, adultery and stealing originated; as if at that point in time the realisation first arose that there was a need for them. It is impossible to imagine any set of human circumstances at any time in the history of mankind when such rules were not known. From the perspective of legal history there is no need to state them in this brief, unembellished form. A characteristic feature of early law codes, for example, the Roman Twelve Tables and the Bible's Book of the Covenant, is the omission of some of the most fundamental rules of law. The reason is that, as David Daube puts it, 'The author is not motivated to lay down what no one questions'.⁵ Certain rules can be regarded as so well understood that there is no need to commit them to writing in the basic form that we find in the ten commandments. Only problems about aspects of murder (intentionality, for example), adultery (for example, the appropriate penalties), and stealing (for example, where the object is no longer in the thief's possession) require written expression because of the need to clarify doubts and introduce reforms. We cannot examine the ten commandments in the way in which we do other early legal documents. We have to puzzle over what motivated a lawgiver to express them in the form in which we find them. They, for example, the three just cited, are despite appearances surely not an exercise in banality. An extraordinary feature in regard to their original formulation should not surprise us.

The feature in question is where a law is formulated, not in response to some existing social or religious need (although this consideration need not be excluded), but in response to an issue that arises from the scrutiny of written traditions. An example of the kind of relationship between law and narrative that I am suggesting is provided by the rules about killing men and animals which are laid down in the context of the flood story (Gen

⁴ For a comparison between this method of formulating rules and the origin of many proverbs, see C. M. Carmichael, 'Forbidden Mixtures', *VT* (forthcoming, 1982).

⁵ 'The Self-Understood in Legal History', *Juridical Review*, 18 (1973) 127.

9 : 3-6).⁶ An integral link between them and the story can be demonstrated. The formulation of the rule about keeping the sabbath is not to be divorced from the lawgiver's reflection upon the story of creation in Gen 1-2 : 3. The two belong together. Note that the lawgiver takes the existence of the sabbath for granted: 'Remember the sabbath day'. What its status was when he drafted his rule is difficult to determine. I shall return both to its meaning in the context of the ten commandments and, more fundamentally, to the reason why it finds a place there at all.

The command to honour parents can also be linked to the lawgiver's interest in first things as they are recounted in the early narratives in the book of Genesis. An obvious question to ask is why this rule follows the one about the sabbath. Two factors at least are noteworthy. First, the sabbath command focuses on the recognition and honour that are to be accorded to the deity because he instituted the sabbath rest at the time of creation.⁷ The carrying over of the notion of honour into the following commandment is therefore understandable. Secondly, it is all the more so if the lawgiver is reflecting upon the beginning of things. God brought the first man and woman into existence: a son, the one who is addressed in this law about honouring parents, owes his origin to them. The first son to be born was Cain. Abel was next. Already in the account of Cain's birth God's participation in it is cited: 'I have produced (*qānāh*) a man with Yahweh' (Gen 4 : 2). Indeed his name, Cain, is supposed to remind one of this link.⁸ In Gen 5 : 1-3 Adam's procreative activity is described in the same terms as God's creating Adam. The association between the first human births and creation itself makes the juxtaposition of the two rules more intelligible.⁹

Cain slew Abel. His doing so is a major feature of the narrative. In the wider context of the concern with creation his action can be viewed as a

⁶ See C. M. Carmichael, 'A Time for War and a Time for Peace: The Influence of the Distinction upon some Legal and Literary Material', in *Studies in Jewish Legal History in Honour of David Daube*, ed. B. S. Jackson, *JJS* 25 (1974) 60-63.

⁷ This consideration applies to both versions of the rule. For the significance of the Deuteronomic reference to the deliverance from the Egyptian oppression in relation to the institution of the sabbath at creation, see later discussion.

⁸ It is irrelevant that this derivation is wrong. The biblical writer's view is what matters.

⁹ Jewish tradition (*Mekhilta de-R. Simeon bar Yohai* to Ex 20 : 12) noted the common interest in creation, in particular, that human beings in producing children

violation of God's work of creation and in particular his own parents' participation in it. His dishonouring them in this way has prompted the formulation of the rule about honouring a father and a mother. That each of them is mentioned is itself perhaps an indication that something as fundamental as procreation has been in mind. A reference to honouring a father without any corresponding one to a mother, as in Mal 1 : 6, would not occasion much surprise in the light of the typical concentration upon males in biblical material. A son is addressed in this law, not a daughter. It may well be that like the rules in Deut 12 : 12 and 12 : 18 the male 'thou' form includes the female. It is, however, pertinent to point out that the restriction to a son can be explained on the basis of the lawgiver's focus upon Cain. The story itself does not bring out the fact of his dishonouring them. It is, however, precisely this mode of deriving a topic from a narrative that inspires the construction of the rule and, we shall see, all the others too.

The commandment to honour parents cites a reason for observing it: 'That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee'. We might well ask what is the connection between honouring parents and living long upon the land (*'ādāmāh*). It is not an obvious one. Something like, 'Honour thy parents that thy neighbours and thine own children may honour thee', would be more readily intelligible. The connection becomes clearer once we recall the result of Cain's deed — he was no longer able to live upon the land (*'ādāmāh*). His relationship to it was of a fundamental kind — he was a tiller of the ground (*'ādāmāh*) — and hence the consequence of his destroying what his parents had created was very real for him. His brother's blood cried out from the ground which no longer yielded its strength. In the commandment God, so we are to imagine, is thought of as reflecting upon Cain's deed and its consequence and drawing out a rule that will serve the Israelites in their tie to the earth. The rule and the reason for observing it are, we might stress, rooted in the nature of the created order as laid out in the Genesis narrative. A father and a mother produce a life and that life in turn is sustained by what comes from the earth, the fruit of the ground. There is a recognition that these sources of life are inter-related, that a simultaneous regard for each is required.

In the Deuteronomic version the reason why the commandment should participated in it. The rule in Lev 19 : 3, to fear one's mother and father and keep God's sabbath, may well reflect a similar combination of interests. Note too Isa 45 : 9, 10.

be kept has changed to the two-fold prospect of prolonging one's days and doing well upon the land. This version still has Cain in mind and has simply separated out the two aspects of his problem after he had killed Abel. He was denied access to the ground and he lived in fear of his life being cut short. The verb *yātab*, 'to do well', in the motive clause attached to the commandment, is the same as in God's counsel to Cain when he became angry that his sacrifice had not been accepted but his brother's had (Gen 4:7). His failure to heed that counsel led to his removal from the land. We do not learn how long Cain lived. It may be significant that only in regard to his brother Seth's genealogical line do we find life spans indicated. For example, Methuselah's was nine hundred and sixty nine years (Gen 5:27). There is none listed for Cain and his descendants.¹⁰ The enormous stretches of time characteristic of Seth's line reflect the notion that wisdom was very great because evil was minimal. In Genesis increasing wickedness caused the deity to impose a limit of one hundred and twenty years upon the human life span (Gen 6:3). Even then only those like Moses who were supreme in wisdom would attain such a term (Deut 34:7, 9). On this view Cain could not have lived long because of his misdeed and his failure to exercise proper discrimination, the latter stemming from his anger which is so opposed to dealing wisely according to the sages (Eccles 7:9).

