

Roland Meynet

TWO DECALOGUES, LAW OF FREEDOM

(Ex 20:2-17 & Dt 5:6-21)

The title “Decalogue” is one of a few titles of pericopes not simply due to modern editions of the Bible.¹ “Ten words”, which is the Greek translation of *Deca-logos*, is in fact the original name given by Scripture itself² to the famous passage of Exodus and to its corresponding passage in the book of Deuteronomy.³ In spite of its venerable antiquity, rather probably because of it, this denomination creates a problem: many translations feel the need to furnish, in the footnotes, the division of the Decalogue into ten commandments. On this point, ancient Christian tradition differs between the Orientals, following the Greek Fathers, and the Occidentals, following St. Augustine.⁴ The number “ten”, instead of indicating the number of the single commandments of the Decalogue, could symbolise totality, as in the first account of creation (Gn 1:1–2:4a), in which the world was created in ten words.⁵ Scripture also uses another denomination, with a different number: “Two tablets”.⁶ These two denominations, “ten words” and “two tablets”, imposed a bipartition of the text, while, from the literary point of view, the text is organised concentrically.

¹ I take up again here one of my studies, with some modifications (R. MEYNET, “I due decaloghi, legge di libertà (Es 20,2-17 & Dt 5,6-21)”. The first draft of this study was published in 1984, with the title “Les dix commandements, loi de liberté; analyse rhétorique d’Ex 20,2-17 et de Dt 5,6-21”. The present analysis is improved, thanks particularly to the oral suggestions of Pietro Bovati and his study of the Decalogue in *Giustizia e ingiustizia nell’Antico Testamento*, 75-142. Besides my acknowledgement goes to A. WÉNIN, “Le décalogue. Approche contextuelle, théologie et anthropologie”; and to M. BALMARY, *La Divine Origine. Dieu n’a pas créé l’homme*; ID., *Abel ou la traversée de l’Éden*.

² Ex 34:28; Dt 4:13; 10:4.

³ Modern exegesis attributes generally the version of the Exodus to the priestly school and Dt to the Deuteronomistic school; the former would have been more recent.

⁴ The difference is in function of the identification of the first commandment (2-3 for the Jews and the Greek Fathers, followed by the orthodox and the Protestants, or 3-6 for the Latin Fathers, a major part of the Syriac tradition, Catholics and Lutherans) and, correlatively, of the last (17ab for the first, 17b for the others); see BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 83, n. 34.

⁵ See A.A. FRAENKEL, “Assarah Maamaroth – ’Assarah Dibberot. De la Création à la Révélation”; see BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 83-84.

⁶ Ex 31:18; 32:15; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-11,15,17; 1K 8:9; 2Cr 5:10. P. Bovati (*Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 81-83) is of the opinion that this number does not indicate a division of the text in two parts, as all iconography presents, but to the number of the copies of the text, a copy for each of the two contracting parties of the pact, as usually done for the treaties of the epoch (and as is done even today for every type of contract).

DECALOGUE OF EXODUS (20:2-17)

Ex 20:2-17 is composed concentrically of four parts (see pg. 18). The first part (2-7) concerns one's obligations towards God; obligations towards the neighbour are the object of the last part (13-17); all the commandments of these extreme parts are expressed by negative imperatives. Two central parts (8-11; 12) are distinguished from the other two by the fact that they contain the only positive imperatives of the passage. They begin with: "Remember the day of Sabbath" (8) and "Honour your father and your mother" (12).

1. FIRST PART (Ex 20:2-7)

COMPOSITION

+ ² I	(am)	YHWH	your God
. who brought you	from the land	of Egypt,	
.	from the house	of the <i>SERVANTS</i> :	
- ³ SHALL NOT	EXIST	<i>for you</i>	<i>other gods</i> before me.
- ⁴ YOU SHALL NOT	DO	<i>for you</i>	<i>sculpture</i>
- or		any	<i>representation,</i>
. of what is in	the heavens	above,	
. and of what is on	the earth	under,	
. and of what is in	the waters	under	the earth;
- ⁵ YOU SHALL NOT	prostrate	before	<i>them</i>
- and YOU SHALL NOT BE	<i>SERVANTS</i>	to	<i>them:</i>

+ <i>because I</i>	(am)	YHWH	your God,
+	(I am)	a God	jealous,
: who	sees	the iniquity	of the fathers on sons
	- on <i>third</i> and on <i>fourth</i> (generations)		for those who hate me,
: ⁶ and who	DOES	mercy	to <i>thousands</i> (generations)
	- for those who love me		and observe my commandments.
= ⁷ YOU SHALL NOT pronounce the name		YHWH	your God <i>in vain:</i>
+ <i>because YHWH</i> DOES NOT hold-innocent		who pronounces his name	<i>in vain.</i>

The first part consists of two short subparts (2-3 and 7) that frame an elaborate subpart (4-6). While in the first subpart, the commandment (3) is preceded by its motivation (2), it is inverted in the other two subparts where the commandments (4-5b and 7a) are followed by its motivation (5c-6 and 7b) introduced with "because".

The first subpart (2-3) has two segments. The first is a trimember (2abc) of ABB' type: the first member is like a title, where the speaker presents his name and his quality (2a); other two members recall what he did for those to whom it was addressed (2bc). The second segment (3) is unimember: it is the commandment motivated by the action accomplished in favour of those to whom it is given (2). The extreme members correspond to one another: the name “YHWH” could be translated as “existing” (like in the LXX) to make evident the lexical relationship with the verb “will not exist”; “other gods” of 3 is opposed to “your God” of 2a; “before me” at the end of 3 brings up “I” at the beginning of 2. It could also be noted that the second person singular pronoun occurs three times (2a,2b,3).

The second subpart includes two pieces. The first (4-5b) is formed of two bimeters (4ab and 5ab) that frame a trimember (4cde). At the extremity, the interdict is doubled. The central trimember is the enumeration of the three parts of the Cosmos: the singular “earth” between the plural “heavens” and “waters”; the enlargement of the last member with the addition of “earth” is to be noted. The exhaustive list of the elements highlights the absolute character of the commandment. The second piece (5c-6) is formed from three bimeters. The first (5cd) is the title that begins with the same “I” of 2a, but a second divine title is added: “jealous God”. The second (5ef) and the third segments (6ab) are parallel; these two segments render explicit the title “jealous God” with which the first segment concludes. Occurrences of the verb “to do” at the beginning of the extreme segments is to be noted.

The third subpart (7) consists of only a single bimember. The commandment (7a) is followed by its motivation (7b). The same syntagm “pronouncing the name” appears in both members; two occurrences of “in vain” are the final terms.

Relations among the subparts: besides what is said already regarding the logical movement found in each subpart between the commandment and its motivation, the following should be noted:

- repetition of “YHWH your God” at the beginning of the extreme subparts (2a and 7a) and at the beginning of the second piece of the central subpart (5c);
- “other gods” at the end of the first subpart (3) and “sculpture”– “representation” at the beginning of the second subpart (4ab) form median terms; the function of the repetition “for you” (3 and 4a) is the same, above all, appearing only here in the whole of the passage;
- “servants” of 2b is from the same root of “you shall not be servants” of 5b;
- recalling of the past at the centre of the first subpart (2bc) is in relation with the announcement of the future at the end of the second subpart (5ef-6); mentioning of the salvific action of God corresponds to the “historical prologue”

of the covenantal texts, that of threat corresponds to the “curses and benedictions” of the same texts;⁷

— finally, the correspondence between “other gods” at the end of the first subpart (3; “sculpture” in 4a) and the two occurrences of “in vain” at the end of the two members of the last subpart (7a,7b) is to be noted: the idols in fact are vanity (Jr 18:15: “My people forgot me, what is vanity, they incense”).

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

“Heavens”, “earth” and “waters” (4cde), as well as the verb “to do” with which verse 4 begins recall the first creation narrative: God “does” the firmament on the second day (Gn 1:7), lights on the fourth day (1:16), animals that live on the earth on the sixth day (1:25). At the end of the sixth day, after having created man and woman, “God sees all that he has done, and behold, it was very good” (1:31). For light, the text uses the verb “to be”: “God says: Let there *be* light! And there was light” (1:3). For the firmament, two verbs used are conjunctives: “God says: Let there *be* firmament [...] God *did* the firmament” (1:6-7). It is the same verb “to be” (translated with “to exist”) that the Decalogue uses just before the verb “to do”: “Other gods will not *exist* for you before me” (Ex 20:3).

