

Chosen Nation: Biblical Theopolitics and the Problem of American Christian Nationalism

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CHOSEN NATION: BIBLICAL THEOPOLITICS AND THE
PROBLEM OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

by

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ABSTRACT
**CHOSEN NATION: BIBLICAL THEOPOLITICS AND THE
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Christian theopolitics presupposes that every salvation narrative entails a politics, and that every politics presumes a story of salvation. This means that the church faces a host of theopolitical structures contending with the Christian story for the allegiance, formation, and identity of Christians. However, theopolitical scholarship has largely overlooked or misunderstood one of the church's major challenges today: nationalism. Moreover, this scholarship is unable to properly address the challenge of nationalism due to an inadequate engagement with biblical theopolitics—particularly that of Old Testament Israel—which, in distorted form, is central to nationalism emanating from within the church.

In order to supplement theopolitical studies in this regard, this dissertation engages nationalism scholarship to better understand the phenomenon and its relationship to Christianity. It finds that within certain nationalist movements, theological moves are at work that make possible both the formulation and propagation of a national identity that places the nation squarely within the Christian salvation narrative, usually as an extension of Israel, and thereby supplanting the church.

In response to this problem, the study develops a biblical theopolitics from both Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. This theopolitics presents Israel as the elect and covenanted People of God whom Yahweh establishes as a visible sign of salvation to the nations, the definitive social, political, and economic human community. While Israel diverges from this vocation, Yahweh still provides for its fulfillment by incarnating both Israel and Yahweh in the person of Jesus Christ, culminating in Christ's suffering and exaltation. Christ subsequently establishes the church to carry on the embodiment of covenant fulfilled, opening it to the rest of humanity.

By way of example for the theopolitical scholarship it is intended to supplement, the final part of the dissertation examines Christian nationalism in the United States, both in the form of popular narratives put forth by the American Christian Right, as well as more sophisticated academic political theologies. It evaluates these discourses, determining that their attempts to authenticate a particular national identity inevitably distort Christian understanding of the biblical narrative, and thus the identity and practices of the ecclesia.

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Braden P. Anderson, B.A., M.A.

An endeavor of this magnitude can never be credited solely to the person whose name appears on the front. There is always a communal element—usually multiple communities—that helps to shape one’s understanding and articulation of the question under examination, and to sustain and discipline the student during the course of study. Here, I wish to take account of those communities and persons who have done just that, and to express my gratitude to them for their ongoing direction, support, and encouragement not only in crafting this project but also in keeping life real in the process.

My graduate education began in political science at the University of Kansas, a program that I hoped would be my entree, ironically, into professional national security policy development. It was there that I met Dr. Thomas Heilke, my graduate director and one who would become a mentor to me, and simultaneously became involved in the graduate-faculty chapter of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, carefully nurtured by Bob and Debbie Clark, who would become dear friends to my family. Thomas, along with our InterVarsity reading group, introduced me to the writings of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. In their work, and in our discussions, I became aware of the significance of the lordship of Jesus Christ in such a way that most of my theological, political, and academic assumptions were upended or drastically reoriented. By the end of my master’s degree there, I could only imagine myself entering theology to further explore this new world.

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To our children, Benjamin and Madelyn, I give my love. Through those two precious souls, in whom I genuinely delight, I am learning much of what is important in human life together. May they grow to find their place in the People of God. To my wife, Elizabeth, I give my love and gratitude for enduring a process that has consumed nine of the eleven years of our marriage, and that has changed both of us in significant and often unexpected ways. She agreed in our first year to my leaving secure and lucrative employment in order to follow a better calling, and she has all along held us together with her even temperament and grace under pressure, her patient love, and her very hard work. I am, and will always be, a better person because of her.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian theopolitical approaches engage politics not as an independent sphere of activity apart and autonomous from that of theology, but rather as a function of salvation history. As narrated in the Christian scriptures, God's redemptive project entails at its heart a communal outworking in the form of Israel and the church. As such, Christian salvation history necessarily implies what could be called a theopolitical ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that entails particular understandings of ecclesial identity and mission. Yet it is also understood that other salvation histories are operative in the world, complete with their own communal manifestations, their own political embodiments, which often vie with the church for a claim on human life and meaning. The challenge for the church in this regard is to be able to identify and evaluate these narratives, their attendant political embodiments, and the degree to which the church itself perpetuates a competing gospel.