The prohibition, 'Thou shall not kill', seems so arbitrarily placed after the positive commandment to honour a father and a mother. It is, if we isolate the formulation of the ten commandments from their narrative background. Once it is seen that underlying the command to honour parents is reflection upon Cain's killing of Abel in the wider context of a father and mother's procreative activity, an immediately following statement prohibiting the act of killing occasions no surprise. To indicate how closely the two rules are to each other we can state the matter as follows: if a son honours his parents he will live long upon the land, unlike Cain who was driven from it because he had spilled his brother's blood upon it. Cain violated creation itself by killing Abel. That is why the ground no longer yielded its strength to him and he was forced to become a fugitive and a wanderer upon the earth. As such he now became a potential victim of violence himself, and the deity had to put a mark upon him to protect him. The prohibition against killing has been prompted by the lawgiver's consideration of the slaying of Abel and its aftermath. The deity's move to protect Cain from being killed himself is manifestly an indication that he is

¹⁰ On the complex problem of the overlapping nature of the Cainite and Sethite genealogical lists, see J. Skinner, *Genesis ICC* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1930) 138–39.

against such arbitrary, indiscriminate killing. In the context of the ten commandments we are to think of the prohibition as issuing from the deity's own reflection upon the experience of the first human beings and his seeing the occasion for an explicit statement on the subject.¹¹

A prohibition of adultery appears quite out of place after a prohibition of murder. Its presentation at this point, however, is readily explained by the process of rule-making that we are describing. The focus upon Adam and Eve's son, Cain, is continued and adultery itself is brought into the context of creation. Cain and Abel were the first sons of the first human couple. Cain was the first son to marry and to produce a son himself (Gen 4:17). This information is related just after the account of his slaughter of Abel and its consequences. The lawgiver's interest in the human link with creation, that is, in procreation, is sustained because of this reference to the next generation. His focus, however, is upon that part of procreation that precedes birth, upon conjugal union. Just as he has been concerned with the violation of creation in regard to the destruction of human offspring, so now he turns to what constitutes a violation of conjugal union, adultery. He was surely encouraged to pursue this topic because already in the Genesis narrative there had been the first ever reflection upon the nature of marriage. After Eve was created from Adam's rib there is the statement about a son's leaving his father and mother in order to marry: 'And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh' (Gen 2:23, 24). The commandment to honour a father and a mother had focused, we recall, upon the fundamental fact that he owed his origin to them. It is noteworthy that in the Genesis story itself we have the kind of reflection upon social relations, in this instance the coming together of a man and a woman, that is characteristic of the thinking that has led to the presentation of the ten commandments. What the lawgiver has done is to reflect in turn upon the implication of this statement about the nature of conjugal union.

A prohibition of adultery presupposes the institution of marriage. If Gen 2:24 has been under scrutiny, it is easy to see how its positive statement

¹¹ The verb *hārag* is used in describing the concrete act of Cain's killing Abel (Gen 4:8). In Gen 4:15 *nākāh* (*Hiph.*) is used in reference to someone's coming upon the fugitive Cain and killing him. As we would expect, a term (*rāṣaḥ*) that conveys the wrongfulness of the act is used in the rule.

about the nature of marriage would readily raise the negative consideration that no man should interfere in such a union.¹² We can also see why adultery is thought of as an interference with the created order. A man and a woman should become one flesh because this unity is somehow an aspect of creation itself. A man who enters another's union by joining himself to the other's wife is offending against what God has ordained at the beginning of the world. Cain was flesh of his mother's flesh in being born of Eve. There is a sense in which before he left her womb a male and a female were one flesh. Having left and grown up he desired to become one flesh again with a woman not his mother. Cain had offended against creation by destroying his brother and he in turn lived in fear of being destroyed. The deity successfully protected him. He married and produced a son himself. In reviewing the story the lawgiver could have raised, although there is no need to press the point, the hypothetical issue that not just Cain's life but his marriage too might require protection from another man's interference. In response he again saw why a prohibition against adultery was necessary.¹³

If consideration of the statement in Gen 2:24 has been the main factor behind the presentation of the rule about adultery, the immediately following account about the taking of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil has inspired the setting down of the next rule, 'Thou shalt not steal'. From the deity's point of view, Eve's action, subsequently shared by Adam, constituted a wrongful taking, the first ever. The deity, thinking ahead, so to speak, of future human conduct, sees the need to cite a rule against taking what belongs to another, where there is not lacking the information that the object is denied to the one desiring it.

In the Genesis story the deity's response to the taking of the fruit did not concentrate on the fact that it had been forbidden. The focus, in other

¹² Rabbinic exegesis (*Bab. San.* 58a) saw in the statement, 'He shall cleave to his wife', a prohibition of adultery.

The question can be raised why adultery is the only sexual offence included in the decalogue. The link with the statement in Gen 2:23, 24 provides an answer. The view that adultery was considered the most serious sexual offence, and hence its inclusion, assumes too much. The rule is addressed to the male and this limitation could also be on account of the link with the Genesis story. In other contexts the female can be the subject of the verb *nā'ap* (e.g. Lev 20:10, Hos 4:13, 14, Prov 30:20).

¹³ David Daube has demonstrated the extent to which both in the New Testament and in Rabbinic sources the prohibition of adultery was linked to the interpretation of Gen 2:24. See his *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1956) 71–86.

words, is not upon the offence of stealing. Instead it is upon the new state of enlightenment in which Adam and Eve find themselves, in particular, the awareness of their nakedness. If we think of the commandments as issuing from the deity's reflection upon his experience with the first human beings and his anticipation of future human conduct, we can see that a prohibition going beyond a specific injunction not to take of something is required. The notion of stealing needs to be brought out. Eve and Adam did not have the knowledge of this evil. Their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, a capacity enjoyed by all later human beings, required that there should be an explicit instruction not to steal. Just as there was no explicit condemnation of Cain's killing of Abel, so too there is none for Eve and Adam's stealing of the fruit.¹⁴

The deity's enquiring whether Adam had eaten of the tree elicited a response in which Adam testified against Eve, and Eve in turn testified against the serpent. There was no false information about themselves, that is, they did not deny that they had eaten the forbidden fruit, but they did try to switch responsibility for their deed to the other. This diverting of attention to another with a view to evading blame for wrongdoing raises the prospect of a further kind of wrongdoing, namely, bearing false witness against someone. To be sure, in the story itself there is no false testimony against Eve and her point that the serpent had beguiled her hardly constitutes it either. The important point is that the topic readily presents itself, that we can see why a lawgiver would want to issue the prohibition, just after the one against stealing, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour', literally, 'respond as a false witness' (Ex 20 : 16). We must not forget that Adam and Eve's activity is viewed as foreshadowing future, more typical, human behaviour.