INTERPRETATION

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you ...” (first commandment)

None of the three commandments that are highlighted in this first part (2-3; 4-6; 7) is an impersonal law, like the articles of our penal codes which begin *ex abrupto* with “It is forbidden to do this or that”. Before dictating any command, the speaker presents himself: “I am the Lord your God” (2a). He is not contented to enunciate his proper name, “Lord”; he identifies immediately with those to whom it is directed: “I am the Lord, *your* God”.⁸ “Ten words” are above all the discourse of an “I” addressed to a “you”.⁹ However, as it happens often among men, it is not enough that one who presents himself says his name to be recognised. He must recall the circumstances of a past encounter, to assist the memory of the other of his unique face. Liberation from the slavery of Egypt, enacted by the Lord in favour of those to whom it is addressed, identifies the addresser as well as his addressee: in a single Hebrew word, *hōs ētīkā*, (I brought you) (2b), the pronouns of the first and second person (*tī + kā*) are joined together. The long history of the relations between God and the sons of

⁷ See P. BEAUCHAMP, “Propositions sur l’alliance comme structure centrale”.

⁸ In Hebrew, the personal pronouns occupy the extremity of the sentence: “I (am) the Lord, the God of you”.

⁹ See B. GROSS, “Les dix Paroles et l’état du Monde”.

Israel is summed up in the exodus event: this event is in fact not one among many, not even the first among many, it is the fundamental event, the act of birth in which the paternity of God and the sonship of the elected people are recognised. Enunciation of the law can be founded only by referring to the origin.

“I am the Lord your God, the jealous God...” (the first with other two)

Recalling the origin does not only refer to the historical event of coming out of Egypt. The mentioning of “what is in the heavens above, and what is in the earth under, and what is in the waters under the earth” (4cde) brings up, though indirectly, the origin of the earth itself, an event that cannot be represented except with mythical language. The reader knows that the creation of the world is the work of the Lord. However, it is necessary to note that the Lord is not so much presented here as the Creator (and does not pronounce his law by this title) but insofar as he is the Redeemer who has intervened in history. On the occasion of what can be identified as the second commandment (4-6), the speaker takes up again the same formula with which he began: “I (am) the Lord your God” (5c). However, this time, it is not to recall the benefits of the past, but to contemplate a future entrusted to the choice of man. The fact that the sins of the fathers should fall on their descendents as far as to the third or fourth generations, is without doubt, a mode of understanding that the discourse is not addressed to an isolated individual and that the responsibility of the present generation involves also the events of future generations. The great difference, between the third or fourth generations that would incur curses and the thousands who would benefit from the blessings, illustrates how much the divine mercy exceeds castigation. The Lord is presented therefore as the absolute master of history, the redeemer of the past right from the beginning (2-3) and the supreme judge of the future (4-6).

“You shall not do” (second commandment)

“Listen, Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one only. You will love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength” (Dt 6:4-5). The total character, underlined three times in the command of Deuteronomy, enunciates nothing other than explaining the first part of the Decalogue: “all” for the Lord is equivalent to nothing for any other (3). What the accumulation of three “all” expresses there positively (Dt 6:4), is here brought out negatively with the insistent reiteration of five negative imperatives (3,4a,5a,5b,7a). Everything is concentrated on the interdict on idolatry (4-5b) which is another mode of proclaiming the absolute uniqueness of the “Lord”. In fact, after the general yet brief first commandment (3) that prohibits Israel from having other gods before it, the central subpart prohibits it with insistence of “doing” idols,

representations of any elements of the world. “To do” a god of what is in the heavens, on the earth or in the waters would be upsetting the order of creation, establishing confusion between the Creator and one of his creatures. It would be “hating him” (5f). Making a god means to deny being a creature. Making for oneself a god is arrogating the position of the Creator and making oneself as god. This first interpretation of the central part must be however completed or corrected by another. The second commandment (4-6) can be understood not as a simple repetition, though amplified, of the first (2-3), but as another commandment: what is forbidden is to make a “statue” or another representation of the Lord, God of Israel. This is exactly what the sons of Israel asked and obtained from Aaron, when they made the golden calf, which was not another god; they said in fact: “Here is your God, o Israel, who brought you from the land of Egypt!” (Ex 32:4).

“and you shall not be servants” (still the second commandment)

Having arrived in Egypt, as free men, and being presented to Pharaoh by their brother Joseph, his minister (Gn 46–47), the sons of Jacob would be later reduced into slaves of the Egyptians (Ex 1). “The land of Egypt” became thus for the sons of Israel “a house of the servants”, till the day in which the Lord, after having revealed his name to his servant Moses (Ex 3:14), brought Israel out from slavery. It is then that Moses and the sons of Israel sing for the Lord the canticle that culminates with these words: “Who is like you among the gods, Lord? Who is like you, majestic in sanctity, fearful in praises, worker of wonders?” (Ex 15:11).¹⁰ After some time, as soon as the covenant on the Mount Sinai was established, the people will betray the Lord by prostrating before the golden calf (Ex 32). Idolatry and every representation — perhaps even that of the Lord — is enslavement,¹¹ it is returning to the land of Egypt, negating the liberation brought by the Lord. Israel is not called to “be enslaved” (5b), but to “love” the Lord (6b) and observe his commandments. Obedience is not a slavish attitude of one who is forced to do what is ordered to him, but it is the fruit of a free choice of one who knows of being saved from slavery.

“Do not pronounce the name in vain” (third commandment)

The order to adore the only God with the exclusion of every other has its corollary: if a man must guard himself from recognising the existence of other gods before the Lord (3), it is also at the same time imperative not to treat the

¹⁰ For the analysis of the “Song of Moses” (Ex 15 :1-18), see R. MEYNET, “Le cantique de Moïse et le cantique de l’Agneau (Ap 15 et Ex 15)”.

¹¹ 5b is habitually translated with an active verb: “You shall not serve them”. But it is a passive (*hofal*): “You shall not be served to them”.

Only-Existing-One “in vain” (7); i.e. treating him as if he does not exist, as if he has the same inconsistency as the vain idols and their empty images (4ab). In any case, the divine castigation that would knock down perjury (7b) would not be in vain, and the culprit would receive at the same time the taste of his sin and the existence of the One whom he had offended.

2. SECOND PART (Ex 20:8-11)

COMPOSITION

* ⁸ Remember	of the	DAY OF SABBATH	to	CONSECRATE IT.
+ ⁹ <i>Six</i>	<i>DAYS</i>	<i>you will serve</i>		
+ and you will do		<i>all your work,</i>		
– ¹⁰ AND SEVENTH DAY	is Sabbath	to	YHWH your God:	
– <i>you shall not do any work,</i>				
	: and your son	and your daughter,		
	: and your <i>servant</i>	and your handmaid,		
	: and your livestock	and your guest	who is at your door.	

+ ¹¹ Because <i>in six</i>	<i>DAYS</i>	YHWH made		
. the heavens		and the earth		
. and the sea		and all	that are in them	
– and	<i>he rested</i>			SEVENTH DAY.

* Because YHWH blessed the DAY OF SABBATH and CONSECRATED IT.

This part consists of two subparts, the command (8-10) and the reason it is given (11), introduced by “because”.

The first subpart (8-10) is formed by three pieces. The first (8) counts only one unimember, developed further successively. The other two pieces (9 and 10) oppose what one should do during the six days of the week to what one should not do on the Sabbath. While the second piece (9) has only one bimember, the third (10) is formed by a bimember (10ab) followed by a trimember (10cde) that lists, pairing them, those who, other than “you” of 10b, must not work on the Sabbath. The words which have the same root, “you will serve” of 9a and “your servant” of 10d, are to be noted.

The second subpart (11) is formed by two pieces. The first includes a trimember (11abc; what the Lord did “in six days”) that is opposed to a unimember (11d; what he did “on the seventh day”). This piece is composed

concentrically, with complements of time at the extremes, then verbs and finally the lists at the centre. The last piece (11e) is the conclusion of the subpart.

The extreme segments (8 and 11e) are parallel and form an inclusion: the first says to the man what he should do and the last what the Lord did; man is invited to do what God did.

The first piece of the second subpart (11a-d) corresponds to the verses 9-10 of the first subpart: — the contrast between “the six days” (9a) and “the seventh day (10a) is taken up again in 11a and 11d; — propositions of 9-10 are doubled in 11a-d: to “you will serve” (9a) and “it is Sabbath for Lord your God” (10a) are added two syntagms opposed with the negation, “you will do”–“you will not do” + “all (his) work”¹² — while 9-10 is composed in parallel mode, 11a-d is composed concentrically; — at the end of the first part (10cde) and at the centre of the second (11bc), there are two enumerations: the first is more elaborate than the second; each one concludes with an analogous expansion, “who is in your door”–“that are in them”, which underlines their symmetry. These two enumerations have the same value of completeness.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Rest of the Lord

The motivation of the commandment (11) recalls the conclusion of the first creation narrative; many repetitions of words (in italic) are to be noted:

¹ Thus the heaven and the earth and their entire host are completed. ² Then God, in the *seventh day* brought to end *the work* that he did and ceased (*šbt*) in the *seventh day* from *each of his work*. ³ God *blessed* the *seventh day* and *consecrated it*, because in it *he had ceased from every work* that he had done creating (Gn 2:1-3).

