

5. LIBERATION AND DESIRE: THE LOGIC OF LAW IN EXODUS AND BEYOND

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In this chapter, we shall examine the legal material in Exodus to consider whether modern readers should pattern their lives around any of its substance. An account is offered of the law's function as the divine ordering of various human desires in the social setting of Exodus. A brief review of some related Reformation discussions, and a modest proposal about how the law in Exodus might be read today, then follow.

The very notion that modern persons might attempt to pattern their life around the substance of the Exodus law will evoke various reactions. Some will be unsurprised, having always assumed something similar. Others will be incredulous, having always taken the book as an ancient artefact only. But they may share one assumption: this literature can be understood straightforwardly by modern readers.

Both the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3–7, there called 'Ten Words') and the 'Book of the Covenant' that follows (Exod. 21:1–23:13) contain a selection of 'apodictic' and 'casuistic' law. ('Apodictic' refers to the more general 'you shall'/'you shall not' form, whereas 'casuistic' describes the more specific case-oriented

‘if/when . . . then . . .’ form.) At several moments throughout, modern readers intuitively feel some affinity with the material. Here are some examples from the Book of the Covenant:¹

1. ‘Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death’ (21:16) was of intense interest in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slavery debates.
2. Instructions about miscarriages caused by fighting men striking a pregnant woman (21:22) always find a place in debates about the moral status of embryos and fetuses.
3. The ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot’ *lex talionis* law of Exodus 21:24 has not gone away in modern discussions about law and justice. The logic of OT retribution still has powerful advocates and detractors.
4. ‘If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him’ (22:2) reappeared in connection with the 1999 case of Tony Martin, the UK farmer who shot and killed a fleeing intruder.
5. Cases of ox-gorings (21:28–38) and other breaches of agricultural peace (22:5–15) may be alien scenarios for modern city dwellers, yet still represent a gritty and recognizable justice. Indeed, it has been claimed that the ox-goring laws have had a major impact in the philosophy and treatment of animals in Western jurisdictions (Finkelstein 1981) ().
6. The procedure for handling premarital sex, generally resulting in marriage (22:16–17), drives some serious Christian enquirers to ask whether premarital sex creates an ethical presumption that, ideally, the two will go on to marry.
7. ‘You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt’ (22:21) suggests a ‘spiritual’ logic that some apply to hospitality today.
8. ‘If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him’ (22:25) has ongoing leverage for some in arguments about modern capitalism’s interest practices.

1. Quotations in this chapter are from the ESV.

Ancient though they may be, something about these texts seems recognizably to be *ours*. Of the Ten Words themselves, we need not look far to find the proprietorial sense that many modern people bring to a discussion of them. Our access seems immediate, and their sense and reference seem plain. Discussions centre on the extent to which these laws are still binding (Sabbath, or not?), or on the people upon whom they are still binding (US public courtrooms, or not?). They are even presented as a universal moral ‘gold standard’ for well-ordered societies everywhere (Kuntz 2004) (). Yet, although these laws can feel proximal to us, we often drift as we read them:

1. There are institutions we neither understand nor like: ‘If [a slave’s] master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out alone’ (21:4).
2. Some practices cause us to recoil: ‘When a man sells his daughter as a slave . . .’ (21:7).
3. We find some of the penalties extraordinary: ‘Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death’ (21:15).
4. There are settings and problems that mean little to us: ‘If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep’ (22:1).
5. Recourse to God is indicated in such ways as we would have no idea how to apply, as when a thief’s identity is unclear and people ‘come near to’ or ‘come before’ God to find ‘the one whom God condemns’, who then pays double to his neighbour (22:7–9).
6. Crimes are listed that we find hard to measure: ‘You shall not permit a sorceress to live’ (22:18).
7. The fierceness of divine retribution we find hard to comprehend: ‘my wrath will burn,’ says God (against the mistreatment of widows and orphans), ‘and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless’ (22:22–24).
8. There are rituals we no longer accept: ‘You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me’ (22:29).

9. Some passages (such as the culmination of the Book of the law, 23:14–33) are quite particular to another time and place, and seem very inaccessible now.

The material is presented for a particular people at the foot of a particular mountain, and any first impression of easy access proves to be illusory. Rather, we do well to ask what makes us feel any affinity with it at all. What constitutes the ‘overlap’, if there is one, between modern readers and those at the foot of the mountain? That inquiry is interesting and important, and we shall return to consider some of the ways in which theology has construed the overlap that makes some parts of the text seem immanent.

But in an evangelical habit of reading, questions about ourselves are derivative upon whatever was happening on and around that mountain. The prior question becomes ‘What does this law have to do with the liberation that is Exodus, and what is the logic of this law for that Exodus?’ Only after we have discovered something of this logic may we find what of it remains for subsequent uses of the material.

Of course, centuries of theological and biblical scholarship have been concerned with the logic of OT law and the logic of its relation to modern readers. It is beyond our scope to survey all that scholarship, just as it is to respond to the moments listed above where laws seem abstruse or morally problematic. The chapter will also include only some brief assertions about other Pentateuchal law, NT Christology, and Pauline theology. In many respects, then, what follows can be considered only a preliminary account of the logic of law in Exodus and beyond, by way of an observation, a summary and some suggestions:

- The observation will be that law appears in Exodus in very pointed response to two elemental aspects of human life: *desire* and *sociality*. In that setting, the law’s first appearance is experienced as a blessing that brings relief. Some details of the Book of the Covenant and the Ten Words will be examined to tease out its logic in its setting.
- The summary will be of some Reformed thought wrestling with the ongoing resonances of these texts. Although this summary

will be well known to readers of Reformed theology, some easily lost distinctions are worth reiterating.

- The suggestions are a modest proposal for Christian reading of the law today, with a few final remarks about its relevance for contemporary legislators.

These will, it is hoped, assist discussion of the law's relevance (or not) for a new generation.

A difficult three months

The story of the law's appearing began long before the mountain came into view. If Sinai dominates the second half of this book, then its first fifteen chapters are dominated by the longed-for liberation, which stands ahead of every word, action and endeavour like the promise of water for a marathon runner, or like the wedding night for a virgin, or like the hope of cure for the sufferer of chronic illness.