The prohibition, unlike the three preceding ones, is not the briefest of statements — 'Thou shalt not bear false witness'. If it did read this way the meaning would include both testifying falsely about one's own activities and lying about another's. Its specific, narrower focus upon the wrong done to one's fellow has to be accounted for.¹⁵ It is owing to the influence

¹⁴ The frequently accepted view of A. Alt that the prohibition not to steal originally had in mind the theft of a person is another example of an unjustified and rather desperate attempt to make the seriousness of the offence the major criterion in accounting for the rule's inclusion in the decalogue. See 'Das Verbot des Diebstahls im Dekalog', *Kleine Schriften I* (Munich, 1953) 333–40.

¹⁵ The common characterisation of the decalogue as concise and comprehensive receives no support from this prohibition.

of the story, to observing Adam and Eve's diversionary tactic and noting its potential mischief in a situation where testimony about an offence is being elicited. Lying in general is condemned in such passages as Jer 7:9 and Hos 4:2.

The Genesis story does not involve false witness as such, but points to the topic. In that it is only suggested, there is scope for formulating the matter differently. In the version that is presented in Deut 5:17 (20) a 'witness of emptiness' ('*ēd šāw'*), and not a 'false witness' ('*ēd šāqer*') as in Ex 20:16, is the reading. The Deuteronomic reference is in fact more accurately descriptive of Adam and Eve's testimony. His witness against her and hers against the serpent constituted a vain exercise because they were still admitting that they had eaten the fruit. An exploration of a narrative for legal and ethical purposes permits a measure of freedom in the formulation of a rule. This flexibility is an important factor in explaining the difference between the two versions of the decalogue.

The final commandment about coveting has caused scholars much trouble. Puzzling over why a mental state was the lawgiver's concern, they felt it necessary to argue that, like the preceding rules, an accomplished action must really be what was in mind. So linguistically they wanted, on a blinkered view of the evidence,¹⁶ to understand the verb *hāmad* to mean not just coveting itself but the carrying out of the corresponding action. This interpretation, which meant that they had another prohibition against stealing, forced them to conclude that the preceding one must refer to the theft of a man — kidnapping. Their entire position is untenable, but the initial puzzlement over why the rule concentrates on an emotion is surely justified.

A question that is also worth raising is why the objects of the coveting consist of another's house, wife, manservant, maidservant, ox and ass. If there has to be a rule against coveting, might we not expect a focus upon objects that enjoy high status in society, but which are judged not to be necessary for daily existence? For example, King Solomon's acquisition of silver, gold, horses, and many wives is warned against in Deut 17:16, 17.¹⁷

¹⁶ See the criticism of W. L. Moran, 'The Conclusion of the Decalogue', *CBQ* 29 (1967) 543–48, and of B. S. Jackson, 'Liability for Mere Intention in Early Jewish Law', in *Essays in Jewish Comparative Legal History* (Leiden, 1975) 203–13.

¹⁷ The verb *hāmad* 'to covet', along with forms of the noun, are commonly used in reference to precious things, for example, silver and gold (Deut 7:25, Josh 7:21, Ps 19:11[10], Ezr 8:27, Na 2:10[9]).

Illumination of both problems is to be found in the Genesis material. The two preceding prohibitions about stealing and bearing false witness have arisen from the lawgiver's reflection upon the taking of the fruit and the subsequent questioning by the deity as to what Adam, Eve and the serpent had done. Having related how each was punished, the story proceeds to its conclusion — which is about coveting that had to be controlled. The problem of coveting unaccompanied by its fulfilment is, in fact, the topic that presents itself, exactly as in the tenth commandment. Having desired the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then eaten it, the man and the woman are likely now, the deity fears, to desire the tree of life and eat of it. To prevent this happening he sent them out of the garden and threatened violence should an approach be made to it. Ineradicable human longing for life without death is, we are to believe, thereby brought under control.

A prohibition against coveting the tree of life is not to be expected. That problem had been taken care of. What the deity in issuing the ten commandments sees, however, is that coveting remains a permanent feature of the human condition. He therefore focuses on it in the context of the life that Adam is confronted with after the events in Eden. The new situation will entail his finding a place to live, his working hard to obtain a living from the ground, and his having to wear clothes. The purpose of the latter, the covering of nakedness, is that a constraint might be placed upon sexual desire. The eating of the fruit had led to an awareness of sexuality and an initial move by Adam and Eve to shield their nakedness. The rule against coveting specifically prohibits desire for another's wife. The inclusion of this prohibition can be explained on the basis of the lawgiver's contemplation of the significance to be attributed to the deity's act of clothing the first couple (Gen 3:21), an act that obviously has future human existence in mind. Nakedness was not shameful in the context of marriage, in a man's cleaving to his wife (Gen 2:24, 25), but the sexual desire that it betokened was to express itself within it and not outside in potential violation of another's marriage. Clothing is thought of as contributing some measure of control to such desire. An explicit prohibition is also seen to be helpful.

The tree of life was located in Eden where the man and the woman had the prospect of eating from it. Now that they have to live elsewhere the inclination to covet will remain but will be centered upon more mundane objects. In ordinary life, the one a descendant of Adam has to live, a house, not a garden, will be his residence. Instead of the unreal longing to live in the garden of Eden, there will be the desire for someone's house

that is better than his. His desire, moreover, is likely to extend to another's possessions where these are seen to offer a better lot in life than his own. In the rule prohibiting the coveting of the neighbour's house and his possessions, it is noteworthy that the latter consist of his work people and his work animals ('nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox nor his ass', Ex 20 : 17). Adam's life was not to be one of eternal ease but, on the contrary, dominated by work. In doing it he and his descendants were to experience hardship. In looking for relief they may well, it is perceived by the author of the tenth commandment, covet their neighbour's work people and animals, especially since anyone who possesses this help will be seen to be doing well in life. In a sense such a person will be enjoying a standard of living that is a substitute for the unattainable tree of life that was in Eden.

The Deuteronomic version adds the neighbour's field to the list of what is not to be coveted. This addition is again consistent with a lawmaker's devising his rule after he has pondered the story in Genesis. It relates how, instead of the abundant source of food from the garden, there was to be the prospect of thorns and thistles and the eating of the herb of the field (Gen 3 : 18). A man's field that offered more than this fare would be, so it is reckoned, a source of envy, a possession to be coveted.

As well as employing the verb *ḥāmad* 'to covet', the Deuteronomist also uses *'awāh* 'to desire'. Both these terms are found in Gen 3 : 6 — the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was desirable in Eve's eyes and to be coveted because it would confer wisdom. Such a description reveals deep reflection upon the nature of desire. The rule about coveting is the outcome of similar reflection.

I return to the initial pronouncements of the decalogue with a view to demonstrating that their formulation arises from the lawgiver's reflection upon the tradition about the golden calf in Exodus 32. They constitute a response to the problems posed by that incident which occurred while Moses was upon Mount Sinai. His delay in appearing to the people prompted them to request of Aaron that he make gods 'which shall go before us' (Ex 32 : 1). Receiving golden earrings from them, he produced a molten calf and they declared, 'These by thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt' (Ex 32 : 4). He built an altar before it and proclaimed the following day to be 'a feast to the Lord', that is, to the Israelite god, Yahweh.