Divine Resemblance

The command of the Sabbatical rest is motivated by the action of God; in other words, man is called by this commandment to imitate the Lord. In fact, according to the first creation narrative, man was made “in the image” of God.

²⁶ And God says: “Let us make man in our image, in our resemblance [...]”. ²⁷ God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Gn 1:26-27).

It is not to be neglected the difference between the two expressions: “in our image and our resemblance” is the project of God, “in his image” is what he

¹² “All” of 9c and “any” of 10c translate the same Hebrew word, *kol*.

realised: “image” is already given, but the “resemblance” is left to the initiative of man, as a vocation to realise.¹³

INTERPRETATION

Command to Work

It is true that this part regards above all the consecration of the Sabbath: in fact the text begins: “Remember the day of Sabbath” (8a). However, after this initial generic command, man receives the order to work for six days (9). One could not respect the rest of the seventh day if he has not first “done all his work”. Placed in relation with the “doing” of the Lord (11a), the “doing” of man (11b) is thus presented as collaboration in the work of creation. In fact, in the creation narrative, the work of God is called with the same terms that designate in the Decalogue the work of man, “to do the work”. Created in the image of God (Gn 1:27), man received the vocation of the son who does the same work of his Father.

Consecration of the Sabbath

What is commanded to man for the seventh day could seem totally negative: it is in fact a “non-doing”, for the persons as well as for the livestock. However, before this prohibition (10b-e), it is said “the seventh day is Sabbath for the Lord, your God” (10a), as if the Sabbath, the “ceasing of the work”, had been for the Creator, before it would be for the creature. The “remembering” (8) seems destined therefore essentially to remember creation, the origin of man and his work itself and to recognise that life is not a fruit of one’s work, but of One who gives it as a gift. This is to remember the Sabbath “to consecrate it” (8), “for the Lord, your God” (10a).

Benediction of the Sabbath

The Sabbath is not only a consecration for God, but it is also a benediction for man. This benediction is for the owner of the house and for all those who are part of his house, even for the foreigner who works for him. The benediction consists in the liberation from slavery: on the seventh day, not only “the son and daughter” (10c) should not be treated as “servant and handmaid” (10d), or like “livestock” and “foreigner” (9a), but the slave and the servant are also to be considered as son and daughter. Consecration and benediction bring all, including the animals, into the sonship of the father of the family who himself recognises being generated by the heavenly Father.

¹³ See M. BALMARY, *La Divine Origine*, Ch. IV, “Où Dieu ne fait que la moitié de son travail”, 109-147 (citations of Origen and Basil of Caesarea: 113-116).

3. THIRD PART (Ex 20:12)

COMPOSITION

+ ¹² Honour	the FATHER	of you	and the MOTHER	of you ,
:: because	are prolonged		the days	of you ,
+ on the land	that YHWH GOD	of you	DONATES	to you .

This part is comprised of just a single trimember segment. From the syntactical point of view, the principal proposition (12a), namely the command, is followed by a final proposition (12b) and a complement of place (“on the land”) qualified by a relative: the last two members are double references to the benediction, regarding time (long life) and space (possession of the earth); from this point of view the trimember can be said to be of ABB’ type. However, the extreme members place in correlation the parents and “the Lord” who “gives” the land to the son, as the parents do when they transmit an inheritance. It is to be noted that all three members end with the pronoun suffix *-kā* (“you”), and that this pronoun appears twice in the extreme members.

*INTERPRETATION***Life is given to you**

In its brevity, this commandment reserves two beautiful surprises. Firstly, one would expect the second member to conclude with another pronoun: “so that are prolonged the days of *them*”. And it is often in this way that we unconsciously read it.¹⁴ The honour due to father and mother, namely the care of one’s parents, has the scope of sustaining them, so that they can live as long as possible. This is the normal reaction and the felt desire of children. However, the biblical text subverts in a certain sense this natural aspiration: it does not negate, certainly, but the motivation it gives for the commandment is different. What it has as its aim is not the long life of the parents but of the son! “The Law of Superego was saying: «Honour your father and your mother because *their* days are prolonged». The law of Revelation, which is prophetic, says: «Honour... your days are prolonged»”.¹⁵ Honouring the parents is to allow the son to live his own life; and it is therefore how the son can honour them.

¹⁴ See M. BALMARY, *La Divine Origine*, 227-230; she shows that Freud himself was making this erroneous reading.

¹⁵ M. BALMARY, *La Divine Origine*, 228.

Land is donated to you

The text reserves still another surprise. One would expect: “on the land that your father donates to you”, i.e. on the property that you received and will receive as inheritance from your parents. The honour would be due to the father and the mother because they give to the son the possibility of living off the work of the land.¹⁶ The text instead says: “the land that *the Lord God* donates to you”. What motivates the command to honour the parents is that, with the inheritance that allows one to live as a free man, life itself was transmitted to the son as a divine gift. By honouring father and mother, as the Decalogue commands, one honours the origin of life and liberty. The verb is vague and, so to say, empty; “to honour” can be and must be without doubt open to different particular meanings, leaving to the initiative of the son: from youth he is obliged to obey his parents, an adult instead is to assure sustenance to the parents who have become old and impotent. Above all the son should respect those who have transmitted life to him and, with the filiation of Abraham, the faith and promise given to the sons of Israel.¹⁷

¹⁶ The term *'ādāmā* indicates rather the land cultivated, while *'eres*□ signifies “the country”, like at v. 2: “the land of Egypt” (see E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN, *Dizionario teologico dell'Antico Testamento*, I, 49-52). “The fruit of the land” is said *p^erî hā- 'ādāmā*; the syntagm *p^erî hā- 'āres*□ is used only four times in the Hebrew Bible, of which three times to designate the products of the country of Canaan that the explorers sent by Moses bring (Nb 13:20,26; Dt 1:25) and one that qualifies both the Messiah and the rest of Israel (Is 4:2). However, the term *'ādāmā* is ambiguous and is used sometime as synonym of *'eres*□, for example in Dt 26:15: “Look down from your holy dwelling, from heaven, and bless your people of Israel and the *land* (*'ādāmā*) that you have given us as you swore to our fathers, the *country* (*'eres*□) where milk and honey flows”! (see also Dt 11:9,17), or at the place of *'eres*□ (Dt 7:13; 11:21; 30:20).

¹⁷ See P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 139-142.

3. FOURTH PART (Ex 20:13-17)

COMPOSITION

+ ¹³	YOU SHALL NOT KILL.		
:: ¹⁴	YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.		
- ¹⁵	YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.		

+ ¹⁶	YOU SHALL NOT ANSWER against	<i>your neighbour</i>	false testimony.
- ¹⁷	YOU SHALL NOT DESIRE	the house	of <i>your neighbour</i> .
::	YOU SHALL NOT COVET	the wife	of <i>your neighbour</i> ,
		- and his servant	and his handmaid,
		- and his ox	and his ass,
		- and all that is	to <i>your neighbour</i> .

This passage is formed of two parallel parts (13-15 and 16-17). The first includes three short similar unimembers: negation and the same modality of the verbs. The second part (16-17) consists of two trimember segments (16-17b and 17cde); “your neighbour” appears four times, in each member of the first segment (16,17a,17b) and at the end of the second trimember.

The first members (13 and 16) correspond to each other as a false testimony in the tribunal can bring death to the “neighbour”. The correspondence of other members seems inverted: the desire towards the wife (17b) could certainly be placed in relation to the prohibition of adultery (14); the desire for the house (17a) could therefore correspond to the prohibition of stealing (15). However, the fact that 17a and 17b begin with the same verb leads one to think that the significance of the “house” is not the material edifice, but household, namely all those who are living in the house and the objects that are found there.

*BIBLICAL CONTEXT***Greed**

“To desire” (*hmd*, used twice: 17ab), is of the same root of the participle “desirable” used to qualify the trees that God made to grow in the garden (Gn 2:9: “desirable” to the sight and good to eat”), and above all — to the eyes of the woman tempted by the serpent — the tree in the midst of the garden, for which the only interdict of God is made: “Now the woman sees that the tree was good to eat, pleasurable to the eyes and *desirable* to acquire wisdom; she took its fruit and ate it” (Gn 3:6).

INTERPRETATION

Neighbour in his threefold anthropological dimensions

Other should be recognised for what he is, in his physical (13) and social (16) life, in his conjugal (14) and family life (17a) and in his economical (15) and domestic life (17b-e). In other words, he is to be recognised in what makes him a man like me, my “neighbour”. Three commandments repeated are regarding three fundamental characteristics of man according to the Bible: above all as being a person, in himself, in his physical body (13) and in his social body (16), as husband (14) and the head of the family (17a) and finally as the responsible person for all the households, wife (17b), servants (17c) and the livestock (17d). Life, family and the wealth of the neighbour are sacred. No one can touch them without incurring capital damage upon himself.

