

First Sunday of Lent

Reading I

[Dt 26:4-10](#)

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

“The priest shall receive the basket from you
and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.

Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God,

‘My father was a wandering Aramean
who went down to Egypt with a small household
and lived there as an alien.

But there he became a nation
great, strong, and numerous.

When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us,
imposing hard labor upon us,

we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers,
and he heard our cry

and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

He brought us out of Egypt

with his strong hand and outstretched arm,

with terrifying power, with signs and wonders;

and bringing us into this country,

he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits
of the products of the soil

which you, O LORD, have given me.’

And having set them before the Lord, your God,
you shall bow down in his presence.”

Jerome Biblical Commentary

61 (T) Offering of the First Fruits (26:1-11). This offering was already commanded in the E code (Ex 22:28; 23:19), and although the text does not mention a fixed occasion, this act probably took place on the spring festival of Azymes. In the two most ancient calendars, there is an injunction not to come into the presence of Yahweh on this occasion with empty hands (Ex 34:20; 23:15). Dt 16:8 prescribes a “solemn assembly” for Azymes and the P calendar provides for the offering of the first sheaf on this feast (Lv 23:10ff.). This historicization of what was originally a Canaanite spring festival (for its original character, cf. 2 Sm 21:9, “at the beginning of the barley harvest”; cf. Ex 22:28) derives from the first days of the settlement, opposing the fertility cult with radically historical faith. Von Rad views 5-10 as the festival legend of Gilgal recited at the Feast of Weeks, as distinct from the Shechem covenant renewal festival (see Von Rad, *Genesis*, 14-15; *GesSt*, 9-86; for criticism of this position, see Noth, *UP* 55; Weiser,

OT 83-90; Eichrodt, *Theology* 512-20). Von Rad's designation of "cultic credo" is, however, apt, and it is notable that the sacred recital here and elsewhere in Dt (6:20-25; 21:7-8; 26:13-15) has a marked rhythmic and stylistically exalted character.³ This declaration strikes a keynote of deuteronomic faith: The possession of the land is the fulfillment of the divine promise.⁵ The father is Jacob, renamed Israel. The Hebrews were chiefly, but not exclusively, Aramean in origin (cf. Ez 16:3, 45). The credo of Jos 24:2ff. goes back to Terah and Abraham and may, therefore, represent a later stage of the historical tradition (see D. D. Luckenbill, *AJSL* 36 [1919-20] 244ff.; M. A. Beek, *OTS* 8 [1950] 193-212; C. H. Brekelmans, *TT* 3 [1963] 1-11).⁶ For the deep Hebr feeling for participation in a common historical heritage and tradition, the change in person is significant; my father was Israel, therefore I am Israel! Although this represents an ancient liturgical form, it does so indirectly (against Von Rad), because the scheme and the stylistic presentation are clearly owing to Dt (cf. the pattern in Jgs 3:7-11; etc.).⁸ This "canonized" Passover terminology (cf. 4:34; 6:21) shows the close association between the two feasts that were later amalgamated.¹¹ For the liturgical joy characteristic of Dt, see comment on 12:7.

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

CHAPTER XXVI.

Ver. 1. *It.* The land where Moses was speaking, which had been already conquered, was no less under the obligation of paying the first-fruits, &c., than Chanaan, and the parts of Syria which were promised to the Israelites. (Haydock) --- All the products of the earth seem to have been liable to be offered, (Matthew xxiii. 23,) in proportion as they ripened, at the feasts of the Passover and of Pentecost, (Calmet) and of tabernacles. (Menochius) --- Yet we find no mention here of the *therumah*, or offering, of which the Rabbins speak so much, as distinct at least from the first-fruits, which were heaved both by the priest and the offerer towards heaven and earth, on the right and left hand. Each (Calmet) landholder, (Haydock) and even the king himself, was bound to bring his own basket to the temple, and to recite the words here prescribed. The wheat and barley were first winnowed, and the grapes and olives made into wine and oil. Before the offering was made to the Lord, no one was allowed to taste any of the produce, Leviticus xxiii. 10., and Numbers xviii. 12, &c. Whether legumes were to be tithed, seems a matter of dispute. (Calmet)

Weiser, OT A. Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development* (N.Y., 1961)