The delay is heightened by Pharaoh's endlessly cruel prevarications, and by the escalating diplomatic tension with Moses (chs. 5–11). The breathless readiness of the final meal, the night and day of flight, and the rumble of horses in pursuit keep us hovering upon the brink of liberation for three more long chapters (12–14). Then, finally, with crashing water and vanquished foes still echoing around us, we arrive at the final exultant ecstasy of freedom in Moses' joyful song and Miriam's exuberant dance.

Yet, after all that, within three days, or one short verse, or four short clauses of text time, 'they found no water' (15:22). After such prolonged anticipation, such an extraordinary consummation and such majestic liberation, simple human creaturely limitation reasserts itself within the blink of an eye. They found no water, and 'so they grumbled'.

History's judgment against their grumbling would be harsh, for it was indeed a harbinger of what was to come. But in terms of the immediate text, such a judgment is premature. This desire for water and the menace of an unhappy crowd will be well known to anyone who has been tasked to manage a social setting, whether

that be a carload of tired children, a conference whose catering has gone wrong, or a nation under stress. If climate change reduces dams to a few per cent of capacity, or if a post-peak oil milieu makes food deliveries intermittent and closes airports, modern people will react similarly. Few experiences are more complicated and frightening than to have the same strong desires as those of the mob that surrounds us.

‘They found no water’ is actually the first of three desperate moments in the chapters that follow: thirst at Marah (ch. 15), hunger at Sin (ch. 16) and thirst again at Rephidim (ch. 17). What we also see in these incidents is a pattern of gracious and generous divine response, with no hint of judgment.

In the thirst at Marah, God quenches their thirst, then gives what he calls ‘a statute and a rule’ that consists in an instruction to listen to his statutes (vv. 25–26); then he quenches thirst again at the springs of Elim. The insertion of statute into a thirst and its quenching hints that the voice of God quenches thirst as much as does water.

Likewise, the hunger in the wilderness of Sin is met with manna. Again, God makes no comment in the judgment, and the voice of God joins the sating of their hunger with walking in his law (*tôrâ*, v. 4). Their hunger for meat is also sated (v. 12f.), with no judgment against grumbling.

Further thirst at Rephidim is quenched again, and again without divine comment on the grumbling. But on this occasion there is no mention by God of his law. We are left waiting to see if God will quench and sate them in that other way, through the presence of his word.

After a quick war (presaging the shape of things to come, 17:8–16), we find ourselves walking with Jethro and viewing Moses’ messy life through his wise and orderly eye (ch. 18). The heady days of liberation and of Moses’ and Miriam’s song seem long gone, and Moses finally unburdens himself about a difficult three months (‘Then Moses told his father-in-law . . . all the hardship that had come upon them in the way’, v. 8). But Jethro (vv. 9–12) is able to see a bigger picture, praising God for this liberation, and in the brief ceremony that follows we are for a moment transported back to that exultant moment of release from the oppressor.

But yet again, a new ‘hunger’ and ‘thirst’ is upon the people (vv. 13–16) as they stand around Moses, waiting, this time, for the judgment of decisions. God also quenches this ‘thirst’ when, as Moses puts it, ‘I make them know the statutes of God and his laws’ (v. 16).

The liberation from Egypt is not simple. It gives rise to a new social setting in all its complexity. The ‘liberation’ from brick-making without straw to foot-slogging without water gives this group a slightly desperate edge. The absence at this stage of any judgment against their need and their edginess highlights their status as a frail collective of human creatures with legitimate but unmet desires.

There are few intellectual tasks more difficult to think well about than the interrelation between our desires as individuals, and our need for each other in groups. For any group to remain a group requires some desires to be affirmed and met, with others moderated and resisted. The people’s pressing need for water and food gives rise to an equally pressing need for judicial processes. By the time Jethro makes his visit, both participants and readers are wondering what sort of ‘liberation’ this will become.

‘God will be with you’

It is easy, then, to miss the significance of Jethro’s speech for what is to follow. When Moses says, ‘I make them know the statutes of God and his laws’, Jethro replies, somewhat unexpectedly, ‘What you are doing is not good.’ There is the simple imprudence of Moses tiring himself out. But more is needed, prefigured when Jethro says, ‘God be with you’ or ‘God will be with you’ (v. 19).

Jethro proposes a way in which the people, through Moses, may more permanently learn (v. 20) ‘the statutes and the laws’ and ‘the way in which they must walk and what they must do’. Moses takes a new role as mediator between God and people, and good men are appointed to devolve the judiciary and to enable local decisions. As a result (v. 23), God will direct Moses, Moses will survive and the people will find peace. Their ‘thirst’, we could say, will be ‘quenched’. Indeed, the plan succeeds as the restlessness of the

crowd is stilled, and there is such order (v. 26) as could almost make it seem the problem is solved.

But there remains a niggling, unresolved silence by God after Rephidim, since which time Moses has sought to deliver God's laws and judgments to the best of his limited ability. Perhaps we expect another small response from God, like the 'statutes' and 'laws' mentioned so far (e.g. 15:25–26), when in his new role, 'Moses went up to God' (19:3).

It turns out, however, that the extent and multifaceted thoroughness by which God is with them defies all expectation. He is 'with' on the mountain, 'with' in words of teaching, judgment and statute, and 'with' in the building of a tabernacle. Jethro's prospect of 'God with you' was directed just to Moses; yet here is God's gracious immanence for all, exceeding their wildest expectations.

This quenching turns out to be such a torrent that later the people will need to take cover from it, and put their hope in a representative to meditate it all to them. But not at first: there is a tragically touching moment, both of longing and stilled restlessness, when the people declare, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (19:8). In the covenant on the mountain that follows (ch. 24), we find a second and third tragic protestation of heartfelt participation (24:3, 7). For just a moment, all is as it should be.

The Ten Words (20:2–17)

Israel's presenting problem, it has been suggested, is that individuals with desires must coexist as a society. Each person's desires exist on a spectrum from innocent creaturely need, through to excesses of falsely imagined need that can translate into voracious consumption. The conditions for social harmony will consist in the affirmation and assistance of proper longings, and the resistance of desire's worst excesses.

