

## TOWARDS A COVENANTAL DEFINITION OF TÔRÂ

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I consider it a singular privilege to honor Prof Allan A. MacRae with a humble contribution to this *Festschrift*. How can one forget the impact he had on us in seminary. One brief recollection will suffice. It was chapel time, and Dr MacRae spoke. He enthusiastically preached on *mûsar* ("discipline"). For the rest of the year, the halls and classrooms rang out with *mûsar*. Even at intramural games on the playing field the cry was heard, *mûsar*! One may have disagreed with him on one issue or another during those seminary years, but clearly there was a mutual respect and esteem. Dr MacRae, we salute you and praise God for you.

The subject I have chosen to write on is of current significance because of the theological and ecclesiastical debates over the concept of law in the Scriptures. The issue focuses more specifically on the question of continuity or discontinuity from Old Testament to New Testament, and hence the application of the OT law in NT times.<sup>1</sup> The subject is too large for an exhaustive treatment in this article. Therefore, we propose to narrow our discussion to the starting point, namely, looking for a biblical definition of *tôrâ*. Our thesis is that *tôrâ* is a covenantal concept having primarily an educational meaning of "teaching, instruction" and secondarily a juridical meaning of "law, legislation." in other words, *tôrâ* is to be understood as a divinely revealed, authoritative instruction rather than as a "code" of ethics or legislation.

### Etymology

A considerable amount of attention has been given to the question of the etymology of *tôrâ* without an emerging clear consensus.<sup>2</sup> Three different views have been generally suggested.<sup>3</sup> The first view is attributed to Gesenius who considers that *yrh* "to throw, cast, shoot" in the Qal, but "to teach" in the Hiphil, is the verb from which *tôrâ* is derived.<sup>4</sup> S. R. Driver and J. E. Hartley seem to agree.<sup>5</sup> The second view is attributed to Wellhausen though he later changed his opinion. He also derived *tôrâ* from *yrh*, "to throw, cast," but connected it with its use in casting lots in order to obtain an oracle.<sup>6</sup> Delitzsch has suggested a third view, equating *tôrâ* with its Akkadian cognate *têrtu*, which in turn is derived from *(w)arû*, equivalent to Hebr *yrh*.<sup>7</sup> Albright seems to agree, but he derived both *tôrâ* and *têrtu* from *(w)âru* (i.e., *wa'aru*), which suggests the meaning of *têrtu* "commission, command, oracle. especially of hepatoscopy (the oracle *par excellence*)."<sup>8</sup>

Two observations may be allowed. One's philosophical or theological