AJSL American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures

OTS Oudtestamentische Studiën

TT Tijdschrift voor Theologie

Hebr Hebrew

Ver. 5. *The Syrian.* Laban. See Genesis xxvii. (Challoner) --- Hebrew, "My father was a Syrian, poor, (or ready to perish) and he went down," &c. The ancestors of Jacob had, in effect, come from beyond the Euphrates, and he had dwelt in Mesopotamia for twenty years. But the translation of the Septuagint seems preferable, "My father abandoned (*apebalen*) Syria." (Calmet)

Ver. 8. *Terror.* Septuagint, "with surprising visions," (Hebrew) *or* "with astonishing prodigies," &c. (Calmet)

Ver. 10. *God,* with profound humility, acknowledging that all comes from him, (Haydock) and praying for a continuance of his fatherly protection. (Menochius)

Ver. 11. *Feast.* The Jews could not yet be required with propriety to raise themselves to delights purely spiritual, chap. xii. 7. Strabo (x.) observes, that the Greeks and barbarians accompanied their sacrifices with feasting and music, which served to take off their thoughts from worldly concerns, and gave them a sort of foretaste of the divinity. (Calmet)

Ver. 12. *Third.* It has been remarked (chap. xiv. 28., and Leviticus xxvii. 30,) that the Jews gave two tithes every year, the second was for feasts at Jerusalem, or on the third year at home, if there was not also a third tithe due on that year. (Haydock)

Ver. 13. *Taken.* Hebrew, "burnt." (Calmet) --- I have brought all that was due, (Tirinus) so that no more can be found in my house than what the fire would have spared, if it had been thrown into it.

Ver. 14. *Mourning.* It was then unlawful to taste what was set apart for the Lord, and even to touch a thing, at that time, would render it unclean, Osee ix. 4. Others explain it thus: I have not eaten, how much soever I was distressed; or, I eat it with a cheerful heart. But these interpretations seem unnatural. Spencer (Rit. ii. 24,) thinks rather that the Jews thus disclaim having given any worship to Isis, whom the Egyptians invoked after the harvest, with mournful cries. (Diod. Sic. i.) About the same season of the year, lamentations were also made for the death of Adonis, (Marcel. xxii.) and for that of Osiris. (Firminus.) --- The Phœnicians mourned in like manner for the desolate appearance of the earth, after the fruits were collected. The Egyptians thought that Isis had discovered fruits and corn, and therefore offered the first-fruits to her. But the Jews are here taught to refer all such favours to God alone, and they testify that they have taken no part in the superstitious rites of other nations, nor spent any thing *in funerals*. Hebrew, "upon the dead;" Osiris, &c., here styled *uncleanness*, by way of contempt. (Calmet)

Ver. 16. *This day.* In this last solemn harangue of Moses, the covenant between God and his people was ratified. (Menochius)

Ver. 19. *To his own praise.* Hebrew, Septuagint, &c., "higher...in praise, reputation, and glory." (Haydock)

New American Commentary (Non-Catholic)

(1) Presentation of the Firstfruits (26:1-11)

¹When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ²take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name ³and say to the priest in office at the time, “I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us.” ⁴The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. ⁵Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. ⁷Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me.” Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. ¹¹And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

As with all such ritual, there must be both act and word, the act consisting here of the offering of the produce (vv. 1–3a, 4–5a, 10b–11) and the word a statement of the present occasion (v. 3b), a recitation of Israel’s “sacred history” (vv. 5b–9), and an explanation of what the offerer had done (v. 10a). It may be helpful to discuss the passage according to this analysis.

26:1–5a The proleptic character of the Deuteronomy covenant is again underscored by the fact that the ritual outlined here was to be undertaken not in the present but only after the promised land had been appropriated and settled (v. 1). Then, in the socioeconomic life of agrarianism in which patterns of sowing, cultivation, and harvesting had been adopted, the first (רִשִׁית, perhaps qualitatively, “best,” as well as temporally)²⁶¹ of the field crops (lit., “fruit of the ground”) must be placed in a basket and taken to the “place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name,” namely, the tabernacle or central sanctuary (cf. Deut 12:5–14). According to the agricultural and cultic calendars, this would be in early summer, on the sixth of Sivan (= May/June), the time of the beginning of the wheat harvest (cf. Lev 23:15–16).²⁶² Having arrived at the sanctuary, the worshiper presented the basket to the officiating priest (v. 3a) and then, having recited the liturgy, laid his gift before the Lord, presenting himself also in prostration (v. 10b).

The prescribed litany is an adumbration of all of God’s mighty elective and redemptive works on Israel’s behalf. Von Rad, in fact, viewed the confession here as Israel’s credo, that corpus of irreducible dogma that expresses the very essence of Israel’s identity and purpose

261 Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 277, 334.