Negating the other is self-negating

One who kills another man (13) negates himself, one who lies with a false testimony, negates himself before others (16): he behaves as if he does not exist, rather in such a way that he does not exist any more. Taking the wife of another or stealing one’s wealth, rather even only desiring them, means thinking that they could be removed, considering them as nothing and doing as if they do not count for anything. Committing adultery (14) or stealing (15), even “desiring” to do it (17), is fundamentally of the same nature as homicide (13) or destroying someone in the eyes of others with false testimony (16). It is simply negating the other as “neighbour”; besides negating oneself as man, i.e. as neighbour of another.

Greed, root of all sin (second part)

It could look strange at the first reading, that false testimony and even desiring the goods of other are mentioned after homicide, adultery and theft. One could expect, on the contrary, a gradual progression: from desire to action, from venial to mortal. The order of the text is neither indifferent nor insignificant. In fact, it is not only forbidden to kill, commit adultery and steal. The interdict extends to the origin of evil, intends to uproot it right from its root: before homicide, there is a false word that injures and can bring indirectly death; before actual adultery and theft, it is the desire of the eyes and heart that induces one to touch the wife and possessions of the neighbour. Indeed, it was the greed of the eyes that led the first woman to touch the forbidden fruit; one knows what the result was.

4. PASSAGE AS A WHOLE (Ex 20:2-17)

COMPOSITION

Relations between Two Extreme Parts (2-7 and 13-17)

² I (am)	YHWH YOUR GOD
who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of <i>SERVANTS</i> :	
³ Shall not exist for you other gods before me.	

⁴ You shall not do for you sculpture	or any representation,
- of what (is) in the heavens above,	
- and of what (is) on the earth under,	
- and of what (is) in the waters under the earth.	
⁵ You shall not prostrate before them and	you shall not be <i>SERVANTS</i> to them,
because I (am)	YHWH YOUR GOD,
the jealous God,	
who sees the iniquity of the fathers on sons on the third and on fourth (generations)	
for those who hate me,	
⁶ and who does mercy to thousands (generations)	
for those who love me and observe my commands.	

⁷ You shall not pronounce the Name of	YHWH YOUR GOD in vain,
because YHWH does not justify one who pronounces	<i>his</i> Name in vain.

[...]

¹³	You shall not kill.
¹⁴	You shall not commit adultery.
¹⁵	You shall not steal.

¹⁶	You shall not testimony against YOUR NEIGHBOUR falsely.
¹⁷	You shall not desire the house of YOUR NEIGHBOUR .
	You shall not covet the wife of YOUR NEIGHBOUR ,
	: and <i>his SERVANT</i> and <i>his HANDMAID</i> ,
	: and <i>his ox</i> and <i>his ass</i> ,
	: and all that is to YOUR NEIGHBOUR .

— Each part has six negative verbs (3,4a,5a,5a,7a,7b; 13,14,15,16,17a,17b; always with the same negation *lō*’); all are imperatives, except the last in the first part (“does not justify” in 7b).

— The command of 16 ends with a synonym (“falsely”) of the word with which each of the two members of 7 (“in vain”) concludes.

— “House” appears in 2b and in 17a; however, they are two different houses, in the first part, it is “the house of the servants”, in the last part, it is “the house of your neighbour”.

— The name “YHWH”, while it is mentioned four times in the first part, of which three times are qualified as “*your* God”, it does not appear anymore in the last part; instead “neighbour” is taken up four times, always qualified as “*your* neighbour”; the pronoun suffix of third person singular is found only at the end: 7b and 17cd. In the last part, the Lord God seems therefore totally absent. However, one can think that false testimony, with which the second subpart begins (16) indicates the swearing in the Name of the Lord.¹⁸ The relation established between the final terms of the last two members of the first part (7a and 7b) and the final term of the first member of the last subpart of the final part (16), with the synonym “in vain” and “falsely”, supports this interpretation; they are two commandments regarding the word.

¹⁸ See P. BOVATI, *Ristabilire la giustizia*, 261-263, n. 62.

Relations between Two Central Parts (8-11 and 12)¹⁹

⁸ REMEMBER of the *day* of Sabbath to consecrate it.

⁹ Six *days* you will serve and do all your work,

¹⁰ And the seventh *day* is Sabbath to THE LORD YOUR GOD:

you shall not do any work, you,

and **YOUR SON** and **YOUR DAUGHTER**,

and your servant and your handmaid,

and your livestock and your guest who is at your door.

¹¹ **because** in six *days* Yhwh made the heavens and the earth and the sea
and all that are in them
and he rested the seventh *day*.

Because Yhwh blessed the day of Sabbath and consecrated it.

¹² HONOUR your father and your mother,

so that your *days* are prolonged,

on the land that the Lord your God donates to you.

¹⁹ See M. TAPIÉRO, “«Honore ton père et ta mère»”, 289 ; A.A. FRAENKAEL, “Du père au Père”, 305-307.

— These two parts begin with the unique positive imperatives of the passage:²⁰ “Remember” (8) and “Honour” (12a).

— The name of the Lord, “YHWH your God”, occurs once in each part (10a and 12c).

— “Day”, that appears six times in the second part (8,9,10a,11a,11b,11c), is taken up again, once in the third part but in the plural form (12b).

— The first commandment is followed by its cause (“because” at the beginning of 11)”, a cause that goes back to the origin, the second is followed by its consequence (“so that” at the beginning of 12b), with its present consequence in 12c and future in 12b.

— “Son” and “daughter” (10c) belong to the same semantic field of “father” and “mother” (12a); the former are descendants of the first degree, the latter are ancestors of the first degree; all the four terms have the same pronoun suffix of second person masculine (-*kā*), translated with “your”; in these two pairs the complementarity of the sexes is found. The same order is followed even for the pair “servant and handmaid” (10d) which is parallel to “son and daughter”.

The two commandments are therefore complementary: the command of the Sabbath is directed to man as father; the following command is addressed to him as son. The two commandments regard the entire relational sphere in the family and have the same centre, the house.

²⁰ The command of the Sabbath contains also a negative imperative (10b).

Relations among the Four Parts

² I am THE LORD *YOUR* GOD
 who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of *SERVANTS*:
³ Shall not exist for you other gods before me.
⁴ You shall not do for you sculpture or *any* representation,
 - of what (is) **in the heavens** above,
 - and of what (is) **on the earth** under,
 - and of what (is) **in the waters** under the earth.
⁵ You shall not prostrate before them and you shall not be *SERVANTS* to them,
 because I am THE LORD *YOUR* GOD, the *jealous* God,
 who sees the iniquity of the **FATHERS** on **SONS** on the third and on fourth (generations)
 for those who hate me,
⁶ and who does mercy to thousands (generations)
 for those who *love* me and observe my commands.
⁷ You shall not pronounce the Name of THE LORD *YOUR* GOD in vain,
 because the Lord does not justify one who pronounces *his* Name in vain.

⁸ *Remember* of the day of Sabbath to consecrate it.
⁹ Six days *YOU WILL SERVE* and you will do *all* your work,
¹⁰ And seventh day is Sabbath to THE LORD *YOUR* GOD:
 you shall not do *any* work, you,
 : and *YOUR SON* and *YOUR DAUGHTER*,
 : and *YOUR SERVANT* and *YOUR HANDMAID*,
 : and *YOUR* livestock and *YOUR* guest who is at *YOUR* door.
¹¹ Because in six *days* Yhwh made
 - **the heavens**
 - and **the earth**
 - and **the sea** and *all* that are in them
 and he rested seventh day.
 Because Yhwh blessed the day of Sabbath and consecrated it.

¹² *Honour* *YOUR FATHER* and *YOUR MOTHER*,
 so that your days are prolonged
 on the land that THE LORD *YOUR* GOD donates to you.

¹³ You shall not kill. ¹⁴ You shall not *commit adultery*. ¹⁵ You shall not steal.
¹⁶ You shall not testimony against *YOUR* NEIGHBOUR falsely.
¹⁷ You shall not desire the house of *YOUR* NEIGHBOUR.
You shall not covet the wife of *YOUR* NEIGHBOUR,
 : and *his SERVANT* and *his HANDMAID*,
 : and *his* ox and *his* ass,
 : and *all* that is to *YOUR* NEIGHBOUR.

While the symbolic scope of the first part (2-7) seems to be the temple, the place of cult of the Lord and of the invocation of the Name, that of the two

central parts (8-12) is the house, the place in which sons, servants, households and employed foreigners are gathered together around father and mother. That of the last part (13-17) is external: “the «door» (i.e. the square) of the city could be considered if not the exclusive place at least one of the typical places of these public relations”.²¹

The command of the Sabbath is connected with the commands towards God, because “Sabbath (is) for the Lord your God” (10a); honouring father and mother (12) precedes the list of the commands towards the neighbour (13-17) of which “father and mother” make part, even though in a special way of their own.