The opening statement of the decalogue, 'I am Yahweh thy God which hast brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage', can be viewed as a response to the issue that is raised by the claim in Ex

32 : 4, 'These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt'.¹⁸ The people's assertion is judged to be wanting in an understanding of who the Israelite god is. His name, or rather his reputation, is considered to be of supreme significance, its having been acquired from his rescue of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt (Ex 6 : 2-8). The following statement in the decalogue, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me', expresses well a negative reaction to the call by the people for gods to go before them. In Exodus 32 these other gods do not appear to be, especially if we take Aaron's statement in vs. 5 seriously, substitutes for Yahweh, and hence the issue, superficially at least, shows up as one of precedence — no other gods before him.¹⁹ The use of the first person by the deity in his prohibition is likewise explained by reference to the narrative in that he is directly involved in the proceedings. 'Before me' translates the literal 'before my face', which is appropriate in that God looked upon what the people and Aaron had done. The complicated attempts to make sense of this phrase are not necessary in the light of this background.

If we pay attention to the biblical sequence of events, the deity had already spoken his words on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20) before the events described in Exodus 32 took place. From our critical stance it is difficult to treat Exodus 32 at historical face value. If we are to suppose that Aaron and the people had already been given the commandments, it is most improbable that having just heard them they should immediately have proceeded to commit their offence. We are dealing rather with a sophisticated process in which statements, in the form of divine pronouncements, encapsulate judgments upon events in Israel's history. From this perspective the narrative of Exodus 32 pre-dates the formulation of the commandments. In attributing them to the deity the lawmaker reverses time and the offence of Aaron and the people is anticipated. The parallel to this procedure is found in the Deuteronomic laws. They are attributed to

¹⁸ The phrase, 'the house of bondage', is a characteristically Deuteronomic one, see S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* ICC (3rd edn, Edinburgh, 1902) lxxix. So too is the use of the verb *yāšā'* and not *'ālāh* (as in Ex 32 : 4), in reference to the coming forth from Egypt. All the evidence indicates that the Deuteronomist is responsible for the construction of the decalogue.

¹⁹ The Israelites had previously been told to recognise that their god had executed judgment upon the gods of Egypt (Ex 12 : 12, cp. 6 : 6). Here then is one context in which the notion of many gods is easily accepted.

Moses as a prophet who is able to foresee problems, for example, the later request of the Israelites for a king (Deut 17:14-20). The role of the commandments in the narrative of Exodus 32 is indeed central to it. In response to what took place Moses is recorded as smashing the tablets upon which God had written them (Ex 32:16, 19).

Following the pronouncement, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me', is the prohibition against making an image or 'the likeness of anything in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth'. No one is to bow down to them or serve them. Unlike Jewish tradition, most others, including the modern critical tradition, make two separate commandments of the statements about acknowledging other gods and making a graven image. The evidence, however, favours taking Ex 20:3-6 as one item.

The opening statement in Ex 20:2 ('I am Yahweh . . .') should be read as the first of the ten items in the decalogue. E. Nielsen's criticism that neither in form nor content is it a commandment is beside the point.²⁰ The decalogue consists of ten 'words' (*'ašeret had^ebārîm*, Ex 34:28, Deut 4:13, 10:4), not commandments, although to be sure they are mainly about observing rules. By concentrating, as we should, upon ten divine utterances we avoid the problem of noting that there are at least thirteen sentences of command: vss. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 (10?), 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 17. It is unfortunate that popular tradition is so used to speaking of the 'ten commandments'. The real puzzle is why originally there was a need to construct 'ten words', for this structure appears to be artificially imposed. A solution will be suggested when we explore further the link between the decalogue and the creation narrative.

In Exodus 32 the people requested gods to go before them and Aaron made for them a molten calf. In the decalogue other gods are prohibited and no image is to be made. There is the same switch from the plural number of gods to the single image. A telling piece of evidence that this is the same variation from plural to singular can be observed in the words, 'Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.' Critics who separate Ex 20:3 (other gods) and Ex 20:4-6 (the image or likeness) have to resort to a complicated process of redaction and interpolation to make sense of the antecedent of 'them'. They think that in some original form of the decalogue the reference was accurately applied to the other gods. Over time, however, the prohibition about the image (in the singular) was

²⁰ *New Perspective* 11.

inserted with the resulting awkwardness involving the plural 'them'.²¹ This is unnecessary theorising in the light of the link with the narrative in Exodus 32. The prohibitions against having other gods and against making an image belong together because they constitute the lawgiver's negative response to what lay before him in Exodus 32. The term *pesel* in Ex 20 : 4 is a general one that would include Aaron's molten calf. The parallel reference to a likeness to something in heaven, earth, or the seas also represents a generalisation that is prompted by the fact that Aaron's image had a specific resemblance to something on earth.

A long clause is attached to the prohibition against worshipping other gods and making an image: 'For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments' (Ex 20 : 5, 6). This double feature, the threat of punishment but also of mercy, is picked up from the account of what followed the making of the golden calf. God was going to consume all the people (Ex 32 : 10-13), but he found some that loved him, the Levites, and showed mercy by not killing them, while others were indeed punished. These Levites themselves killed some three thousand men by way of keeping God's commandment (vss. 27, 28). In that God ordered each Levite to 'slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour', we might infer that there were some thousands of them who proved loyal to him. In any event, we have solid evidence in Ex 34 : 6, 7 that the words of the clause in Ex 20 : 5, 6 are the product of the lawgiver's response to the making of the

²¹ See W. Zimmerli, 'Das Zweite Gebot', *Gottes Offenbarung. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (Munich, 1963) 234-48. As part of his argument he drew attention to the fact that the characteristically Deuteronomistic language 'to bow down and serve' is always used of foreign gods and not of images. A major feature of the Deuteronomist, however, both in constructing his laws in Deut 12-26 and the decalogue, is his survey of the entire sweep of Israelite traditions with a particular focus on first time developments. This means that for the second commandment (Ex 20 : 3-6, not vss. 4-6 only as Zimmerli thinks), he has approached Exodus 32 with the later developments of Israel's tendency to worship foreign gods in mind. It is not surprising, therefore, that he uses the language he normally applies to foreign, Canaanite gods in focusing upon the image and gods of Exodus 32. Compare how the Deuteronomistic language about prolonging one's days upon the land, that is, the promised land (Deut 4 : 40, 11 : 9, 25 : 15, etc.) was used in taking stock of Cain's relationship to the land (Ex 20 : 12).

golden calf. The same words about God's keeping mercy to thousands,²² but not clearing the guilty and visiting iniquity upon succeeding generations, are stated in the context of Moses's requesting pardon for the offence. In Exodus 34 these words are manifestly inspired by the writer's reflection upon the incident. The same is true, I am arguing, for Exodus 20.