The Ten Words seem crafted to achieve precisely this end. Obviously enough, the first four reveal God to be the proper object of worship. But we learn something about human desire when we see that three of these four guide *the practices by which* they worship. Desire, it seems, needs not only to be guided toward the worship of God, but also against a kind of misdirection that takes the form of attachment to false objects, whether graven images or

the name of God used for improper ends; and it has to be guided away from the kind of preoccupied obsession with work that leaves no room for the expression of affection toward God.

With the proper worship of God set in place as the ultimate target of human desire, attention shifts to five practices. The practice of parental honour puts parents under God as another proper focus for people's affection; and the four boundaries that follow steer their practices away from four arenas most likely to stir improper desire, and so fill their horizons to make a society unsustainable.

It might be unusual to talk in such a manner about the Ten Words. We do not usually think of them as a strategy for ordering desire by helping it to find its proper home. But it is the tenth word that suggests this proposal. It is often singled out as somehow oddly different from the others, most of which seem to concern outward behaviour. But those are not just any outward behaviours: they are eight behaviours that for these people, perhaps for all people, are most likely to be waylaid by the same inner circuitry as drives our hunger and thirst. Hence the tenth word reveals what has been at work all along: the problem of the inner world that drives perjury, theft, adultery, murder, contempt for loving authority, overwork and false or absent worship. The Ten Words are a workable, memorable sketch of what we really need against what we think we need, and although it is not necessarily comprehensive or exhaustive, it is a more than adequate guide for how to manage desire within a society.

In his determination to find the worst in this text, Christopher Hitchens (2007: 100) asserts the bans on murder, adultery, theft and perjury to be ridiculous. 'No society ever discovered has failed to protect itself from self-evident crimes' such as these. Yet on the other hand, he finds the Tenth Word 'absurd' and 'impossible': 'One may be forcibly restrained from wicked actions . . . but to forbid people from *contemplating* them is too much' (100).

According to Hitchens, God should instead 'have taken more care to invent a different species' than the desiring human (Hitchens 2007: 100). Hitchens wants us simply to believe that morality is obvious, and that our desires are basically good. On this view, of course, the Ten Words are unintelligible. But the Ten Words actually

reveal the opposite case: morality is not obvious or self-evident when desire is leading us, and a society only succeeds in protection against crime when each member's immediate wants are eclipsed by a common object of love.²

The Book of the Covenant (20:22 – 23:33)

Although the Ten Words are easily the best-known example of law in Exodus, in Exodus' own terms, they do not exhaust what needs to be said about law. If we are to do proper justice to the law in Exodus, we need also to familiarize ourselves with the lesser-known material of what becomes referred to as 'the Book of the Covenant' (24:7).

The Book of the Covenant is arranged roughly according to topic, with only some of the Ten Words reappearing clearly in concept. On first glance, the section is a 'ceremonial sandwich' with 'civil filling':

- 20:22: 'Then the LORD said to Moses'
- 20:23: repeat of *Word 1*
- 20:24: about altars
- 20:25: no dressed stones (*Word 2*)
- 20:26: no steps
- 21:1: 'the laws (*mišpāṭīm*) you are to set before them':
- 21:2–11: slaves and concubinage
- 21:12–27: kidnaps, deaths, assaults (*Word 5*)
- 21:28–36: oxen mad or lost
- 22:1–4: on thieves (*Word 8*)
- 22:5–15: on restitution
- 22:16–19: sorcery and sex
- 22:20: repeat of *Word 1*
- 22:21–27: aliens and the poor
- 22:28: on authority (*Word 3*)
- 22:29–30: sacrifices and firstborn

2. I have borrowed the concept of a society's 'common objects of love' from Oliver O'Donovan's Augustinian approach to social and political thought (O'Donovan 2002).

- 22:31: holiness and torn flesh
- 23:1–7: lawsuits and stray donkeys (*Word 9, Word 10*)
- 23:8: bribes
- 23:9: aliens again
- 23:10–12: Sabbath years and days (*Word 4*)
- 23:13: ‘Pay strict attention to everything I have said to you’
- 23:13: repeat of *Word 1*
- 23:14–33: Festivals and sacrifices, with special reference to the journey ahead

A more orderly arrangement for the material has been proposed as follows (Staalduine-Sulman 2006: 209–210), although some irregularities remain:

- A. *Cult*: the altar as the one place (20:22–26)
- B. *Weak*: slaves and maids (21:1–11)
- C. *Capital charges*: social (21:12–17)
- D. *Bodily integrity*: injuries (21:18–36)
- E. *Theft and ownership* (21:37 – 22:12)
- D'. *Bodily integrity*: cattle and virgins (22:13–16)
- C'. *Capital charges*: cultic (22:17–19)
- B'. *Weak*: strangers, widows and orphans, the poor (22:20–26)
- A'. *Cult*: curses and consecration (22:27–30).

Several features of the Book of the Covenant are worth noting:

1. The laws are patchy, covering some areas in detail and others briefly, with many areas of life unaddressed. This law code seems random, even sketchy (as perhaps ours might appear to others).
2. The laws cover a variety of specific cases, which are typical of an agrarian pre-monarchical people, and are consistent with community life in Egypt or with episodes in the patriarchal narratives.³ These are precisely the kinds of cases that tribal elders

3. Calum Carmichael (Carmichael 1992) argues for the origin of the ‘Book of the Covenant’ in the Jacob narratives.

will be called upon to judge – perhaps not then and there in the wilderness, but soon enough.