Relations are particularly close between the first and second parts: only in these parts the creative actions of God are mentioned, first in favour of Israel (2b), then in favour of all the created beings (11); only here appear the enumerations of “heavens”, “earth” and “waters” or “sea” (4 and 11); only here the verb “to do” is used, referring to the action of man (4a,9b,10b; it is to be noted that 4a and 10b have negative imperatives) as well as God (6a,11a).

The terms “fathers” and “sons” of the first part (5c) will be taken up again, in singular form, in the second part (“son” in 10c) and in the third part (“father” in 12a).

Two enumerations of three terms in 10cde and in 11bcd at the centre of the passage find their echoes: the second at the centre of the first part (4bcd) and the first at the end of the fourth part (17cde). The framing of these lists (A/B,A'/B') seems to mark more of the unity as a whole.

The words of the root *'bd* are found in the first two parts and in the fourth: “servants” and “to enslave” in 2b and 5a; “to serve” and “servant” in 9a and 10d; “servants” in 17c (accompanied by “handmaid”, like in 10d).

The Hebrew word *kol*, translated either with “any” or with “all” as the context requires, appears in 4a in the first part, in 9a, 10b and 11d in the second part and at the end of the last part, in 17e.

While the pronoun of 2nd person singular suffix is only for God in the first part (“YHWH *your* God”; 2a, 5b and 7a), it is the suffix only for the neighbour in the last part (“*your* neighbour” in 16, 17a, 17b and 17e); in the two central parts it is the suffix not only for God (“YHWH *your* God”: 10a, 12c), but also for the six terms of the enumeration of 10cde (“*your* son and *your* daughter, *your* servant and *your* handmaid, *your* livestock and *your* guest”) and for the pair of parents (“*your* father and *your* mother” in 12a).

The adjective “jealous” (5b), two verbs “to love” (6b) and “to commit adultery” (14) and the syntagm “to desire the wife of your neighbour” (17b) belong to the same semantic field of marital and extra-marital relations.

²¹ P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 131.

*BIBLICAL CONTEXT***“Each one fear your father and mother and observe my Sabbaths”**

So begins the central chapter of the “Law of sanctity” (Lv 19:3); the fact that these two commandments are coordinated is an external attestation that confirms the composition of the Decalogue in which the same commandments are juxtaposed, in inverse order, at the centre of the passage as a whole. The link between these two commandments is surprising.

INTERPRETATION

The interpretation that is proposed here will be gradually developed beginning from the centre of the text, namely the second and third parts (8-12).

Uniqueness

Like the Lord God, father and mother are unique. A man can have many sons and daughters (10c), govern many servants and handmaids (10d), possess immense herds and employ number of immigrants (10e) but he will never have anyone like his father and his mother (12a). The natural relation of the couple that gave birth to him is something very particular: brothers, sisters, wife, sons, and daughters can never substitute, whatever may be their number, those who generated him. Among all the family bonds, however thick they may be, the relationship with father and mother is unique and can never be multiplied; like God who cannot be multiplied. The uniqueness of the parents is the image and symbol of divine uniqueness. The Lord God created everything: we exist only because of him (11a). Our father and mother, created in the image of God, are the means through which life is transmitted. Honouring them, we recognise in them the gift that God has given to us to exist in this world (12bc).

Heritage

Glorifying the Lord in his father and in his mother, man recognises himself as heir. All that he has, servants and handmaids, oxen and asses (10cde), the land that nurses him (12c), all this he has inherited from his parents. Everything has been “donated” to him by God through his parents (12c). His days (12b) and his land (12c) were also given to him by Another; and even the work that he does during the six days which are reserved for him (9), as the image of the God who made the heavens and earth and seas and all that they contain (11a-d), he confesses, sacrificing the seventh day (10a) that it too is a gift to him by God. Everything is His grace, all that he is, all that he has and all that he does. His happiness and his life are bound to this joyful confession. Negating the gift would be refuting it; and logically it would be shortening his days (12b) and as a consequence, leaving the land (12c).

Sonship

Man is an heir. Sons whom he generates on this earth are the best gift that God could give to him. Therefore, in the Biblical world, sterility is considered as the supreme curse, because it negates to man and woman the supreme benediction of becoming like “God”, father and mother. He is not a man, in the real sense of the word, who does not have a descendant, who can not bring forth fruit both according to flesh and spirit. The two central commandments of the Decalogue therefore define my existence in its two-fold temporal dimension, in its two-fold ontological truth. I am a son or a daughter and I am a father or a mother, I am generated and I generate. It is the fundamental dimension of my being. The command of Sabbath is addressed to me as father, called to liberate my son and my daughter from the slavery of work; the following commandment is addressed to me as son, as I am invited to honour my father and mother who have served me, giving me the role of a son, who recognised my liberty to leave them to become father or mother also.

Liberation

A man who is generated by God is free: the Sabbath is given to him because he can recognise and practise this freedom, above all in himself, being freed from the slavery of daily work and in the same time in his son and his daughter, his servant and his handmaid (8-10). Therefore his son and his daughter are not to be treated as slaves; rather he should treat his servants as sons. Sanctifying the day of the Sabbath is considering that the freedom of a son is so holy that no one can touch it. The freedom of a son is to be extended to all: my son is as I am, even my servants and dependents and even the foreigners, who represent every man, are like my sons. The freedom of the father and mother is to recognise and make sure that their son and their daughter are free and that they are their heirs; this is to transmit the land that they received, the gift that was given to them, when the Lord their God brought them from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves (2). Glorifying father and mother is to honour in them that which they received from God more than what they have given.

“God of You”, “Neighbour of You”

Like “God” (2-7), “the neighbour” exists (13-17). Both of them have a proper name that should be respected and honoured. “Pronouncing the Name of the Lord your God in vain” (7), “Responding against your neighbour with a false testimony” (16) signify treating them as if they do not exist at all. This behaviour would be negating that the Lord is my God, that the neighbour is my neighbour, it would be to affirm that they do not count, that they are nothing *for me*; it would signify therefore even to treat myself as nonexistent. To negate the name, i.e. the person of the other, is to refute the other as a person and his

relationship that makes me exist as a person. In fact, it is not only the Lord my God who makes me exist, but also my neighbour. The “I” can not subsist without a “you” and in relation with this “you”.

“The House of Slaves»

The fundamental and creative act of the Lord consists in bringing the people of Israel out of the house of slavery. “The Lord” defines himself so to say as one who historically brought the sons of Israel “from the land of Egypt”, but he is also one who calls every man every day to come out “from the house of the servants” (2b). Rather, he invites each to imitate him, freeing in his turn another man from slavery. The father of the family who would enslave his own son and daughter even on the day of Sabbath, who does not free his own servant and handmaid, makes them live — if they can be said to live — in a “house of servants”. Instead, one who does not treat the son like his slave, but treats the slave like a son, brings him from the land of Egypt to imitate the Lord his God: he gives him life. A man who “desires the house” of another, who steals servant and handmaid, oxen and asses, who takes the wife, confines all of them in his “house of servants”. Stripped from “all that is his”, even the neighbour himself will be soon reduced to slavery. Finally, the man who reduces the other to slavery will be taught that even he himself, more than the victim, is slave of his “greed” (17ab); he kills another and in the process kills himself.

Son is not a Slave

With land (12), only the son can receive the Law, the Law summed up in Ten Words. Land is not transmitted to the servant, and the Law is not imposed on the slave: it would be the constraint of force. Law is what is to be accepted freely. This is the substance of the law. It could not be given in Egypt to those who were only a group of slaves, the object of the tyranny of their masters, but in the desert, after the liberation brought by the mighty hand of the Lord (2), to those who became people, subjects of their own history. Law consecrates freedom and bases itself on it. The “mercy” of the Lord rests on the succession of the fathers and sons unto the thousands of generations who love him and observe his commandments (6). Love is another name for freedom given by the Law.

Jealousy, Love and Adultery

The Lord is presented as “the jealous God” (5b). This qualitative adjective is surprising: so it needs to be interpreted. As is usually the case, it can be intended in a bad or good sense. In a bad sense, it is to be understood that God does not want man to take what belongs to him. In the text only the Name of God is said to be “his”; nothing more than that, neither “what is in the heavens above, nor what is on the earth under nor what is in the waters under the earth” (4bcd) is

said to belong to God; and even more so of man! If God had brought Israel from the house of servants, it would certainly not be to enslave his people. God is jealous of human freedom and will never touch it. His greatest desire is that man be enslaved to no one, not even to an image (4a,5a). Love is not slavery, but free adhesion where each one respects the otherness of the other. An idolater is one who wants to possess all of the other as if he is an object to be possessed and used and not as a subject to be loved and respected. The adulterer neither respects the identity of the other nor of himself. Both of these negate the other and themselves. A truly free son is one who honours in his parents and the conjunction, the “and” (12), that at the same time distinguishes and unites them, i.e. the love that generated him.