In both passages, Ex 20 : 5, 6 and 34 : 6, 7, the statement that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children in succeeding generations goes beyond what is described in Exodus 32. There is nonetheless in Ex 32 : 34 the comparable reference to God's decision to visit the people's sin upon them whenever he visits them, in the form of his messenger, when they proceed to take up residence in their new place. There is also revealed that God keeps a book (vss. 32, 33), in which he presumably notes the generations. The view in question must have in mind the future experience of Israelite idolatry. Indeed this later history will explain why the incident of the golden calf took on so much significance. It was the first example of the later tendency to full-scale idolatry. We have already noted the intense interest in beginnings on the part of the lawgiver. In itself the incident hardly amounts to a serious defection, certainly not in comparison with the later imitation of Canaanite religion. The calf that was made seems to have been regarded, in the words of S. R. Driver, 'not as exclusive of Jehovah, but as representing him'.²³ Nonetheless, both the writer who gave the narrative its present shape and the lawgiver saw the tendency to false belief emerging in it.

²² The reference to thousands in both Ex 20 : 6 and 34 : 7 has been seen as puzzling and some have interpreted it to imply a thousand generations, see B. S. Childs, *Exodus* (London, 1974) 388. This reading is perhaps encouraged by the preceding reference in Ex 20 : 5 to the third and fourth generation, the latter term, *dôr*, not being used there. Moreover, in Deut 7 : 9, a verse that echoes Ex 20 : 6, there is an explicit reference to a thousand generations ('*elep dôr*, not '*alâpîm* as in Ex 20 : 6 and 34 : 7). Despite the plausibility of this interpretation for Ex 20 : 6 it should be resisted. The reading, 'thousands', simply does not imply a thousand generations. We can see why the Deuteronomist saw scope for introducing the notion of generations because of the parallel with Ex 20 : 5 (the third and fourth generations). Moreover, because the thousands referred to the Levites and they, favoured for all time by Yahweh, continue from generation to generation, his variation is an understandable one. With their example in mind he could generalise.

²³ *The Book of Exodus* CBC (Cambridge, 1918) 350. The narrative of Exodus 32 seems to have undergone Deuteronomic redaction in vss. 7–14, see Childs, *Exodus* 558–59. If so, it is further evidence that the Deuteronomist looked back on the narrative from the perspective of later Israelite apostasy.

The view that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children is an attempt to explain in ultimate terms why succeeding generations of Israelites resorted to idolatry.²⁴ Like Joseph's sale by his brothers into slavery, and the Pharaoh's stubbornness in refusing to let the Israelites go (Gen 45 : 4-8, Ex 4 : 21, 7 : 3, 9 : 12, etc.), Israel's constant tendency to false belief and practice is also viewed as the deity's doing. Odd, even perverse, it may sound, but for those who have a certain conception of providence and seek to probe ultimate causes, God's role has to be acknowledged. It would be beyond us too, even with psycho-analysis, to account in any fully satisfactory way for obstinate conduct in the face of manifest signs that it should be changed.

One historical experience in particular may have influenced the statement about how the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the sons to the fourth generation. As commentators have long suspected, there seems to be a link between the incident about the golden calf in Exodus 32 and King Jeroboam's setting up the two golden calves in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12 : 28). His words, 'Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt', are those of Ex 32 : 4 (except 'These be' for 'Behold'). The plural reference is appropriate in 1 Kings 12 but not obviously so in Exodus 32, while the reference to Egypt suits the latter context better. The Deuteronomist judged Jeroboam's action in the harshest possible way: it led, through the continuing worship of the calves, to the downfall of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17 : 21-23). Jehu was one of his successors and because he was zealous in doing the deity's bidding in exterminating the house of Ahab, his sons to the fourth generation were permitted to sit on the throne of Israel (2 Kings 10 : 30). They did not continue beyond that generation and the reason is clear. Of each father it is recorded that he did not depart from Jeroboam's sin, namely, the worship of the golden calves (2 Kings 10 : 29, 13 : 2, 11, 14 : 24, 15 : 9). The Deuteronomic redactor of the material thinks of Jehu's merit extending to subsequent generations and attributes this extension to the deity. It is likely that the repetition of the offence in succeeding generations was viewed in terms of the deity's visiting the iniquity upon the sons to the fourth generation.

The prohibition against taking the name of God in vain has been commonly interpreted in a narrow sense: no false swearing, no abuse of God's

²⁴ It has nothing to do with considerations of individual responsibility as laid out in Deut 24 : 16. Stamm and Andrew, *Recent Research* 17, see a clash between the two notions. They fail to appreciate that the law is concerned with earthly justice and overlook the fact that where a reference to the deity is found it is likely to indicate sophisticated reflection on the part of ancient thinkers.

name in the utterance of an oath. That this interpretation does not do justice to the meaning of the term *lašāw* ('vainly', 'for unreality') has also been seen.²⁵ It denotes lack of reality, emptiness, and seems to have a focus other than false swearing. The lawgiver's concern with a potential development involving the golden calf provides it. His view is that the Israelite God makes proclamations about his name and spells out what it stands for. The opening statement of the decalogue is a case in point: 'I am Yahweh thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. When declaring, 'For I Yahweh thy God am a jealous God' (Ex 20 : 5), he is again revealing knowledge of who he is. This view emerges clearly in the passages in Ex 34 : 5-7, 14, which record the deity's pronouncements on the occasion of Moses's receiving the commandments for the second time. He descends in the cloud, stands with Moses, and 'proclaimed the name of Yahweh'. The content of the proclamation, about his mercy but also about his visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, is, we saw, incorporated in the prohibition against worshipping other gods (Ex 20 : 5). In Ex 34 : 14 this prohibition is repeated and gives as its reason: 'For Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God'.

In light of this background it cannot surprise that in the decalogue the prohibition that appears after the one about other gods is specifically concerned with Yahweh's name. The concern arises from the confusion that is seen to prevail after Aaron had made the golden calf. The indication is that Yahweh's name might well have been given to it. Aaron had built an altar before it and proclaimed that the following day was to be a feast to Yahweh (Ex 32 : 5). He did not, to be sure, go on to proclaim that the golden calf was to be named Yahweh. It is this distinct possibility, however, that has prompted the formulation of the prohibition with its reference to taking up (*nāšā'*) the name, that is, upon one's lips in proclamation (as in Ex 23 : 1).²⁶ M. Greenberg's paraphrase that the name of God should not be used for a vain thing is accurate.²⁷ To use it in association with a golden calf (in 1 Kings 12 : 28-33 as well as in Ex 32 : 4-6, cp. Neh 9 : 18) is to detract from his reputation, his majesty, who he is (the Jealous One, for example).

²⁵ See B. S. Childs, *Exodus* 410-11.

²⁶ 'Thou shalt not take up a groundless report', both *nāšā'* and *šāw'* being used.

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972) vol 5, 1442. In Ps 31 : 7(6) *hablē-šāw'* are apparently idols. In Jer 18 : 15 the deity condemns his people because they have forgotten him and burned incense to vanity (*lašāw'*).