The painting, "One Nation Under God," by artist John McNaughton, is just such a work.¹ When viewing it, the eye is immediately drawn to the central figure of Jesus Christ. Christ is portrayed as a Caucasian dressed in a white robe underneath an open golden robe. According to the captions on the webpage (available in a convenient zoom window to the right of the painting), the golden robe, with the Greek letters alpha and omega stitched upon it, represents Christ's sovereignty over all creation. Upon the white robe underneath is the golden figure of the "Tree of Life," with twelve fruit representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Behind Christ stands an array of figures from American history, and behind them, the United States Capitol and Supreme Court buildings, as well as the U.S. flag, occupying the highest point in the painting, save the Statue of Freedom atop the capitol dome. Historical figures include George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and a number of other U.S. presidents, soldiers from different eras of American warfare (including one named "King" who ironically doubles to

¹ Available at http://www.mcnaughtonart.com/artwork/view_zoom/?artpiece_id=353# (accessed July 30, 2010).

represent the nonviolent civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.²), and other heroes, from abolitionist Frederick Douglas to astronaut Christa McAuliffe to Nathan Hale, “martyr soldier of the American Revolution.” Christ and the historical figures stand at the top of a stair, down the right and left sides of which sit figures from various contemporary American walks of life. The ones on the left (to Christ’s right) represent “good Americans,” and include a contemporary Marine, a family doctor, a college student, an immigrant, a school teacher, and a mother with a baby in her arm and a son nearby. On the right (to Christ’s left) are “those who have weakened the country,”³ and include a Hollywood director, a politician, a Supreme Court justice, a “liberal news reporter,” and a college professor. The devil himself lurks in the dark background of this group.

Christ is further adorned in a red sash around his waist symbolizing “the blood spilt by Americans for God and country” and displaying the Hebrew for Psalm 33:12.⁴ He holds up in his right hand a parchment copy of the United States Constitution, which the artist describes as “inspired of God and created by God-fearing, patriotic Americans.” Indicating those with an “important role in the preservation of our country,” Christ’s left hand points to the constitution, as well as the “good” mother and her nearby son, whom she is “releasing to come forth and touch the Constitution.” Indeed, in a moment reminiscent of the hemorrhaging woman who strains to simply touch Jesus’ garment to be healed (Lk 8:43-48), the young boy is reaching out to gingerly touch the Constitution with his fingertip.

What is so telling about this is the way the images interweave the biblical narrative with the American national narrative. Christ and Israel are placed at the center of America’s story, which is thereby made continuous with their own. Indeed, the painting, which the artist says he

² According to the artist, he had originally painted the historical King but had to change it due to copyright issues with the King Foundation.

³ These descriptors are applied on another page where McNaughton explains the symbolism of the picture: http://www.mcnaughtonart.com/artwork/list_of_symbolism?artwork_title=One%20Nation%20Under%20God (accessed July 30, 2010).

⁴ “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

received in a vision,⁵ is a powerful, albeit less than subtle, depiction of a particular understanding of the meaning of American identity. There is little doubt, between the picture and the artist's explanations, that the images contained therein are intended to have a claim on the understanding, particularly by Christian Americans, of America's true self, its authentic character. The nation is in crisis, divided between those who would direct America according to their own interests and aggrandizement and those who would sacrifice for its safeguarding as a special nation, ordained to greatness if only it is faithful to its providential founding. Those who acknowledge Christ as Lord are at the same time called to allegiance to America's traditions and ideals. To be faithful to Christ is to be faithful to America.

The McNaughton painting is a particularly vivid example of an important challenge to a robust ecclesial identity today, namely nationalism. Nationalism entails among other things the effort to determine and then propagate an understanding of the "true self" of the nation, which is normative for the social identity of its members and thus integral to their politics. *Politics* is understood in this study as the processes by which members of a given community understand how their community is to be defined and how their communal life is to be ordered, as well as how they work out that understanding in practice. Insofar as nationalism entails the fusion of the political with the theological, it constitutes a theopolitical project of identity formation.

Scholars of theopolitics provide unflinching examinations and trenchant critiques of the many ways Christian practice is co-opted by non-Christian politics, often concentrating on the theory and empirical behavior of the modern state and/or capitalism, which are understood to embody particular narratives of salvation. While such critiques are quite good so far as they go,

⁵ See http://www.mcnaughtonart.com/artwork/interview_with_the_artist (accessed July 30, 2010). According to the artist, "I saw the painting in my mind as clear as if it were unveiled right in front of me, like standing before a stage when the curtains are slowly pulled back. I even had the name of the painting come to my mind. It hit me so hard that I knew I was supposed to paint it. I knew it would be one of the most difficult images I had ever endeavored to paint, but that it would be well worth it. Considering the time in which we live, I felt it definitely needed to be painted." The notion of providential responses to the exigencies of the day will play heavily in the discussion to follow, especially in the discussion of American Christian nationalism in the final two chapters.

they address only incompletely or inconsistently how ecclesial identity is compromised in such situations, namely how participants in one salvation history and its attendant politics can be brought over or persuaded of their own accord to participate in the politics of a competing salvation history. This is the purview of nationalism, a movement often distinct from the state and pursuing a particular communal embodiment of national identity. Nationalism is of crucial importance for theopolitics, for in many cases the nationalist narrative vies with the Christian gospel, resulting in a heavily syncretized and problematic theopolitical identity. More often than not, this takes the form of appropriating elements of the biblical narrative and/or Christian theology and fusing them with the national narrative, resulting in a syncretized understanding of identity and mission. Given that nationalism has been characterized as “arguably the most powerful force in international politics in the twentieth century,”⁶ and given its continued prevalence and proclivity for violence in the twenty-first, its inadequate treatment in theopolitical literature is cause for concern. Given the attention paid to nationalism by ecumenical ecclesial documents in recent years,⁷ such a phenomenon requires explicit treatment.⁸

⁶ Lowell W. Barrington, “Nationalism & Independence,” *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, Lowell W. Barrington, ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 3.