262 Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 252.

before God.²⁶³ The same confession, von Rad argued, is to be found in less full form in Deut 6:20–24 and in a much expanded version in Joshua 24:2–13. Von Rad’s traditio-historical assumptions and method aside, there is a great deal of truth to the idea that ancient Israel, like the later church, encapsulated its most significant truths in summary form and that the faithful periodically recited them in a cultic setting.

One of the problems noted by von Rad is the omission of reference in the credo to the Sinai covenant itself.²⁶⁴ This led him to postulate that the Sinai tradition was originally limited to only a local community centered in and around Shechem and never found its way into the standard versions of the credo.²⁶⁵ The problem with this (among other difficulties) is that it is inconceivable that the Sinai tradition would not have found its way into the Deuteronomic material if Deuteronomy is to be dated as late as most scholars suggest.²⁶⁶ It is far more likely that the Sinai reference is missing because (1) the focus is on the linkage between the patriarchal promises (implied in v. 5) and their fulfillment in the land of Canaan (vv. 9–10a) and (2) the fact that the Feast of Firstfruits also marked the anniversary of the cutting of the Sinai covenant (if the tradition was indeed that ancient) and would make it superfluous to mention that covenant in the creed.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the centrality of the Sinai encounter has already been asserted over and over again in Deut (cf. 1:6; 4:9–19; 5:2–5; 9:8–21; 18:16; 29:1). The Deuteronomic tradition in its canonical form was very much aware of the importance of the Sinai covenant to Israel’s confession.

26:5b–10 The confession begins with Jacob, the “wandering Aramean” (v. 5b), so-named because his mother was an Aramean (Gen 24:10; 25:20, 26) and he himself spent at least twenty years in Aram (Gen 31:41–42). The wandering speaks of the pastoral lifestyle he pursued, living

263 G. von Rad, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1966), 3–8.

264 *Ibid.*, 7.

265 *Ibid.*, 36–39.

266 For this and other reactions and criticisms, see C. M. Carmichael, “A New View of the Origin of the Deuteronomic Credo,” *VT* 19 (1969): 273–89; D. R. Daniels, “The Creed of Deuteronomy xxvi Revisited,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 231–42; H. B. Huffmon, “The Exodus, Sinai and the Credo,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 101–13.

267 Craigie argues, in fact, that the omission of reference to Sinai/Horeb undermines von Rad’s interpretation of the passage as a creed and, rather, draws attention to the connection of the promise of land to the patriarchs and its impending fulfillment to the people (*Deuteronomy*, 322).

in temporary quarters much of the time and moving from place to place (Gen 25:27).²⁶⁸ Canaan was his by promise (28:4, 15; 35:12; 46:4) but not by possession. Only after the descent to Egypt (Deut 26:5), enslavement there (v. 6), and the supernatural deliverance by the Lord's grace (vv. 7–8) were Jacob's descendants able to come now to Canaan and bring it under control and thus fulfill the promise (v. 9). The peace and stability that would permit the inauguration of regular agricultural patterns would be irrefutable evidence that the Lord had indeed accomplished his word to the fathers. In recognition of this and in tribute to the Lord's electing and saving grace, the farmer would come to proffer the firstfruits of his fields (v. 10a).

26:11 The result of faithful obedience to this rite would be untold blessing, both spiritual (“you shall rejoice”) and material. The latter is implied in the inclusion of the Levite and alien (g r) along with the offerer himself, for both were disadvantaged and dependent on the largess of the people (Deut 12:10–12, 18; 14:28–29). As the community as a whole was true to the Lord and therefore blessed by him, so even the poorest elements of Israel's society would benefit as well (v. 11).

268 Some scholars construe the participle אָבַד (“wandering”) as “perishing” or the like, a meaning of אָבַד, which, indeed, is commonly attested (KB, 2–3). However, the context as a whole contrasts the sojourning impermanence of Israel's lifestyle to this point with the sedentariness and stability implied in the agricultural festival of which this confession was a major element; thus B. Otzen, “אָבַד; bhadh,” etc., *TDOT* 1:20. For further discussion see M. A. Beek, “Das Problem des aramaïschen Stammvaters (Deut xxvi 5),” *OTS* 8 (1950): 193–212; A. R. Millard, “A Wandering Aramean,” *JNES* 39 (1980): 153–55.