3. There is no attempt to distil some aspirational, utopian statement of community life. Even the Ten Words do not do so. Some material in the Book of the Covenant has no obvious connection to the Ten Words; and where the Ten Words are applied, the application is almost random. Not all Ten can confidently be found there, and there is no systematic attempt to present the ones that are.
4. Yet key moral realities, distinctive against other ancient law codes, can be discerned in its layout and themes. Christopher Wright finds here that God is above all else, that people do matter more than objects, and that the needs and circumstances of some people generate a more immediate moral claim than even the legitimate claims of others (Staalduine-Sulman 2006: 211, n. 20; Wright 2004: 306, 309, 312). Paul Williamson has indicated (in this volume) the way they inculcate love for God and neighbour, and do not discriminate according to social class.
 - a. In the wider section, there is an intermixing of Hebrew lexemes, which may be glossed as follows:⁴
 - b. *mišpāt*, a judgment or verdict (15:25; 21:1; 24:3)
 - c. *ḥōq*, a canon, rule or regulation (15:25, 26; 18:16, 20)
 - d. *tōrā*, an instruction or teaching (16:4; 18:16, 20)
 - e. *mišwā*, a command (15:26; 20:6). And, of course, in 20:1 (cf. 24:3) what seem like the most momentous statements are simply *dēbārīm*, ‘words’ or ‘sayings’.

What is the status of this law? It could be ‘emergency law’ for an unruly desert people; but its expectations of imminent arrival in the land, and its references to situations in agrarian life, suggest that it is no stop-gap measure. It could be ‘eternal law’ for all people everywhere; but clearly not in the first instance, where it brings order to the passions and desires of a particular group in a particular time and place. Of course, we are not wrong to hear a

4. I owe this quick summary of these nuanced terms to George Athas.

resonance with the creation accounts throughout the Ten Words, which lends them some enduring significance. But in the main, this is a first body of law for an emerging nation. However, the story of its establishment is only completed with the narration of the golden-calf incident – surely the most humiliating episode to be found in any people’s account of the origins of their national identity.

The denouement (ch. 32)

The opening verse of chapter 32 underlines the short-sightedness of their desire. Instead of waiting with eager expectation for the presence of God in his tabernacle and in his rule of divine law, Moses’ delay inflames a desire for replacement gods to bring the security they crave. As Michael Raiter puts it (in this volume), idolatry is their ‘default position when weak and vulnerable’.

The chapter also underlines the deranging intensity of the group, as the threat of the mob provokes one of the OT’s most shocking examples of moral collapse. A tool in the hand would profane the stones of the altar and was not to touch any of them (20:25); yet just such a tool in the hand of Aaron gouges out this bull. The feasting that follows, perhaps even using the meat and manna of Yahweh, spills over into an explosion of revelry. Added together the scene is a cameo of what the NT will later call ‘flesh’.

The viewpoint switches to the quietness of the mountain, giving way to the quietly tense confrontation between an intercessing Moses and the God who points to the people’s corruption. Something ominous and momentous is signalled in the narrative pause to describe

the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. (32:15–16)

Why this detail, of which readers have already been twice informed (24:12; 31:18)? As Moses and Joshua descend and the sound of uproar escalates, we know the One whose purpose is to reign supreme through these tablets. So when God’s furious

representative delivers them against the foot of the mountain (the same *taḥat hābār* as where the people are gathered, 24:4), the sound of their smashing heralds a new thing, where the law has hurtled into a collision with the people for whom it was written. The law, which was to assist in ordering proper affection, has been greeted with an explosion of passion; and what was once anticipated with such eagerness as God's way of being with them, to guard their desires and to order their community, now takes its place as an alien presence. It slices across these short-sighted, self-justifying and rapacious desires and judges the mob. Nor does the shattering mean it no longer applies: its republication (34:1–4) makes clear that in the tablets' shattering, it is *the people*, not the law, who are somehow shattered.

Resonances beyond Exodus

We began by considering modern readers of this material, and by asking in what consists the assumption that we understand something so manifestly ancient. The Reformation discussion over the status of OT law can also be seen as an attempt to answer this kind of question. This section will briefly explore that discussion.

It is perhaps worth noting that the intermixing of Hebrew lexemes (with Paul's later rhetorical variations in his use of *nomos*) is not easily handled in scholastic, Reformed or modern discussions. These expect language to be used with analytic consistency; but senses and references of the term 'law' generally encompass many nuances of meaning.⁵ This difficulty keeps reappearing and equivocation over the term remains a difficult problem. There is little we can do about the problem other than to observe and continually monitor what sense and referent is on view.

5. So in Calvin's *Institutes*, biblical 'law' can refer to the morality of the Decalogue (2.8); or to the various collections within the Pentateuch (*Institutes* 4.20.14–16); or simply to everything Moses said (2.7.1). But in Calvin at least, each sense is generally made clear by definition or by context (Calvin 1960: 348, n. 1).

One ancient method of resolving law into some finer distinctions is pithily summarized in the second half of the seventh article of the Thirty-Nine:

Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral. (Article 7, 1662)

For moderns, this half-article is too brief and seems to conceal more than it reveals. Its threefold distinction (ceremonial, civil, moral) distils a cluster of long-running theological discussions; but taken at face value these distinctions lose any organic connection to OT law and take on an appearance of arbitrariness, as if each OT verse or sentence can instantly be sorted into one of three hoppers. As Michael Hill rightly observes:

Many people like to divide the regulations and laws that give shape to God's covenant with Israel into moral, cultic and civil elements. In this way it is hoped that the cultic and civil elements can be jettisoned with the coming of the New Covenant in Christ, and the moral component retained. However the Bible itself does not operate in this way. The Old Covenant is seen as a discrete unified package with a number of aspects, not parts. These various aspects cannot be unravelled and treated as parts. (2002:74)

Such distinctions are often applied to Exodus quite simply. 'Moral law' is equated to the Decalogue, 'civil law' to the large central section of the Book of the Covenant, and 'ceremonial law' to the outside 'sandwich' layers of the Book of the Covenant, and to the tabernacle instructions. But even in Exodus the law is 'a discrete unified package with a number of aspects, not parts'. We can find what looks like 'moral law' and 'ceremonial law' within 'civil law' (22:21–22, 28–31; 23:1–2, 6–9, 12–13). Although the seeming 'moral laws' often take the 'apodictic' form and the 'civil law' often takes the 'casuistic' form, even then we can find exceptions (e.g. an

apodictic ‘civil’ law in 22:18, perhaps a casuistic ‘moral’ law in 22:22–23, and most apodictic ‘ceremonial’ law). Nor do the intermixed lexemes give us much to work with in order to clarify these distinctions. In short, the material is not easy to codify using the threefold distinction.

