

CHAPTER EIGHT UNITY, OR PLURALITY, OF SANCTUARY?

It is alleged, that before the Deuteronomic reform and the centralization which it effected, sacrifices were offered, even by the most pious Israelites, at all places throughout the land, specially on the Bamoth, or high places, to which a peculiar sanctity was ascribed. The Covenant-law is claimed to testify to this state of affairs; and the classical passage, Exod. 20:24-26, is generally quoted as decisive for the view, that, long after the conquest of the land, a plurality of sanctuaries was not only tolerated, but legalized.

All will, of course, depend on the exegesis of this passage; and the latter will be determined by the context. As we have hitherto discovered no evidence of the composite character of the Codes, we vindicate our right to interpret these verses in the light of what precedes and follows. Thus viewing them, we would state their bearing on the present question under the following heads: —

1. They contain simply some provisional directions: —

(a) For the altar to be erected for the Covenant-sacrifice (Exod. 24).

(b) For all sacrifices to be offered before the tabernacle was ready (compare also Josh. 8:31).

The only objections that can be reasonably urged against this natural explanation are the following two:—

(1) The time between the promulgation of this command and the erection of the tabernacle was too short to require a special provision.

According to Exod. 40:1, the tabernacle was not reared before the first day of the first month of the second year after the exodus. And even then the tabernacle-service could not go into effect, because the sacrificial laws had not yet been given. Not before Lev. 8 do we find the command to consecrate Aaron and his sons (compare also Num. 1:1). Thus the time between the publication of this command and the inauguration of the tabernacle-service was at least eight full months. Were the children of Israel without sacrifices all this time? If not, and if each was his own priest, and built his own altar, what was more natural than a provision of this character? Afterwards, of course, it was partially abrogated by the fuller and permanent arrangement of the ritual system.

(2) The directions that the altar should be of unhewn stone, and that it should not be ascended by steps, are claimed to be of general character, and thus to preclude the subsequent promulgation of the Levitical law, which contradicts them.

As to the first of these points, we claim on our side that the command is not general, but special and temporary. Because the altar which each man would build for himself could not be consecrated, it should consist of simple, undefiled, natural material. Of course, to the altar of the tabernacle, made according to God's own prescriptions, solemnly consecrated and served by an official priesthood, these restrictions did not apply.

The prohibition to ascend the altar by steps, had in it an element of permanent validity, as ver. 26 intimates. Only the special way in which this necessity was met, had no perpetual binding force. Hence, whilst the Levitical law preserved the former, it could disregard the latter. The principle was maintained, but in the manner stated in Exod. 28:42, 39:28.

2. The critics cannot satisfactorily account for the addition, "where I record my name." Wellhausen dismisses the significant phrase with the following insignificant remark: "This only means that the place of communion between heaven and earth is not to be regarded as arbitrarily chosen, but as in some way designated by God himself." The reference of this clause to the successive stations of the tabernacle during the desert-journey, is not excluded, but does not do full justice to the meaning. It is intended that all places become sacred by a manifestation of God, whether it be in a theophany, or by the Shechinah, or in some other way. On Sinai, God recorded his name in a glorious revelation and thus to the Israelites the provisional right could be given to build an altar there. Afterwards, when the manifestation of God's glory was transferred to the tent of the testimony, this of necessity became the only recognized sanctuary. The passage clearly intimates, that, as often as altered circumstances would in the future render centralization of worship practically impossible, the same freedom would be restored, always, of course, with the same restriction, that no place of sacrifice should be arbitrarily chosen, but only such as were sanctified by "a recording of God's name." Actually, we find in subsequent history that all such consecrated spots had been the scene of a theophany: they were so many "Sinais," where the same command could be repeated, and the pious Israelite once more erect his simple altar of earth or unhewn stone, and sacrifice his burnt-offering and peace-offering, his sheep and oxen.

That the Covenant-law positively presupposes unity of worship and cultus, is seen from the feast-laws, Exod. 23:17, 19, where every male is required to appear three times in the year before the LORD God. If the sanctuaries were so numerous as the critics assert, and accordingly visited continually and frequently by all Israelites, a command like this, to appear *three times* before the LORD, would have been superfluous and unmeaning.