The fact that the sequence of material in Ex 20 : 3-7 is from the subject of other gods back to that of the Israelite god is explained on the basis of the link with Exodus 32. Behind the prohibition against using his name in vain is in fact the same antagonism to acknowledging the existence of other gods, the fear that they might be brought into association with Yahweh. Another puzzle is also clarified. There is a change from the use of the first person by the deity in the pronouncements (Ex 20 : 2, 3, 5, 6) up to this one when there is a switch to an address using the third person: 'For Yahweh will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain' (vs. 7). Interpreters see this change as an indication of different layers of tradition, although B. S. Childs wonders about the tension not troubling the final redactor.²⁸ There is no need for this unprovable hypothesis. The link between the individual commandments and Exodus 32 again proves illuminating. Those prior to the prohibition against taking God's name in vain constitute the deity's own personal response to the problem with the golden calf. In the narrative he is depicted as directly involved. The position is different in regard to the prohibition about his name. It is not recorded that in making the gods (or god, *'elōhîm*), the people and Aaron actually called them (or it) by the name Yahweh. The offence could be viewed as a potential one. There was no need to formulate the prohibition in terms reflecting a personal insult to Yahweh. Hence, too, the use of language that warns about the future: 'For Yahweh will not hold him guiltless'. It is again noteworthy, in support of the link between the prohibition and Exodus 32, that in Ex 34 : 7 these same words are found. The context, as we have noted, is Yahweh's proclamation of who he is by way of warning against what had occurred with the golden calf.

I return to the question why the sabbath command appears in the decalogue and why the motivation cited for observing it is differently expressed in each version. In the preceding commandment the name of God, it was argued, is not to be given to any object that is intended to represent him. The implication is that the Israelite god's name has distinctive associations, that certain affirmations define it, for example, he brought the Israelites out of Egypt. His name is important because his reputation is bound up with it. Moses was concerned that should God destroy the people because of their offence involving the golden calf the Egyptians might give him a bad one. They would say that it was for evil he brought them out of Egypt to slay them and remove them from the face of the earth (Ex 32 : 12). On a later occasion when God was again about to destroy them, Moses appealed on the grounds of the concern he should

²⁸ *Exodus* 399.

have for his reputation. The Egyptians would hear of the destruction and inform the inhabitants of Canaan. They already knew of his fame but when they hear how he has rid himself of them they will draw negative conclusions about his power, that he destroyed them because he was not able to bring them into the land he had sworn about (Num 14:13-21).²⁹ Such sentiments well illustrate the truth that reputation itself is an aspect of power.

Just as the name Yahweh is special and care has to be taken not to use it without regard to its true significance, so in the law that follows this warning the term *shabbat* is intended to become synonymous with this significance. The lawgiver, in typical wisdom fashion, is contrasting a negative aspect of a matter with a positive. It is plain that to observe the sabbath is to honour the name of God in the sense of recognising his reputation and power, for example, his creating the world (Ex 20:11),³⁰ or his bringing Israel out of Egypt 'through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm' (Deut 5:15). The question is why the sabbath became important in this context of according recognition to the Israelite god. The tradition about the golden calf enables us to see why this is so. After it had been made Aaron proclaimed a feast for Yahweh on the following day. That is, after Aaron's work of creation a special day was to celebrate its significance. The development raises the topic of an occasion that should be linked with Yahweh, one that will properly testify to his peculiar character. The lawgiver is obviously opposed to what took place in Exodus 32.

The people's request to make gods means, plainly, that they will be made according to their notions of divinity. On reflection, the issue arises whether men create gods or the gods men. From a rational stance the former is true, but when the question of the origin of humankind is raised, a reversal in thinking has to take place. The god or gods created the world and man. In other words, reflection upon the incident in Exodus 32 raises the topic of creation. Already in his prohibition of any graven image the lawgiver has revealed his concern about a proper understanding of it. A likeness to anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the

²⁹ In Num 14:18 God's character is affirmed in terms of his mercy but also in terms of his refusal to clear the guilty and his visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation — exactly as in the prohibition in Ex 20:5, 6.

³⁰ Note the link in Ps 24:4 between God's creation and not lifting up one's soul to vanity, the same language as Ex 20:7 (cp. Ps 139:20 in the context of the Psalm as a whole).

water under the earth is proscribed (Ex 20 : 4). Aaron's calf was manifestly in the likeness of an earthly creature. In that the true Israelite god created the world, what was in the heavens, upon the earth, and in the seas, according to the account in Gen 1-2 : 3, no likeness to anything in creation could represent him.³¹ Hosea's view of the calf of Samaria was that, 'The workman made it: therefore it is not God' (8 : 6).

The lawgiver counters the wrong understanding of things that emerges from the incident of the golden calf by drawing upon the Genesis account of the creation of the world.³² In that the seventh day in that tradition constitutes the climax to the process and is given a special status,³³ the lawgiver sees its importance as an occasion to remember who Yahweh is. We can thus explain the appearance of the sabbath command in the decalogue with its explicit comment in the Exodus version upon God's work of creation. The determining factor has been Aaron's proclamation of a feast day to Yahweh in celebration of the golden calf. In countering this confusion over the interpretation given to man-made objects, the lawgiver opts for the sabbath day primarily because it affirms Yahweh as the true creator. He could have chosen the passover celebration or some other festival.³⁴ These, however, apart from lacking any link with creation,

³¹ Presumably the term *šelem* could have been used by the lawgiver. It made sense, however, for him to have chosen another term, *l'mānāh*, if he were contrasting a false act of human creation with the account in Gen 1 : 26, 27 of God's creating a true image (*šelem*) and likeness (*d'mūt*) of himself, namely, man. E. Nielsen, *New Perspective* 97, speaks of the reference in Ex 20 : 4 as betraying 'an ideological connection with Gen 1 : 20-28', but he asserts, 'Any idea that the expansion of the law against images is dependent from the literary point of view on the creation narrative in Gen 1 is wholly improbable'. Would he have made a similar assertion in noting the relationship between, say, the rule prohibiting a king from accumulating horses, wives, silver, and gold (Deut 17 : 16, 17), and the account of Solomon's doing precisely this (1 Kings 10-11 : 4)?

³² Or upon the tradition underlying the present P one (if indeed it is P for on the face of it there is nothing remotely reminiscent of priestly lore), should it be later than the Deuteronomist's time. A major piece of research claims the opposite, P comes before D. See M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1978) 132-48.

³³ This story involves transferring what would have been a feature of the human work week to the deity's procedure at creation.

³⁴ Note how Jeroboam celebrated the installation of the golden calf with a feast (1 Kings 12 : 32), presumably that of booths. Every sabbatical year the Deuteronomist wanted a reading of the law on the occasion of its celebration (Deut 31 : 10, 11).

are closely tied to living in the land after its conquest, whereas the sabbath could be regarded as existing before the events at Sinai.³⁵ It is also far more frequent and consequently counters forgetfulness. In Exodus 32 the people's action had been prompted by Moses's delay. They were ready to forget him and proceed to actions that expressed wrong ideas. A proper understanding of Yahweh's nature must, it is thought, be regularly reinforced. The command is to remember the sabbath in a special way.