Covenant

Ten Words are first of all not a Law; they are not a list of commands, imposed by a master that would burden man for ever. The gift of life and freedom is not blackmail on the part of God, to which man would be forced by the divinity. They are instead a unique word, in the sense of commitment, promise and confidence. One who “gives his word” commits himself at the same time and is challenged by the other, running therefore the risk of being betrayed. Like in love and a matrimonial contract,²² both the contracting parties are equals.²³ Ten Words represent the pact that God proposes to his people that will be sanctified by the rite of the covenant (Ex 24). The gift of freedom supposes from the part of God the acceptance of the possibility of being rejected, of being “hated” instead of being “loved” (5-6).²⁴ The castigation contemplated for one who would betray the faith of God is not revenge by the One who is hurt by unfaithfulness but the remedy of One who wants to save life, the “visitation” of One who intends to propose to restore the loving relationship with forgiveness.²⁵

THE DECALOGUE IN DEUTERONOMY (5:6-21)

Immediately three books later the Bible takes up the Decalogue for a second time. According to the biblical narrative, almost forty years have passed, and the generation of those who received the Decalogue of Exodus have disappeared. Before his death and at the fringe of the Promised Land, Moses confirms the Ten Words to his sons, who are about to enter the land that the

²² The covenant of conjugal type concludes with the gift of the Decalogue, see Ch. MESSAS, “Les dix Paroles”, 17.19.

²³ P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 135.

²⁴ P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 97-101.

²⁵ P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 119.121.

Lord promised to give them. The first Decalogue is situated, literarily, after the people had come out of the land of Egypt and had crossed the Red sea; the second is located just before crossing the Jordan to enter their country.

COMPOSITION

First Part (Dt 5:6-11)

The first part of the Decalogue in the book of Deuteronomy is absolutely identical to that of Exodus.²⁶

Two Central Parts

The difference between the two versions is important, though they treat the same commandments and follow the same order. This is a supplementary proof, if it is necessary, that these two parts constitute a unit, clearly distinct from the other two parts that frame them.

Second Part (12-15)

+ ¹² Observe	THE DAY OF SABBATH	to	consecrate it,
: according to what	<i>I commanded you</i>		YHWH YOUR GOD.
:: ¹³ Six	<i>DAYS</i>		<i>you will serve</i>
:: and <i>will do</i>	<i>all</i>		<i>your work;</i>
· ¹⁴ and the seventh	DAY IS SABBATH	to	YHWH YOUR GOD.
– <i>You shall not do</i>	<i>any</i>	<i>work,</i>	<i>you,</i>
	. and your	son	and your daughter,
	. and your	<i>servant</i>	and your <i>handmaid,</i>
	. and your	ox,	and your ass
	. and your	guest	and all your livestock,
		who (is)	at your doors,
= so that	<i>they rest</i>	your <i>servant</i>	and your <i>handmaid,</i> like <i>you.</i>
:: ¹⁵ And you will remember	that <i>servant</i>	you were	in land of Egypt
· and I brought you	YHWH	YOUR GOD	from there
· with mighty	hand	and extended	arm.
: So	<i>I commanded you</i>		YHWH YOUR GOD
+ of doing	THE DAY	OF SABBATH.	

The commandment of the Sabbath according to Dt (12-15) is very different from that of Exodus, regarding its composition and the justification proposed: it

²⁶ See pg. 2.

is not based so much on creation but on liberation from Egypt. The concentric composition is better marked.

The first and the last subparts (12 and 15de) correspond to one another: “the day of Sabbath” preceded by the verbs “to observe” and “to do” in the extreme members (12a and 15e), “I have commanded you the Lord your God” in the second member at the beginning (12b), and in the first member at the end (15d).

The central subpart (13-15c) explains the content of what “he commanded you the Lord your God”, i.e. what one has “to observe” (12a) or “to do” (15e) “the day of Sabbath”.

— The first piece has just a trimember segment (13-14a) of AA’B type in which the six days are opposed to the seventh day.

— The symmetrical piece (15abc) is also a trimember, but this time of ABB’ type, in which slavery is opposed to liberation: thus six days in which one “serves” (13a) correspond to the time during which he was “servant” in the land of Egypt (15a), while Sabbath (14a) corresponds to liberation (15bc) enacted by “Lord your God” (the name is taken up in 15b as in 14a).

— The central piece (14b-g) is formed of a trimember (14bcd), a bimember that completes the list (14ef) and a unimember (14g) that expresses the cessation of “work”: the occurrences of “servant and handmaid” (14d and 14g) and the pronoun “you” at the end of the extreme members of the piece (14b and 14g) are to be noted.

Third Part (16)

The final trimember (16cde) expresses the motive of the commandment (16ab) indicated by the repetition of the conjunction “so that” (16cd). The repetition of the syntagm “the Lord your God” (lit.: “YHWH the God of you”) in the final members is to be noted. Every member concludes with the same pronoun suffix, “you”, that appears another three times (in 16a, 16b and 16e).

+ ¹⁶ Honour	the father	of you	and the mother	of you ,
+ according to what	I commanded	to you	YHWH THE GOD	of you ,
: <i>so that</i>	are prolonged		the days	of you
: and <i>so that</i>	there is happiness			for you ,
: on the land that	YHWH THE GOD	of you	donates	to you .

Comparing with the text of Exodus, the text of Deuteronomy is amplified: two supplementary members were inserted among the three members of the segment of Exodus:

Ex 20:12

Dt 5:16

¹² Honour your father and mother¹⁶ Honour your father and your mother
according to what I commanded you the Lord your God

so that your days are prolonged

so that your days are prolonged
and so that there will have happiness for you

on the earth that the Lord your God donated to you

on the earth that the Lord your God donated to you

Two central Parts together (Dt 5:12-16)

+ ¹² **OBSERVE** the day of Sabbath to consecrate it,
:: **according to what I commanded you YHWH YOUR GOD.**

¹³ Six *days* you will serve and will do all your work;

¹⁴ and the seventh *day* is Sabbath to YHWH YOUR GOD.

= You shall not do any work, you,

. and **YOUR SON** and **YOUR DAUGHTER,**

. and your *servant* and your *handmaid,*

. and your ox, and your ass and all your livestock,

. and your guest who is at your doors,

= so that they rest your servant and your handmaid like you.

¹⁵ You will remember that you were servant in land of Egypt
and YHWH YOUR GOD brought you with mighty hand and extended arm.

So I commanded you YHWH YOUR GOD
of doing the *day* of Sabbath.

+ ¹⁶ **HONOUR** **YOUR FATHER** and **YOUR MOTHER,**
:: **according to what I commanded you YHWH YOUR GOD,**

so that your *days* are prolonged and so that you will have happiness,
on the earth that YHWH YOUR GOD donated to you.

Other than the relationships already highlighted for the text of Exodus (see pg. 16s), the connection between the two central parts are reinforced by the repetition of an identical member, “according to what I commanded you the Lord your God”, in an identical position (12b and 16b). This is a confirmation of the fact that these two commandments are to be read together.

Last Part (Dt 5:17-21)

+ ¹⁷ YOU SHALL NOT KILL
 :: ¹⁸ and YOU SHALL NOT *COMMIT ADULTERY*
 – ¹⁹ and YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

+ ²⁰ And YOU SHALL NOT TESTIMONY	against YOUR NEIGHBOUR	in vain,
:: ²¹ and YOU SHALL NOT <i>COVET</i>	the wife	of YOUR NEIGHBOUR,
– and YOU SHALL NOT DESIRE	the house	of YOUR NEIGHBOUR,
	: his field	and his servant
	: his ox	and his ass
	* and all that is	of YOUR NEIGHBOUR.

The first piece (17-19) is identical to that of Ex 20:13-15 (see pg. 12), but three commandments are now coordinated by “and” twice, as if the three sins of homicide, adultery and theft were related to one another.²⁷

The composition of the first segment of the second piece (20-21b) is almost equal to Ex 20:16-17b. Dt inverts the last two members (“wife” before “house”) so as to make the parallelism with the three commandments of the first piece more regular: not only does “testimony” correspond with homicide, but “coveting the wife of the neighbour” corresponds with “committing adultery” and “desiring the house of the neighbour...” with “stealing”. In the last segment (21cde), the addition of “field” and, above all, the play of the coordinating conjunctions that regroup the terms into subgroups are to be noted.

Passage as a Whole (Dt 5,6-20)

The global composition of the Decalogue according to Deuteronomy is the same as the Exodus version: the first part (6-11) is dedicated to the duties towards “the Lord your God” and the last (17-21) to the duties towards “your neighbour”. At the centre, there are two unique positive commandments: the consecration of the Sabbath (12-15) and the honour due to father and mother (16).