We see that the attempt to bring the Covenant-law into contradiction with the subsequent Codes, or to show that it sanctions a more primitive form of sanctuary-worship, rests on a very forced interpretation of a single passage severed from its context. That there was a relative element in this regulation, is absurd to deny; and the absolute principles involved were retained, though in a somewhat modified form, in the Levitical law, so that no discrepancy exists. Surely no development of centuries was required to effect the unessential difference between these verses and the description of the altar in the tabernacle, modifications which are fully accounted for by the historical situation that conditioned both.

It is further alleged that this first Code makes no provision for the priests and their support, and thus silently assumes the common right of all Israelites to offer sacrifice. We deny that the latter proposition can be logically deduced from the former; and as to the silence of the Code, if the argument proves any thing, it proves that there was no privileged priesthood as late as the time of David or Jehoshaphat, which is more than even the most destructive critics are willing to assert. The *argumentum e silentio* has no force unless it be shown, that to legislate on this topic fell within

the scope and purpose of this law. It regulates simply the Covenant-relation between Jehovah and his people. Shall we conclude from the silence as to circumcision and leprosy, and many other topics, that these were unknown in the tenth or ninth century? But we have no more right to draw any inference from the fact that no priests are mentioned here. Moreover, an evidently prospective statement is made (Exod. 24:1, 9) concerning Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, who are commanded with Moses to come up to the LORD. By this distinction they are singled out from the rest of the people; and on no other ground could this distinction of Aaron's sons have been made, than in view of their future priesthood, and their appearing before God in the tabernacle.

Deuteronomy is quoted as testifying to the actual state of affairs during the transition period immediately before the centralization under Josiah. It contains, we are told, the reminiscences of what the Covenant-law represented as indispensable reality. The Deuteronomist writes throughout in a polemic tone, and assumes the character of a reformer. It indicates certainly no great concession when we admit that the Deuteronomic Code enforces and inculcates unity of worship more than any thing else. To draw from this the direct inference, that it must be both the product of, and the norm for, the reaction against Bamoth-worship in the latter part of the seventh century B.C., is very hasty and sweeping. What the critics may be called upon to prove, is not that Deuteronomy had a striking fitness to serve as a reform-Code in the days of King Josiah. Nobody denies this, and there is abundant evidence that it was actually used thus. Neither will the evidence that the Code could accomplish a greater and more important mission in the seventh century than in the Mosaic time, justify the conclusion that it owes its origin to the former, and not to the latter. God did not inspire his holy word for a single age or generation: it never returneth void, but accomplishes sooner or later all that which he pleases. The one and the essential point which we wish the higher criticism to establish, is this, that the Code does not fit into the historical situation, by which, according to its own testimony, it was called forth. As far as we know, this has never been done. The two preceding points have been settled, which it required surely no higher criticism to do; but we object to a use of them as if they warranted an inference that can only be drawn from the third. Is there any impropriety in the tone and contents of the book, when we realize that the Israelites were to enter upon the possession of a land, for centuries defiled by a heathen cultus that almost every high place would by its associations expose them to the utmost danger of relapsing into idolatry and nature-worship? If ever a time called for an urgent appeal to the people to maintain the centralization of their cultus as a safeguard against Canaanitish influences, it was the latter part of the Mosaic period. And the remarkable fact, that Deuteronomy emphasizes as much the permanence of the once established sanctuary as its unity, suits far better the Mosaic time than the seventh century, when the thought that the temple could be removed from Jerusalem would have been considered absurd. Entirely too much has been made of the frequently recurring expressions: "the place which the LORD your God shall choose (יבחר) out of all your tribes to put (שום) his name there (לשכן)." Riehm asserts that this could not have been spoken by Moses with reference to the uncertain place of the tabernacle. But here criticism, otherwise so averse to prophetic foresight, seems to claim for Moses a minute knowledge of the future fate of the sanctuary. What else could Moses expect than that, after the conquest of Canaan, a definite place would be chosen by God to dwell there, either in tabernacle or temple? Even long after the Mosaic age, in the same time to which critics ascribe the origin of Deuteronomy, all these terms were applied to the tabernacle and its locality by Jer. 7:12. בשילו אשר שכנתי שמי שם.

So much about the prospective character of Deuteronomy. Since it has a retrospective side also, we

must briefly inquire whether this lends stronger support to the critical view. Does Deuteronomy paint the past with such colors as compel us to postulate between it and the Covenant-law a period of at least two centuries?