In turning to the Deuteronomic version we can see why it might be appropriate to link its observance to stressing Yahweh's role in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. The issue in Exodus 32 is precisely about identifying who brought them out from there. The same lawmaker could equally well have produced both versions. At the very least it can be claimed that each has been prompted by response to the same incident. A more precise explanation of the difference can be provided, however.

S. R. Driver pointed out that in various Deuteronomic rules the recollection of the servitude in Egypt is made a motive for kindness towards others placed in a similar position. It might therefore appear that observance of the Deuteronomic command is similarly grounded because it singles out servants for special mention. Yet in a puzzling way the sabbath is viewed as a periodical memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which is a quite different emphasis.³⁶ The question that arises, and which Driver did not pursue, is how the lawgiver understands this link. In that the rule still concerns the pattern of six days followed by a rest day because it is the 'sabbath of Yahweh thy God',³⁷ there has to be a link with this pattern, and hence with the deity's work and rest at the time of creation. What the Deuteronomist has understood, it might be suggested, is that in Egypt the Israelites would not have been able to enjoy the sabbath day because of the nature of their bondage to the Egyptians. The deity had looked upon their situation and had gone to work again in order to restore the created order

³⁵ Even if in actuality there was no pattern of six days of work followed by a rest day at that particular period of time. The tradition in Exodus 16 about the attempt to have the Israelites observe the sabbath in the wilderness will have been motivated by this historical question and the need to answer it affirmatively because of the notion that the deity had instituted the sabbath at the beginning of time.

³⁶ *Deuteronomy* 85, 86.

³⁷ By concentrating exclusively on the reference to the Egyptian experience as the reason given for keeping the commandment, critics have overlooked what is to be understood in this reference to the deity's sabbath.

of things, the pattern of six days of labour followed by a rest on the seventh. The imagery of a mighty hand and a stretched out arm indicates, it might be noted, someone hard at work on another's behalf. The Deuteronomic version, unlike the Exodus one, draws special attention to servants and their need for rest. The reason would appear to be the awareness that they might be made to work seven days a week. If so, it would be a further indication that the lawgiver had this aspect of things in mind about the Israelites in Egypt. Noteworthy in this regard is that the call to remember the bondage in Egypt follows immediately the instruction about the Israelite servants' need for rest.

On account of its retrospective character, the setting of the Deuteronomic version of the decalogue is different from that of the Exodus one. The Israelites are no longer at Sinai in an unsettled state, but are about to enter their new land, their place of rest in the sense of freedom from enemies (Deut 12 : 9, 25 : 19). In that forthcoming settled condition they will truly be able to work for six days and rest on the seventh.³⁸ When that happens the deity's deliverance of them from Egypt will have accomplished its purpose. The Deuteronomic version of the sabbath command has to be seen in the light of this broader perspective. The same lawgiver, guided by his historical sense of things, is responsible for both versions and the difference between them is not the striking one that critics assert. Both versions are primarily interested in what happened at the beginning of time and how what was established then had been adversely affected. Even the opening pronouncement of the decalogue has to be read in the light of the lawgiver's concern with creation. The positive assertion about Yahweh's bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, requires the amplification that he did it for a purpose, namely, to establish again what he intended at the beginning of things.

In the section of text that precedes the account of the golden calf we have God's instructions to Moses about the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 31). Two men are selected to work in, among other things, gold, silver, and brass. Immediately following this account is an instruction to

³⁸ Even in the wilderness state there was an attempt, admittedly of an extraordinary kind, to have the Israelites keep the sabbath. In Exodus 16, when the Israelites complained about their hunger in the desert and the deity provided them with manna, the sabbath is thought of in terms similar to those in the Deuteronomic version. The purpose of the provision, with twice the daily amount on the sixth day in honour of the sabbath (vs. 23), is that the Israelites may know that Yahweh brought them out from Egypt (vs. 6). The implication is again that they will experience rest on the seventh day in contrast to their experience in Egypt (cp. note 35).

keep the sabbath (Ex 31 : 13-17). It is said to be a sign that in six days God created the heaven and earth and rested on the seventh. Presumably the reason for this juxtaposition of topics is the interest in the work that is to go into the making of the sacred tabernacle. The idea of working for it on the sabbath might seem especially abhorrent. However that may be, it is worth repeating the claim that the inclusion of the rule about the sabbath in the Exodus version of the decalogue has been motivated by a negative reaction to Aaron's use of gold in making a sacred object and proclaiming a special day to celebrate it. Whoever put together the accounts in Exodus 31 and 32 was probably conscious of their contrasting elements. It was proper to use gold in the making of the tabernacle in which Yahweh would appear, but not in the making of a calf to represent him. Yahweh had a special day, but not the one Aaron intended.³⁹

We can now provide a better account of the movement of thought from the prohibition of the vain use of the divine name to the sabbath command (in both versions), to the command to honour parents. Underlying the prohibition is a negative reaction to Aaron's (or the people's) likely use of the name of God, Yahweh, for the work of his hands. He assigned his created object a special day in celebration at which the people affirmed, 'These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt' (Ex 32 : 8). It was necessary to present a day, the sabbath, which would affirm Yahweh as the true creator and deliverer from Egypt. The incident of the golden calf offended against a true understanding of creation, just as the Egyptian oppression had constituted an offence against what had been established then. This interest in the violation of the created order is continued, but in the contrasting context of the one human activity, the producing of offspring, which can be properly regarded as an authentic act of creation. The lawgiver has switched his focus to the first ever violation of creation, Cain's slaughter of his brother. Perhaps too another contrast has been noted. Cain's deed, which was the unexpected climax to his work of producing fruit from the ground, brought about the

³⁹ In other biblical material there is a prohibition against kindling a fire upon the sabbath day (Ex 35 : 3), and a case recorded about a man put to death for collecting wood for a fire on this day (Num 15 : 32-36). Fire was used by Aaron in making the golden calf. The sabbath command in the decalogue is, it has been argued, an affirmation that Yahweh is the true creator in order to counter any notion that human beings such as Aaron have a comparable power to create. Like the antagonism of Zeus to Prometheus's stealing of fire because it denoted mankind's technological advance, a similar clash may underlie the opposition to fire on the sabbath.

opposite condition to the state of rest that had followed the deity's work of creation.⁴⁰ He became a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. In any event, the lawgiver proceeds to a scrutiny of the Adam and Eve narrative, in the first place because Cain and Abel were born of them, and the presentation of his remaining rules.

If there is any merit in the above thesis, further illumination of the ten commandments is forthcoming. The unique setting in which they are presented takes on more significance. The mountain smokes and God descends upon it in fire (Ex 19 : 18). Thunder and lightning accompany the preparation for their presentation. Elemental forces of creation are being displayed. In expressing to Moses that he wants obedience from the people, the deity makes the claim that all the earth is his (vs. 5). He informs Moses that on the third day after the people prepare for the event, he will descend upon the mountain in the sight of them all, that is, he will make his appearance upon the earth. It was on the third day of creation that the earth came into existence (Gen 1 : 9-13).