²⁷ See P. BEAUCHAMP, *D’une montagne à l’autre, la Loi de Dieu*, 43-47 (*La legge di Dio*, 45-48): the better known and emblematic narrative is that of David, in which desire makes him commit adultery with Bathsheba, after which he goes the way of falsehood and kills her husband (see also the story of the vineyard of Naboth in 1K 21).

⁶ I am	THE LORD YOUR GOD	
who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of <i>SERVANTS</i> :		
⁷ Shall not exist for you other gods before me.		
⁸ You shall not do for you idols	or any representation,	
of what is in the heavens above,		
and of what is on the earth under,		
and of what is in the waters under the earth.		
⁹ You shall not prostrate before them	and you shall not be <i>SERVANTS</i> to them,	
because I am	THE LORD YOUR GOD, the <i>jealous</i> God,	
who punishes the iniquity of the FATHERS	on SONS three or four (times)	
for those who hate me,		
¹⁰ and who does mercy as far as thousand (times)		
for those who <i>love</i> me and observe <i>my commands</i> .		
¹¹ You shall not pronounce the name of	THE LORD YOUR GOD	in vain,
because the Lord does not justify one who pronounces his Name		in vain.

¹² Observe the day of Sabbath to consecrate it,		THE LORD YOUR GOD.
according to what <i>I commanded you</i>		
¹³ Six days	YOU WILL SERVE and will do all your work;	
¹⁴ and the seventh day	is Sabbath to	THE LORD YOUR GOD.
= You shall not do any work, you,		
. neither your SON	nor your DAUGHTER ,	
. neither your SERVANT	nor your HANDMAID ,	
. neither your ox,	nor your ass, all your livestock,	
. nor your guest	who is at your doors,	
= so that they rest your SERVANT	and your HANDMAID , like you.	
¹⁵ You will remember that SERVANT you were in land of Egypt		
and I brought you THE LORD YOUR GOD with the mighty hand and extended arm.		
So <i>I commanded you</i>	THE LORD YOUR GOD	
of doing the day of Sabbath.		

¹⁶ Honour your FATHER	and your MOTHER ,
according to what <i>I commanded you</i>	THE LORD YOUR GOD,
so that your days are prolonged and so that there is for you happiness,	
on the land that	THE LORD GOD gives you

¹⁷ You shall not kill.	¹⁸ And you shall not commit adultery	¹⁹ And you shall not steal.
²⁰ And you shall not testimony	against	YOUR NEIGHBOUR in vain,
²¹ And you shall not covet	the wife	OF YOUR NEIGHBOUR,
And you shall not desire	the house	OF YOUR NEIGHBOUR,
. his field and his SERVANT		and his HANDMAID ,
. his ox and his ass		
. and all that is		OF YOUR NEIGHBOUR.

The connection between the first and the last parts is all the more evident by the repetition of “in vain” in 20 as in 11a and 11b; in Exodus there were synonyms, “in vain” and “falsely” (see pg. 18).

It was already noted that the relationships between these two central commandments are specially marked in Dt by the repetition of the same sentence in an identical position: “according to what I commanded you the Lord your God” (12b and 16b). It should also be noted that “I brought from the *land* of Egypt” of 15a corresponds to “the *land* that the Lord your God gives you” (16d); this relation could be deduced to interpret “land” as the land of Israel.²⁸

The link between the commandments of the Sabbath and the first part is not based on creation, as in Ex 20, but on the event of liberation from Egypt. Mentioning it twice highlights its importance (6b and 15ab). The repetition of “your servant and your handmaid” at the end of 14 and of “servant” in 15a underlines the theme of slavery from which man was liberated and is invited at the same time to liberate others.

The verb and substantive of the syntagm “those who observe my commandments” of 10b, at the end of the central subpart of the first part (10b), is taken up again in the two central parts: “observe” at the beginning of the command of the Sabbath (12a) and “according to what I commanded you” in 12b and 16b (also in 15c).²⁹ This strong link could be interpreted as an indication of the decisive importance of two commandments: the Sabbath and the honour due to one’s parents. This is already indicated by their literary centrality; it is as if these two commandments were, in some way, the summary, the quintessence of the Decalogue, and therefore the whole of the Law. This looks at the freedom of man, and this freedom is ordained to his “happiness” (16c).

The Decalogue of Exodus and Deuteronomy are very similar and at the same time different. Their similarity shows that they are not two different texts, but two versions of the same text. The Bible, in fact, calls both of them “Ten Words”³⁰ or “Two Tablets”.³¹

²⁸ The word *'ādāmā* is used in this sense for example in Dt 30:20: “¹⁹ I take today a testimony against you the heaven and the earth: I have set you before life and death, blessing and cursing; choose therefore life, that you and your descendants may live,²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and cleaving to him, for he is your life and the length of your days, that you can thus dwell on the *land* that the Lord swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (see also Dt 32:47; see pg. 11, n. 16).

²⁹ The verb “to remember” with which begins the command of the Sabbath in Exodus, did not disappear from the version of Deuteronomy: it appears in fact at the beginning of 15.

³⁰ See pg. 1, n. 2.

³¹ See pg. 1, n. 6.

WHY TWO VERSIONS OF THE DECALOGUE?

It may be asked why such a fundamental text was transmitted in two versions.

HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

One can seek the explanation *in the origin* itself, i.e. attempting to retrace the history of the text. Two versions could have been the result of two traditions or two different theological schools, one priestly (P), another Deuteronomistic (D), therefore from two different epochs: the Deuteronomistic school was after the reform of Josiah (622) while the priestly school was after the Exile (538). We will not enter into this problem.³²

FUNCTIONS OF DOUBLETS

Instead of analysing the roots however, the fruits can be examined, i.e. reflecting on the effects of doubling the text. The Decalogue is not a unique case of “doublets” in the Bible. Very often, things are said *twice* in the Bible. This seems to be a fundamental law of biblical texts: there are in fact two narratives of creation (Gn 1:1–2:4a and Gn 2:4bf) right at the beginning of the Old Testament; there are two dreams of Joseph (Gn 40–41);³³ two Decalogues; two similar and different narratives of Jesus’ infancy at the beginning of the New Testament, according to Matthew and according to Luke.

Already at the basic level of the composition of the texts, “parallelism of the members” — synonymous, antithetical or complementary — is a characteristic that pervades all the poetical texts, including prophetic, and even many texts in “prose”. For example, Psalm 44 is formed of 28 *bimember* segments:

In italics,	segments whose members are synonymous.
In Arial characters,	segments whose members are complementary.

¹ *To the choir master by the sons of Korah, An instruction.*

² God, with our ears we have heard,	our fathers have recounted to us
<i>That which you did in their days,</i>	<i>in the early days, you, your hand.</i>
³ <i>The people you dispossessed to plant them</i>	<i>you destroyed the people to set them free.</i>
⁴ <i>Not with sword they conquered the nation</i>	<i>and their arm did not save them.</i>
But your right hand and your arm	and the light of your face for you love them.
⁵ You are my king, God,	who decides the salvation of Jacob.
⁶ <i>In you our adversaries we push down</i>	<i>in your name we tread down our aggressors.</i>
⁷ <i>Not in my bow did I trust</i>	<i>and my sword did not save me.</i>
⁸ <i>But you saved us from our adversaries</i>	<i>and our enemies you confused.</i>
⁹ <i>In God we glory every day</i>	<i>and your name for ever we celebrate.</i>
¹⁰ <i>Yet, you rejected us and abased us</i>	<i>and you no longer go out with our armies.</i>

³² See A. WÉNIN, “Le décalogue”, 9-10, and above all P. BOVATI, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 76-78 (and the connected bibliography).

³³ See R. MEYNET, «*E ora, scrivete per voi questo cantico*», 84, 91-95.

