

the Sabbath and efforts to divorce it from the context of Revelation 13 and 14. To the cultural subset we call the Adventist lifestyle.

I believe that Adventists today are in desperate peril that the distinctives of our faith will become, as to our Christian forefathers, baggage too heavy to carry. As in ancient

Rome, our faith, impelled by cultural considerations—whether benign or malignant—will become social cement. And in a new, more religious Hollywood of smorgasbord social entrees, our footprints will be immortalized on a sidewalk called culture, right alongside the footprints of the church fathers. □

THE DECALOGUE: CONSTITUTION OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS



The religious importance of the Decalogue for Jewish life was noticed by Jewish thinkers who “have often regarded the Ten Commandments as the essence of the Torah.” For example, in his essay “About the Decalogue, Being the Principal Laws of Moses,” Philo contends that the individual laws of the Torah derive from each of the commandments. In a similar vein, Pseudo Philo describes the giving of the Decalogue as God establishing “the *u* (*nomos*) of his eternal covenant with the sons of Israel and . . . his commandments that will not pass away.” He further suggests that it is by this “everlasting law” that God judges the entire world.” . . .

Given the esteemed place of the Decalogue in Judaism, it was only natural that it would have a central place in emerging Christianity. Indeed, the problem between the Rabbis and the Minim is an indication that adherence to the Decalogue was one of the early articles of Christian faith. Additional support for the centrality of the Ten Commandments in Christianity is apparently present in one of Pliny’s letters to Trajan, in which he describes the worship habits of Christians. He informs the emperor that one of the Christian meetings, which was held on a “certain fixed day before it was light,” involved the recital of an oath in which the participants swore “never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify

their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.” Assuming that Pliny was not giving a verbatim report but was recording that which he had heard from his informers, this is more than likely a loose paraphrase of what was really said. It is quite possible that Pliny was misquoting Christians who were continuing the Jewish tradition of reciting the Decalogue in public worship.

Further evidence in support of the centrality of the Decalogue in Christian teaching and worship, is found in two of the common prayers recorded in the second-century Apostolic Constitutions. The “ten oracles” (Decalogue) are referred to as a *u* (*nomos*): “You gave them a Law, ten oracles uttered by your voice, and engraved by your hand.” And again we read about God “who gave an implanted and written law to wo/man, so that s/he might live lawfully as a rational being.” Thus we see that as late as the second century, esteem for the Decalogue was still central for Christian life and liturgy.

We have seen that the Decalogue—“the basic constitution . . . of the Community of Israel”—was highly esteemed within Second Temple Judaism. The earliest Christian communities joined their Jewish parents and siblings in this reverence for God’s central law. Although rejecting the ceremonial aspects of the Pentateuchal law, Christians recognized the Decalogue as a timeless principle with divine origin and affinity. One could say that the Christian viewed the Decalogue directly as the essential Torah. The Christian elevation of the Decalogue directly affected Jewish religious practice, as is evidenced by the rabbinic prohibition of the Decalogue’s recital in the daily liturgy. The centrality of the Decalogue in such biblical books as Romans and Hebrews suggests that this interdiction did not affect the Christian theology of law. In fact, both the prayers from the Apostolic Constitutions and the Letter of Pliny to Trajan show that even in the second century some Christians still viewed the precepts of the Decalogue as central to community life and liturgy.

—Keith A. Burton, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama, “The Decalogue as Essential Torah in Second Temple Judaism.”