When the rules are given they come directly from God and not through the mediation of Moses. This is a feature unique to the decalogue. One reason is that they issue from the deity's direct involvement with the first human beings and with Israel's first demonstration of a tendency to worship other gods. This involvement is as true for the initial religious rules as for the moral ones. Interpreters have long referred to the first half of the decalogue as listing rules about man's relationship to God and the subsequent ones as listing those about man's relationship to man. This turns out to be a misleading characterisation. In any event, the distinction seems artificial, not one that we would expect at this less theologically reflective stage in the history of religious thought. Every rule has been fashioned on the basis of the deity's experience with one situation or another.

The other reason for the unique feature of God's direct address is that it is modelled upon his words spoken in creating the world. In Genesis there is manifestly no audience. Remarkably, there is a real sense in which this is true also for the giving of the ten 'words'. In the Deuteronomic version, as S. R. Driver pointed out,⁴¹ the indication is that the people heard the 'voice' of God but not distinct words (Deut 5 : 5). A plain reading of the Exodus version is more revealing. When Moses, preparing for the event,

⁴⁰ Note how the deity's created order involved no killing. Living beings were to eat the produce of the ground (Gen 1 : 23, 30).

⁴¹ *Deuteronomy* 83, 84.

was on the mountain God answered him 'by a voice' (Ex 19 : 19). This is an odd statement and can hardly refer to intelligible language.⁴² Just before the decalogue is given Moses has come down from the mountain to speak with the people (Ex 19 : 25). It is at this point we are told, 'And God spake all these words' (Ex 20 : 1), with no specification as to who the recipients are. After the speaking the people hear and see activity upon the mountain but remove themselves far off from it (Ex 20 : 18). They then requested Moses to speak with them and to hear from him. If we follow the text, this statement must have a future reference and does not imply that Moses himself had heard the distinct words of God. Scholars have understandably seen a good deal of awkwardness in the putting together of the material in Exodus and postulated a complicated process of redaction by way of making sense of the final form of the text. They have not been aware, however, of the link that is being forged with the story of creation. It has to be taken into account and there is additional evidence to support it.

There is, for example, a further piece of evidence which also raises questions about the nature of the audience when the ten 'words' were first spoken. Attention has already been drawn to the problem that the making of the golden calf is difficult to comprehend if Aaron and the people had just received them. It is better to assume that they only existed in written form in the deity's possession and that Moses was about to bring them down from the mountain in order to communicate their content to the people for the first time ever. The fact that they contained condemnation of what they had done would be viewed as making their impact all the greater.

The decalogue in the Exodus version is introduced with the statement, 'And God spake all these words'. The term used, 'words', is preferred to a term such as, 'commandments'. There are, we are to learn in other texts (Ex 34 : 28, Deut 4 : 13, 10 : 4), ten of them. The inspiration of the creation narrative again proves illuminating.⁴³ The voice that uttered words in creating the world is again active at Sinai. There were, moreover, ten divine utterances at creation. 'By ten sayings was the world created',

⁴² See B.S. Child's note, *Exodus* 343, in which he argues against both the common rendering 'thunder' and the view that audible language is meant.

⁴³ I am aware that source criticism (for example, the assigning of Gen 1-2 : 3, not just its language and literary features but its conceptions also, to P and to a date later than D) could invalidate some of the observations I am making. To be alert, however, to the existence of sources is one thing, to provide convincing proof of them and, in particular, of their precise nature quite another.

according to *Pirque Aboth* 5 : 1. Ten times it is stated, 'And God said', for example, 'Let there be light', and the phenomenon in question came into being, for example, 'And there was light' (Gen 1 : 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29).⁴⁴ The word spoken is an expression of the deity's will and is therefore, like the words in the decalogue, commanding in tone. The Psalmist's comment on the deity's words at creation is, 'For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast' (Ps 33 : 9).⁴⁵

There is, in fact, explicit textual evidence that the presentation of the decalogue has been brought into association with the creation of the world. In Deut 4 : 32, 33 the giving of the law, God's speaking out of the fire, is said to be unique since the appearance of man upon the earth: 'For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?'⁴⁶

Critical scholarship has long noted that Deuteronomic language pervades both versions of the decalogue. R. H. Pfeiffer pointed out that all attempts to remove it and attain some original form of the ten commandments has proved impossible.⁴⁷ No wonder, for their entire formulation is the creation of the Deuteronomic lawgiver. The way in which he constructs

⁴⁴ On the ten divine utterances in Genesis 1, see J. Skinner, *Genesis* 7, 8, 33, 34. Only in regard to God's utterance in Gen 1 : 28 (about man's being fruitful and multiplying, replenishing the earth, subduing it, having dominion over the fish and fowl and every living thing), are we not informed that the result took place. It is possible, however, that the statement, 'And it was so', in vs. 30 also applies to vs. 28. According to H. Danby Gen 2 : 18 is one of the ten and not Gen 1 : 28, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, 1933) 455. Skinner lists the latter and excludes the former, 8.

⁴⁵ The link between the ten pronouncements at creation and the ten at Sinai underlines the point that pronouncement is the important feature in the decalogue and hence the first one is Ex 20 : 2, the deity's personal statement about bringing Israel out of Egypt. If the link in question is indeed the source of the idea of ten 'words', its artificial character would explain why such a designation does not play a very prominent role in the text.

⁴⁶ The term *bārā'* 'to create' is used as in Gen 1 : 1.

⁴⁷ *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1941) 229-32.

them is exactly the method behind the formulation of every one of his laws in Deut 12-26.⁴⁸

If a guess were to be hazarded about the original setting in life of the decalogue it would be that of teacher and pupils examining written records for the purpose of setting down rules, most of or all of which would already be known to them in some form or another. The indication is that Deuteronomic wisdom circles are responsible for their compilation.⁴⁹ Of them we do know that the recipients of instruction could read and write (Deut 6 : 9, 11 : 20). The ten 'words' were written, we are to believe, upon two tables of stone so that Moses might use them for instructional purposes (Ex 24 : 12, Deut 4 : 10). Two different experiences, it has been argued, went into their construction. The model in mind may well be two different school exercises whereby the teacher examined one body of material about the incident of the golden calf and another about the origin of mankind.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For a recent demonstration of the method see my *Women, Law, and the Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh, 1979), and 'Uncovering a Major Source of Mosaic Law', *JBL* 101 (1982).

⁴⁹ In both Deuteronomy (4 : 9, 6 : 7, 11 : 19) and Proverbs a father's instruction of his son is important. It is perhaps noteworthy that in three items of the decalogue (honour to parents, killing, adultery) the focus has been upon Cain, the first son. Commentators have long recognised that the decalogue's concerns (e.g., honouring parents, adultery, true and false witness, coveting, taking the name of God in vain, Prov 30 : 9), are found in wisdom instruction.

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Professors David Daube and John F.A. Sawyer for their helpful comments.