<p>¹¹ You make us retreat the adversary ¹² <i>You handed us like sheep for slaughter</i> ¹³ You sold your people for nothing ¹⁴ <i>You have made us a reproach for our neighbours</i> ¹⁵ <i>You have made us a laughing stock among people</i> ¹⁶ <i>Every day my disgrace is before me</i> ¹⁷ <i>For the voices of insult and of revilers</i> ¹⁸ <i>All this comes to us without forgetting</i> ¹⁹ Our heart has not turned back ²⁰ But you have smitten us in the place of jackals ²¹ If we have forgotten the name of our God ²² May be would God not have discovered this ²³ <i>For you we are killed every day</i> ²⁴ Rise up, why do you sleep, Lord? ²⁵ Why do you hide your face? ²⁶ <i>For our soul is bowed to the dust</i> ²⁷ Arise, come to our help</p>	<p>and our enemies stripped us. <i>and among the nations you scattered us.</i> and you have not gained by their price. <i>scorn and reproach of those around us.</i> <i>a shaking of head among the nations</i> <i>and the shame covers my face.</i> <i>for the face of enemy and one who avenges.</i> <i>without having betrayed your covenant.</i> nor turned aside our steps from your way. you covered us over with darkness. and spread our hands towards a foreign God, he who knows the secrets of the heart? <i>we are treated as sheep for slaughter.</i> Awake, do not cast us out for ever! Do you forget our misery and oppression? <i>our body is cleaved to the earth.</i> and redeem us because of your mercy.</p>
---	---

Function of Insistence

The first function of a doublet can be said to be insistence: repetition is in fact the first figure of rhetoric, i.e. the basic procedure of the art of better expression! Every professor knows that he can not be fully satisfied by explaining something only once; perhaps it is expressed badly or some students were distracted or they did not hear it well or they did not understand it; he must therefore say the same thing at least twice. However, the second time he will not repeat simply what he had already said, he will use other words, amplify or summarise... The “model”, so to say, of this first function of doublet can be seen in the story of Joseph, son of Jacob: Pharaoh had two dreams, that of seven fat cows and seven sleek cows, then that of seven ears of grain, full and ripe and seven ears of grain, meagre and scorched by the east wind (Gn 41); the wisdom of Joseph consisted in interpreting the dreams, i.e. understanding above all the identical relation between the two dreams. Behold the words of Joseph:

“The dream of Pharaoh is one: that which God is about to do, he indicated it to Pharaoh. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years and the seven good ears of grain are seven years: the dream is one. ²⁷ And the seven thin and bad cows that came after them, are seven years and the seven empty ears, blasted with an east wind, are seven years: seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is the thing that I told Pharaoh: that God is about to do, that he manifested to Pharaoh. ²⁹ Behold, seven years are coming, in which there will be great abundance in all the land of Egypt. ³⁰ Then seven years of famine will arise; all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten and the famine will consume the land. ³¹ It will be forgotten that there was abundance in the land because of famine afterwards, because it is very grievous. ³² And the fact that the dream of Pharaoh is repeated twice, signifies that this thing is decided by God and God is hastening to do it.”

The last sentence of Joseph indicates the function of insistence that he recognises in the doubling of the dream.

Function of Totality

The function of doubling is not only insistence. Very often it is also to indicate totality. In this sense, it is a form of “merism”; “the heaven and earth” is a mode of indicating all that is created, “day and night” is to say all time. The following example is among the simplest:

+ 31 THE QUEEN	OF THE SOUTH	<i>will rise</i>	in the judgement
– with the men of	<i>this generation</i>		and will condemn <i>these</i> ;
. because she came from the ends of the earth			
: to	HEAR	the WISDOM	of Solomon.
	= and behold, greater		than Solomon is here.

+ 32 THE MEN	OF NINEVEH	<i>will arise</i>	in the judgement
– with	<i>this generation</i>		and will condemn <i>this</i> ;
: because	THEY REPENTED to	the PROCLAMATION	of Jonah.
	= And behold, greater		than Jonah is here.

The second part of this short text (Lk 11:31-32) could seem a simple repetition of the first part, a so-called “doublet”, redundant, if not useless. Yet, we can not negate it to the function of insistence (repetition is the first figure of rhetoric!) for complementarity is added. In this case it has a multiplying effect:

- the twofold sexual complementarity between a woman (“the queen”) and the “men” is a mode of indicating all human beings;
- it can also be added that the complementarity is even between who governs, “the queen” and those who are governed, “men” and this is another manner of expressing totality;
- geographical complementarity between South and North (“Nineveh”) also indicates totality (all the pagans will judge this generation”);
- it is also above all complementarity, chronologically and necessarily, between “to hear” and “to be repented”;
- it is still complementarity between “wisdom” of the king (“Solomon”) and the “proclamation” of the prophet (“Jonah”). It is a way of saying that Jesus is king and prophet at the same time;

— finally there is complementarity between the centripetal movement that brings the queen of the south “from the ends of the earth” to Israel and the centrifugal movement that calls Jonah from Israel to Nineveh.

It is to be noted in this example, that when two literary units seem so similar, one should not forget to observe that the differences, because they are bearers of meaning, may be more than the similarities.³⁴

Let us see another example (Lk 13:1-5):

· ¹ *There were presented some in that time to refer to him*
 · about those **GALILEANS**,
 = whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

 + ² *And responding he said to them:*
 - “You think that those **GALILEANS SINNERS**
 - more than **all** the **GALILEANS** were,
 - because this they *SUFFERED*?

· ³ No, I tell you, but if you do not **REPENT**,
 · **all** similarly *WILL PERISH*.

· ⁴ Or those **EIGHTEEN**,
 = on whom fell the tower of Siloam and killed them,

 - you think that these **DEBTORS** were
 - more than **all** men living in **JERUSALEM**?

· ⁵ No, I tell you, but if you do not **REPENT**,
 · **all** similarly *WILL PERISH*”.

To the question of some (1), Jesus responds (2-3), but adds another similar case to the first (4ab) that he will comment with the same terms (4c-5). The reason for this addition is not a simple redundancy characteristic of the oral style; its function is of insistence, but still more of indicating totality.

All men are sinners, both the Galileans of the north and the inhabitants of Jerusalem at south; the victims of man (1bc) and those punished by God (4ab) and those who escape one and the other, all are at the same way debtors. The suffering of one does not justify another. All are invited to conversion. It is the only way of escaping a violent death and thus to be detached from sin and settling one’s debts.

³⁴ Among many examples: Lk 13:1-5; 17-21 (see R. MEYNET, *Vedi questa donna?*, 106-112; 15:4-10 (see R. MEYNET, «*E ora, scrivete per voi questo cantico*», 19-21)

“Poetical efficacy”

The effect of biblical doubling is not only insistence and totality. Its other function, certainly much more important, is “poetical efficacy”.

Thus, we can understand that it is the pressure of a law, at the risk of calling up a repulsive rigidity, which provides the indispensable condition for it to be at play, that is freedom. This system of echoes always keeps, even in prose, poetical efficacy, and always directs the gaze towards a meaning which can only be ‘between the lines’. This is true at the simplest level of the mere parallelism: ‘You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot’ (Ps. 91.13): this leads me to the *idea* of a threat, distinct from its materializations but inseparable from them. Energy is born out of the image, but it has to get free from it. This is probably why the biblical texts offer so much food for thought to the most demanding mind, without doing its thinking for that individual. They propel their readers towards the fearsome moment when they will have to do the interpretation by themselves.³⁵

The meaning, namely the presence of the author, is not imposed on the reader; he hides and at the same time reveals it “between the lines”. This void calls the reader to the risk of interpretation, i.e., not to fill it, but to dare to make himself present with his personal word. The efficacy of a text is known by its capacity to generate other texts, to urge the reader to write his own poem. Biblical doubling represents this opening, an essential condition of its fecundity.

“Theological” Function

Further reflecting, it can be risked not to propose an “explanation” but an ulterior interpretation of the function of biblical “doublets”. It seems that the biblical doubling has as fundamental function of avoiding the consideration that the biblical text is absolute and idolized. If there had been only one text, we would be tempted to adore it, as the golden calf. Two instead, are like cherubim of gold: in their symmetry they have the function of indicating the emptiness that separate and unite them, of indicating the Presence (Ex 25:18-22; 37:7-9). In other words, the obligation of reading two versions of the Decalogue, two versions of Our Father, protects us from the risk of idolatry. Let us imagine how strong would be the temptation to appropriate Jesus, to idolize his words, if we had not four but only one Gospel! The traditional iconography represents the evangelists with four different figures: a man for Matthew, a lion for Mark, a bull for Luke and an eagle for John. These are, according to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezk 10:14), four figures of the cherubim, not to be confused with the Presence

³⁵ P. BEAUCHAMP, preface to R. MEYNET, *Rhetorical Analysis. An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, JSOT.S 256, Sheffield 1998, 13.

to which they are the sign: “The glory of the Lord went forth from the threshold of the temple and stood over on the cherubim” (Ezk 10:18).

This is certainly the reason for the Church always to reject with firm determination all attempts to reduce the four Gospels to a single text: both the attempts of Marcion who held only the third Gospel and Tazian who wrote *Diatessaron*, a combination in a unique narrative of the four Gospels. The fact that there are four Gospels, each different, invites the reader not to absolutise one text, in other words not to fall into the temptation of the desire to appropriate Jesus, as if he were an immovable statue. Instead, the diversity among texts calls us to follow a person, beyond each text, allowing Jesus to appropriate us. The Gospel is four-fold, Jesus is unique. The fact that the Decalogue was transmitted under two versions invites us to adore, beyond the texts, the unique God.

Translation: Arul Jesu Robin MUTHIAH

Revision: Joseph E. ROGERS

This article was first published in Italian: «I due decaloghi, legge di libertà (Es 20,2-17 & Dt 5,6-21)», *Gregorianum* 81 (2000) 659-692.

The French translation was published in *Studia Rhetorica*, n° 12.

© *Studia Rhetorica Biblica et Semitica* for this English translation.

[02.11.2004]