We are referred chiefly to such expressions as the following: "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (12:8, *seqq.*). Deuteronomy, it is said, "opposes consciously" "what we are now accustomed to do." Its reform is not merely modifying but condemning, previous legislation, not only reformatory, but polemic. And to explain this marked difference between it and the Jehovist, a considerable interval of time must be assumed. It is impossible, if the Covenant-law had been promulgated at Sinai and Deuteronomy in the plains of Moab, that the latter should condemn what the former had approved of.

In answer to this we remark, —

1. The promulgation of the Levitical Code, which according to our view falls between the Covenant-law and Deuteronomy, has been overlooked here by the critics. The tabernacle represented absolute unity of worship; and, this having been abandoned in the desert, it is not strange that Deuteronomy condemns in the most polemic terms a subsequent relapse into previous customs, which had now become unallowable.

2. That such a subsequent relapse took place during the thirty-eight years of wandering in the desert under the judgment of God, is proved by historical testimony, not only that of the Pentateuch, but also of Amos 5:25, 26. Whatever may be the more definite exegesis of this difficult passage, it doubtless alludes to such a state of affairs as Deuteronomy condemns. It is true that Amos does not directly charge the Israelites with having sacrificed in a plurality of places at the same time, but only that they had "taken up the tabernacle of Moloch and Chiun their images, the star of their god, which they made to themselves." But it is clear that the former is a direct inference from the latter statement. Unity of worship stood and fell with pure Jahveism, of which the central idea is the recognition of one personal God, to whom belongs the initiative in all that pertains to his service. The moment this definite and exclusive idea is lost, there returns with the vague conceptions of nature-worship, the unlimited freedom to sacrifice at all places where this uncircumscribed deity of nature reveals itself; i.e., everywhere. That the idolatry to which Amos refers was conducted throughout the camp, and not centralized in the tabernacle, admits of no doubt; and this alone furnishes a sufficient ground for the polemical tone of Deuteronomy. For it is true of the past as well as of the future, that the prophet's eye takes in more than a single day: it covers periods, and sees them in the light of their most significant features. Hence the prophet Moses, looking back upon the last forty years, could even in the fields of Moab, at the dawn of a new period, truthfully say, "Not as we are *now* accustomed to do."

3. The protest against a plurality of places of sacrifice is brought into close connection throughout the Code with the warning against heathen idolatry (Deut. 12:2, 3, and so *passim*). But the critics are emphatic in telling us that Bamoth-worship was Jahveh-worship. Accordingly, this feature suits the Mosaic period far better than the age of the later Judaic kings. The dark future and the still darker past combined in these days of Moses to inspire him with fear for Israel's corrupt tendencies in this direction.

4. That Deuteronomy in its general representations often approaches very closely to the later times, proves nothing more than that we have here an example of generic prophecy. These later evils were the natural results of the dangers to which Israel was exposed in the midst of a heathen environment. It did not require a great amount of supernatural foresight to discern them beforehand. And all critics admit that Deuteronomy, on the whole, has a prophetic character. How can it awake our surprise, that the prescription of a general remedy for a general class of evils was found appropriate as often and as late as the occasion or the necessity required?

5. We close with the remark, that in view of the striking resemblance between the Mosaic time and the state of religion in the seventh century, and the almost perfect fitting of Deuteronomy into the historical circumstances of both, it must surprise us, that the critics have not been bold enough to reject the whole history of Israel's apostasy, and wandering in the desert, as a "historical fiction," a new and unprecedented example of carrying back the present into the past with a Jesuitical intention. If the attempt has been successful in the case of the tabernacle, we do not see why it should not be practicable here. But if there are so many temptations to reiterate the bold hypothesis, and nevertheless the stern reality of history would not allow them, it may well serve us as a warning not to yield too readily to similar facts, presented in the same attractive light, wherewith a little less historical testimony, the critics have actually risked the dangerous step of proclaiming that the history of the past is but an embellished reproduction of a subsequent present. We are content to call neither a counterfeit of the other, but to find in both the genuine reflection, which in all times and all places the invariable methods of God's dealing with men will produce in the mirror of history.

According to Wellhausen, there is no other difference between Deuteronomy and the Priest Code on this point than that the latter takes for granted what the former requires. With regard to a second point closely allied to the one just discussed, the case stands different. We must, in the second place, examine the pretended development of the sacrificial system.