Yet to return to Article 7, we should not too quickly pluck it from the theological arguments that gave it intelligibility and a context. For example, the article summarily distances itself from the possibility of an OT-style theocracy. No OT civil law ‘ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth’. In this conclusion, it agrees with John Calvin, who argues that every nation is free to make whatever laws it considers profitable as long as these are ‘in conformity to [the] perpetual rule of love’ (*Institutes* 4.20.15). For Calvin, particular societies in specific circumstances rightly enact such laws as are needed, provided they are made within boundaries of equity and natural law, and to promote gentleness and love (4.20.15–16).

His conclusion is premised upon a nuanced use of the threefold distinction. Moral law directs our love, first to God and then to one another. It is ‘the true and eternal rule of righteousness’ (4.20.15), and is ‘a testimony of natural law’ (4.20.16). From moral law springs ceremonial laws, which tutored the Jews in piety to God and toward their Christological eschaton (as in Gal. 4:3–4). From moral law springs civil laws – those specific ‘formulas of equity and justice, by which they might live together blamelessly and peaceably’ (4.20.15). Calvin does not fall into the arbitrariness Michael Hill sees in others, for according to Calvin the ceremonial and the civil both expressed morality, instantiating respectively reverent service of God and love for humanity.

Calvin always camouflages his debts to Aquinas, but it is not hard to see a direct influence in this discussion. Aquinas also thought that ceremonial and civil laws were specific manifestations of a more basic natural moral law. It has to be conceded that Aquinas’ weakness for seizing on some handy biblical texts risks trivializing his view. When God instructs Moses to teach *mišwâ*, *hûqqîm* and *mišpāṭîm* (Deut. 6:1), Aquinas takes the ‘precept’ or ‘command’ (*mišwâ*) to refer to the moral order, from which springs the ceremonial ‘statutes’ (*hûqqîm*) and the judicial ‘rules’ or ‘judg-

ments' (*mišpāṭīm*). His use of this handy triad sidesteps some semantic complexity; and he simply fails to resist a moment of biblical opportunism that is the occupational hazard of all theologians when 'holy and righteous and good' in Romans 7:12 are merely taken to correspond to 'ceremonial and civil and moral' respectively (Aquinas 1937: 1a2ae.99.a4). But these complaints should not cause us to suppose that Aquinas' overall argument is flawed. He described an underlying divinely ordered moral reality experienced by humanity as a 'natural law', which is then graciously 'republished' for humanity by God in the OT and NT (Pinckaers 1995: 171–185). (). Calvin was sufficiently persuaded by this approach to deploy it in broad outline. What matters for our purposes is that for both, the morality of moral law pivots upon a conception of a 'natural law'. (An important qualification to this conception is considered below.)

The moral, ceremonial and civil distinction was a tool for exegetical discussion, which tried to map the conceptual logic of the biblical material. But another set of distinctions, three so-called uses of the law, tried to map some modes of the biblical law's relevance for people today. These more uniquely Reformed distinctions do not easily map on to the older moral–ceremonial–civil divide, and the relationship between the 'uses' and the older formulation is confusing at first.

The 'uses' make another threefold distinction. But this new triad is not discussing the whole Mosaic legal code, as the moral–ceremonial–civil distinction does. Rather, the 'uses' of the law are an argument about how we may take *only the 'moral' component* of biblical law.

Another point of confusion lies in the unfortunate fact that in various Reformed documents, the first two uses were often reversed. Terminology of 'first use' and 'second use' was never quite settled. In Calvin's exposition of the moral law's uses (*Institutes* 2.8):

- Its first use (2.7.6–9) is a 'theological use': it acts as a 'mirror', convicting both believers and unbelievers of sin, driving them to repent and find grace through faith.
- Its second use (2.7.10–11) is a 'civil use', a 'bridle' upon wilful sinners, so enabling communities to live in relative harmony.

(Calvin cites 1 Tim. 1:9–10 in support, although the text could equally support the moral law’s theological use.) We must note that for Calvin and for Article 7 (and for the Westminster Confession 19.4), it is this *second use of the OT moral law, not the OT civil law as such*, that is to form the basis for any modern system of justice.

There was a broad Reformation consensus upon these two uses of moral law. Even the antinomian John Agricola could agree to the *civil* use of the moral law. (His complaint was against its theological use.) In contrast, we would probably find a less clear consensus among Christians of Reformed lineage today about either use. (It would be interesting to map the history of the change.)

But the main Reformation dispute was over the so-called third use of the law, summarized in Article 7 as that ‘no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral’. Calvin is in no doubt:

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers . . . Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord’s will. (*Institutes* 2.7.12)

In Calvin’s startling metaphor, this use is ‘a whip to an idle and balky ass’ and ‘a constant sting’ upon the believer – always with the proviso, of course, that no believer is condemned by law or justified by its works.

Noticing the psalmist’s love of the law, Calvin asks, ‘what would be less loveable than the law if . . . it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright?’ In the law is also found a promise of grace ‘which alone sweetens what is bitter’ (2.7.12).

Calvin’s disagreement with Luther about this third use seems pointed and irreconcilable. Luther finds only the first two uses, both blended in the following statement of absolute finality (with archaisms of the English translation slightly modified):

the law is also a light, which shows and reveals, not the grace of God, not righteousness and life; but sin, death, the wrath and judgment of

God. For, as in the mount Sinai the thundering, lightening, the thick and dark cloud, the hill smoking and flaming, and all that terrible show did not rejoice nor quicken the children of Israel, but terrified and astonished them, and showed how unable they were, with all their purity and holiness, to abide the presence of God speaking to them out of the cloud: even so the law, when it is in his [*sic*] true sense, does nothing else but reveal sin, engender wrath, accuse and terrify men, so that it brings them to the very brink of desperation. This is the proper use of the law, and here it has an end, and it ought to go no further. (1953: 302)

But if Exodus is anything to go by, has Luther gone too far? After all, the nuance of that narrative is to say that despite their awestruck fear of God on the mountain, this is also that brief interlude where the law is loved, representing relief and order. There is not yet a warrant for Luther's sharp distinction of gospel and law, for, after all, the representatives of the people 'saw the God of Israel . . . And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank' (Exod. 24:10–11). Does Calvin's third use better reflect that moment where the community gratefully offers to do everything for the God who is with them, ordering their desire, creating community, meeting their needs with sayings and judgments?

There is rarely much to be gained by playing Calvin and Luther against each other. In this case, there really is a profound sense in which both are right. Exegetically speaking, Luther may have been a little quick to see disaster prefigured at Sinai; but theologically speaking, he is in good company with the author to the Hebrews in seeing disaster prefigured there (Heb. 12:18–21), just as the psalmist sees disaster prefigured in the murmurings in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8–9). For exegetically speaking, the disaster does strike when the tablets of the law shatter among the people, and law becomes precisely the arch-enemy of which Luther speaks.

Calvin's and Luther's opposing position on the third use of moral law reflects a dialectic present in the text of Exodus, where the law is both a friend and an enemy to the people. It is a friend because it offers to order their desires and to build their community. It is an enemy because it judges a community whose desires explode in every direction. But where does that dialectic leave us?

In what way should we look to the law, if at all? Obviously, this discussion did not stop at the Reformation, and we shall return below to touch on three recent proposals.

A modest proposal

However in this section, another proposal for the Christian reading of the law will be presented, although the thought is far from new. The proposal is simply that Christians now read the law to grow in Christian wisdom. It no longer comes to us with the force of direct command. In the overall ‘story-arc’ of the Bible, we receive it in the same way we receive a proverb, a psalm or some other biblical wisdom; and we receive this wisdom ‘in Christ’, reading with the kind of faith in him that converts it into *Christian* wisdom. It helps to inform us about moral reality understood Christianly.

It must be conceded that there is some difficulty in detailing how this hermeneutical project should proceed. That difficulty may be an artefact of the way that in general, true ‘wisdom’ cannot easily be described in advance. Nonetheless, four lines of evidence can be offered in support of the proposal:

1. A ‘natural law’, properly understood as the God-given order of creation, undergirds both law and wisdom.
2. There are moments in Exodus that look ‘wisdom-like’, where laws are premised on the basis of this order.
3. Some Jewish intertestamental thinkers argue for similarities between wisdom and law, despite their different origins.
4. Moments from Exodus are used to build Christian wisdom in the NT.

Each of these lines of evidence will now be examined in turn.

‘Natural law’

We observed that for Aquinas and Calvin, OT ceremonial law was a specific instance of the moral law to worship God; and OT civil law was a specific instance of the moral law to order human

desires and human society. On their view, ‘moral law’ is an expression of ‘natural law’.

‘Natural law’ is a concept that generates some heat among Protestants when it connotes an uncomplicated autonomous capacity to read morality from creation. But this sense is emphatically not what Calvin (nor probably even Aquinas) had in mind. Calvin simply meant to refer to moral realities that God has embedded into that creation which is divinely described in moral terms as ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31).

By discerning a ‘moral law’ in OT law, theologians do not mean to be arbitrary. They simply refer to the aspect of it that is intelligible because of our common pattern as humans: our shared interdependence with the earth and with each other, the similar desires we have, and the need to know God that resides within us all. Law names, articulates and guards the moral structure of things, just as wisdom literature does in its own way. Biblical literature does so with a precision and to an extent that no human mind could achieve unaided.

Could Luther live with this conception of natural law as undergirding the structure of moral law? He speaks of the moral law’s ‘total power and force’ (Luther 1960: 116; ‘Law’, §34) and its applicability to the ‘whole world’ (Luther 1960: 114–115; ‘Law’, §§7, 13). Nothing in Luther’s writing ever suggests that the Christian is released from moral reality, and to that extent he would approve a qualified conception of a ‘natural law’ as undergirding OT law.

Moments of moral order in Exodus

George Athas (in this volume) has explained that ancient *mišpāt* justice set ‘everything in its proper assigned place so that it may fulfil its assigned function in relational harmony with the rest of creation’. What he showed as occurring in the first section of Exodus becomes explicit in the *mišpātīm* of the Book of the Covenant, when we see a few instances of what might be called ‘wisdom-based law’.

The clearest example is where ‘you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right’ (23:8). This divine command actually takes its warrant from a wrong but persistent pattern of human behaviour,

and even though the language is different, its logic bears striking resemblance to some wisdom aphorisms (e.g. Prov. 17:23; Eccles. 7:7). Arguably, up to six other such ‘wisdom moments’ appear (20:26; 22:21, 27; 23:2, 9, 12).

But, more significantly, it is possible to show that the Decalogue itself alludes throughout to the creation and fall narratives.⁶ The uncreated otherness of God; the telos of the earth in rest; a son’s slaughter of his parent’s son; the one man, one woman relationship; the theft of the fruit; the shifting of blame; the desire that drove it all – in response to each of these, each saying in the Decalogue guards and restores what began as very good.

We have warrant on both fronts, then, to discern a moral aspect to the Exodus laws that finds its origin in the creation’s moral order. (The law against bribery, premised on a wrongful pattern of human behaviour, might not at first seem to reflect divine moral order. But this regularly recurrent *pattern* of human behaviour is a corruption of the predictability of human desire, which is itself an aspect of the divinely ordered cosmos.) This ordering may peek through here and there in the material: perhaps the kindly reminder to the priest not to ascend the stairs before the invention of underwear recalls the goodness of our sexuality for our marriage. But there is no need to find everything grounded in created moral order. For example, there may be an arbitrariness to the refusal of torn flesh as a symbol of holiness (22:31).

The main point is that the creation’s moral order grounds some of the Exodus laws just as it grounds some later wisdom. To quote Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 4:6: ‘Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”’

Intertestamental thinkers

Even though the wisdom literature is a different OT stream than the legal and salvation-historical material, Eckhardt Schnabel sees

6. So Carmichael argues, although he also thinks that the first table derives from the golden-calf account (1992: 22–50).

a convergence between law and wisdom in Jewish intertestamental literature:

both law and wisdom are repeatedly linked with the concept of life as ‘walking’ in (good) ‘ways’ . . . Similarly, both law and wisdom are often compared with ‘light’ . . . Both law and wisdom are intimately linked with righteousness, holiness, and purity as goal of the enlightened walk in the proper way. (1985: 344–345)

Indeed, in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 24.23, wisdom is explicitly identified with Mosaic law in general, and with the Book of the Covenant in particular.⁷ Of course, many intertestamental developments are not directly relevant to a Christian reading of the Bible; but Schnabel’s point is that in some respects, Paul’s use of the law reflects the intertestamental convergence of law and wisdom. But rather than testing Schnabel’s argument, we can arrive at a similar result by observing the uses of the Exodus law in the NT.

NT usage of Exodus

What might it look like to use OT law in the NT as data there for Christian wisdom? At least a few ‘tests’ can be imagined:

- We may see law peppered unsystematically throughout moral discussion, or allusions to it threaded throughout moral discussion, since it would function only as one of a number of sources for Christian wisdom.
- We may see the purpose or ground of any given law functioning as the primary moral datum, rather than its deontic force per se.
- When law does appear, we may expect to see its inner logic expanded, and/or amplified, and/or reapplied.

With one exception, these are precisely the features we find in NT usage of Exodus laws. Its appearances are few, but when it does

7. See Levenson for another discussion of this verse and of law as a form of wisdom (Levenson 1980: 25 and *passim*).

appear, its function in moral discussion is unpredictably creative. Its depths are often plumbed in a kind of Christian wonderment.

The absence of the first four Decalogue 'words' from the NT would be almost incredible, except that their logic is richly interwoven throughout the NT, possibly at the level of several subtle allusions. The direct quotation of the seventh word in Ephesians 6:2–3 about parents appears to be the exception subverting the thesis here presented, for it is a direct quote in support of an apostolic instruction. But in this passage no other law is used in this way, and this one is singled out for the promise attached to it. It is at least plausible that the Christian child is being asked to grow in wisdom about the moral realities of honour to parents, rather than being commanded merely on the basis that the seventh word exists.

In James 2:11, the fifth and sixth words about murder and adultery are used to illustrate the problem of a restricted use of Mosaic law, and we are quickly pointed to a 'law of freedom' (v. 12) that seems to govern the subsequent moral instruction of this letter. The anthropological depths of the words about murder and adultery are searched out and strengthened in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:21, 27), and Paul's use of the ninth word about coveting adds to his exposition of human anthropology in Romans 7:7.

The one clear exception to this wisdom-enhancing usage of law is seen in Jesus' discussion with the young man about the second table of the law (Matt. 19:18–19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20). But then at this point in salvation history, the Jewish people are still 'under' this law.

In sharp contrast, the second table of law is used in Romans 13:9 to strengthen and extend Christian wisdom about love, which of course is repeatedly and provocatively the new Christian 'law'. It is probably the law's fulfilment by love (Gal. 5:14) that is renamed 'the law of Christ' in Galatians 6:2. This theme of the law's fulfilment by love is repeated in James 2:8 and 1 John 3:23 (which is perhaps a Christocentric reworking of the two great commandments). Obviously, the theme derives from Jesus' use of Deuteronomy 6:5 (cf. 10:12 and 30:6) and Leviticus 19:18 as the hermeneutical keys to law. The law was always an exposition of love (Mark 12:30–34; Matt. 22:37–40; cf. 19:19; Luke 10:27). In this new kind of Christian 'law', the person and work of Christ have

become the organizing centre and the interpretative matrix for moral reality.

The Book of the Covenant makes only three direct appearances, when Jesus refuses to allow two of its civil laws to distort personal relationships (Matt. 5:38–39 on Exod. 21:24; and probably Matt. 5:40 on Exod. 22:26–28); and in Paul’s almost mischievous use of Exod. 22:28 in Acts 23:5.

In short, there is ample reason to think that NT readers of the Exodus law are very interested in allowing it to inform their moral reasoning, but not at all interested in allowing it to define or control that reasoning. In other words, it has become for them a contributor to Christian wisdom.

The ‘third use’ is wrong, then, if taken to mean that Christians are forensically bound by OT ‘moral’ laws. We are not ‘under the law’ (Rom. 3:28; 6:14; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 3:25; 5:18; and cf. 4:5), and no OT command can be quoted as the sole basis for Christian moral motivation. But NT thinkers did not seem to imagine that ‘freedom from law’ entailed Marcion’s error, as if OT laws should no longer be read as part of the canon of Scripture.

Certainly, in Christ ‘are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:3); yet this statement should not be taken in an *ontological* sense, as if we need no longer refer to anything else in the cosmos, whether the writings of the OT, or the general ordering of the cosmos. The statement is *teleological*, describing the way it is that only through Christ and his eschatological purposes may we properly ‘decode’ the texts we read and the order we think we see. Paul must mean something like this when he speaks of faith somehow upholding the law (Rom. 3:31).

Nor did any serious Reformation thinker imagine that to be ‘freed from the law’ was to be ‘freed from moral reality’. Luther declares that if it came down to a choice between Christ and the law,

the law would have to be let go, not Christ. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish laws and we shall judge all things rightly. Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel. And these decalogues are clearer than the decalogue of Moses . . . (1960: 112–113; ‘Faith’, §§51–54)

This surprising assertion is no mere rhetorical flourish. Luther expects faith in Christ to make whole new realms of moral insight possible. Yet, ironically perhaps, Luther is one of the best examples of wise Christian use of the law. His *Treatise on Good Works* (Luther 1966), and his two Catechisms, are classic instances of a wise Christian mind ‘at play’ among the Ten Words. We see Luther quarrying for wisdom at this seam that yields knowledge of our hearts, and knowledge of our neighbour’s needs. He does so in knowledge and love of the Christ who meets every tabernacle yearning, and who also meets every legal yearning. (For laws do have yearnings, however well they may be hidden: the yearning for a new person whose desires are right; the yearning for a people who love each other well; the yearning for a people who patiently wait upon the God who is with them. All of these yearnings are consummated in Christ, the firstfruits and the lastfruits of the law’s proper longing.) Armed with joyful faith in Christ, Luther reaches into the inner depths of law, knitting its logic together with the knowledge of Christ. He therefore achieves everything in this *Treatise* that any ‘third use’ could ever hope to achieve.

In an important sense, then, the ‘third use’ *is* correct. Spirit and Word free us properly to receive moral reality, so we may now ‘wisely’ receive the law in Christ, discerning much in it about love for God and others. But we can offer no formula in advance for how the Christological reading of a given law (or proverb) will proceed. That there is some difficulty in detailing this hermeneutical project is not a strong defeater of it, for the entire witness of Scripture is that true ‘wisdom’ is a lifelong process that must be pursued heuristically, and in humble partnership with God.

Beseeking our legislators

As a kind of postscript, I offer some brief comments on three recent discussions of the law and its use. I shall conclude with some suggestions about how the law in Exodus might be seen to offer wisdom for modern legislators.

Covenantal nomism

In 1980, Jon Levenson complained that the generally welcome rediscovery of the concept of covenant in OT studies was getting carried away, to the point where OT law was being explained entirely as arbitrary conditions imposed by the divine suzerain upon his people. Levenson complained that this move ignored the wisdom evidently embedded in OT law.

Covenantal nomism, whether a real belief system or one imagined by scholars, takes this trend to its logical extreme. Law obedience is primarily for covenantal inclusion.⁸ But this preoccupation strips law of any real connection to a natural moral order, and so covenantal nomism seems to assert a radical voluntarism, where God simply commands in order to test for covenantal obedience, and people simply obey in order to effect covenantal membership. On this view, there really can be nothing to say from the OT for human affairs; it is of antiquarian interest only.

Theonomist reconstructionism

Diametrically opposed is theonomist reconstructionism, which seeks for substantial aspects of OT law to be reconstructed in modern life. Although some propose the reconstruction of the OT cult, Greg Bahnsen confines his attention to the reconstruction of modern civil law along OT lines (1996). Wright summarizes some of the major objections to this project (2004: 403–408). But one of its mistakes is to equate the written OT civil law with moral reality. In an attempt, then, to commend moral reality to modern legislators, reconstructionism commends OT civil law. But the Reformed conclusion is to be preferred: moral reality can be defended and upheld by different civil laws in different times and places.

8. 'Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression' (Sanders 1977: 75.)

Biblical relationism

Another project seeks to find what it calls ‘paradigms’ for social life in OT biblical law. Its proponents do not think of themselves as ‘reconstructionists’, and they are not (Schluter and Ashcroft 2005: *passim*; Wright 2004: 408–411) (). They would agree with Michael Hill’s statement ‘The basic shape of God’s rule, and God’s just order established at creation, is confirmed and further delineated in the Law [which] gives us, as Christians, a glimpse of God’s just order’ (2002: 74).

Biblical relationism optimistically quarries the law for ‘divine wisdom’, we might say, about human society. Various social structures and interactions are drawn from its pages, and reformed into modern-day public policy suggestions. However, the text always seems to constrain these suggestions: we should have a Sabbath, no interest and a return to clan-based security. Each suggestion has merits, but this interesting project does not always demonstrably read OT law ‘Christologically’.

We have already seen that a ‘Christological’ reading is hard to specify in advance, and proponents of biblical relationism may reasonably be reserved about an expectation that they should do so without any specification of how to proceed. Nonetheless, NT soteriology and eschatology do bring new insights into moral reality, resulting (for example) in merciful civil judgments, the good of chaste singleness, the total error of holy war, or the distinction between church and state. To read OT law only on its own terms may predispose us to some errors of moral judgment.

Avoiding these errors, then, what wisdom might be on offer for a modern legislator from the law in Exodus? The following suggestions are ad hoc only, and far from exhaustive.

First, we may observe how surprisingly brief the Exodus law is. Modern parliaments now operate as legislative factories, multiplying law upon law in an overbearing effort to regulate human society. Admittedly, there are many more of us, our society is more complex, and different times do require different laws. But a wisdom formed by Exodus might conclude that sometimes less is more, and that excessive ‘positive law’ (legislation) does not always assist local leaders to judge, lead and help form communities.

Secondly, our legislators may note the way the Exodus law is not *idealistic* law. Not even the Ten Words finally map out and hold people to some complete utopian specification of the good society, and the Book of the Covenant is quite patchy in what it regulates. Presumably, it regulated whatever needed regulating, and beyond that, allowed community life to look after itself. But in some respects modern Western law may be tempted to espouse the kind of grand moral vision that no law is capable of. (Some implementations of human rights law may labour under such a temptation, although other instances of it are more appropriately circumscribed.)

Thirdly, anyone interested in the morality of law needs to try working with the grain of this material. In this volume, Greg Clarke has pointed to some recent mockery of it; but quite apart from these authors' decision always to see the worst in these pages, they simply cheat. They presume that modern liberal morality would have been self-evident to any reasonable atheist such as themselves – whether ancient or modern. They presume ancient societies should use modern liberal punishment practices and punish similar crimes. But this self-righteous finger wagging simply ignores the way OT law had to regulate a particular time and place without the relative luxuries we enjoy. This kind of modern liberalism also avoids any consideration of whether this law, and the gospel's fond farewell to it, have flowed together through the millennia to create some of the modern liberal luxuries that make us who we are. Surely no modern legislators can blithely go about their business without wrestling with that great story.

Finally, the law in Exodus is connected to human desire, and has in mind the good of communities. Of course good modern legislators do think about human desires and the good of communities. Nevertheless, we may urge them to keep looking to those channel-markers in their law making. A modern legislator, crushed under a weight of technical and political concerns, may simply forget that his or her task is to take human desire into account, assisting its best longings and resisting its worst excesses, so that a community may dwell together in relative peace. What we need is a peaceful society, not a body of law. Even the modern legislator will find his

or her wisdom sharpened by reading from this law, and of the Christ who fulfils it.

The psalmist once prayed:

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.

(Ps. 119:34)

Perhaps the corresponding prayer today is, ‘Give us understanding, that we might learn wisdom through your old law, and discern what is the best through faith in Christ, who is the fulfilment and end of that law.’

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