⁷ See, for example, the “Colombo Statement,” published as “Ethnicity and Nationalism: A Challenge to the Churches,” *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 225-31 or the 2004 World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission document, “Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Search for Unity,” available at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/kuala-docs13-makarios.pdf>. Probably the best existing ecumenical treatment is that written by the Leuenburg Church Fellowship (now the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe), *Church-People-State-Nation: A Protestant Contribution on a Difficult Relationship Report of the Discussions in the South and Southeast Europe Regional Group of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship*. Lembeck, 2002, available at <http://www.leuenberg.net/daten/File/Upload/doc-2185-1.pdf>. This document provides a fairly sophisticated discussion of the important distinctions between the entities named in its title, including a good discussion of “nation” as a people group marked by common culture, language, tradition, claim to territory, or political community as distinct from a “state structure” (2.2.3). Unfortunately, nowhere is nationalism explicitly defined, a significant weakness in the document’s treatment.

⁸ This absence is evident, of all places, in the *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, co-edited by William T. Cavanaugh and containing chapters by Stanley Hauerwas and a number of his students. The volume includes a section entitled, “Structures and Movements,” which contains chapters on “State and Civil Society,” “Democracy,” and “Globalization.” Yet there is no chapter on nationalism, despite the phenomenon’s prevalence in both social-scientific scholarship and ecumenical documents. See *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

This study aims to provide just that. In the first chapter, I review existing theopolitical scholarship in order to discern the state of the question and to set the stage for the subsequent theological analysis of nationalism. It should be made clear that the scholarship discussed in Chapter 1 is not the main problem at the heart of this study, but rather American Christian nationalism. However, in examining the shortcomings of the literature in this regard—literature, which by its insightful nature and interests, one would expect to take up nationalism more explicitly—I am able to establish a framework in which to operate. To that end, I examine its treatments of the contemporary challenges to ecclesial identity, which either rightly note the importance of distorted identity emanating from within the church but leave their treatment of nationalism underdeveloped, or which locate those challenges in phenomena of modernity, particularly the modern state and capitalism. I also discuss how any adequate response to nationalism must include a robust treatment of biblical theopolitics, animated by explicit and thoroughgoing attention to the theopolitics of biblical Israel as normative for the church. This, too, I find largely absent or underdeveloped in theopolitical scholarship.

In order to supplement this scholarship, I attend first to the question of nationalism in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, I survey theoretical scholarship in the area, with a view toward the instigators of nationalist movements, and especially the ways in which they construct national identity by appropriating and reinterpreting elements of existing traditions and narratives of identity. This discussion helps orient the reader to the primary concerns when discussing the phenomenon of nationalism, but it also informs part of my critique of one of my chief “teachers” of theopolitics, William T. Cavanaugh, who I believe has appropriated the wrong side of the nationalism scholarly debate in his own understanding of state behavior. This side portrays national identity as purely fabricated by state elites for the purpose of social cohesion under their regime; while this undoubtedly occurs in some instances, in others, national identity is being formulated by non-state elites using existing elements and narratives of identity and revising them to suit their agendas. Cavanaugh’s argument, and that of the “modernist” school he appropriates,

is unable to account for this type of nationalism; yet Christian nationalism is a significant example of precisely that.

To demonstrate this, Chapter 3 discusses the relationship between religion and nationalism, including the historic interaction between nationalism and Christianity in the West. Appropriating the work of several nationalism scholars in what I view as increasing levels of depth, I show how theopolitical Christian nationalism really is, in that it ultimately requires the deliberate task of interpreting the Christian scriptures and intellectual tradition in such a way as to theologially underwrite a particular conception of national identity. This process interweaves the theological narratives with the national so as to present identification with the nation as part and parcel of Christian faithfulness. However, I also point out that the existing nationalism scholarship itself fails to take adequate regard for the theological moves involved in such a project.

To attend to this problem, as well as to provide a theological criterion of evaluation for the empirical studies of recent American Christian nationalism in Chapters 6 and 7, I provide in Chapters 4 and 5 a constructive biblical theopolitics. Chapter 4 takes up the theopolitics of biblical Israel as related in the Old Testament. The promise of a people is made by God to Abraham near the beginning of the narrative, but the reader soon finds that people in bondage. This same God, Yahweh, delivers that people and then establishes it in election and covenant as a theopolitical community, alternative to both the empire from which it had been delivered as well as to the kingdoms surrounding its land of destination, to be before the world a visible sign of God's reign, which is to say, human salvation. However, the people fails to stay true to its divinely ordered life and chooses instead to conform to the ways of its neighbors. It is indicted by the prophets for its departure from covenant, and falls under judgment. However, always in view is its restoration, which will be made real in the one person who will be Israel as God meant Israel to be.

That one person is Jesus Christ, as the New Testament presents him, who comes as both Israel and Yahweh to definitively fulfill covenant. He is the Messiah, and he inaugurates a new age wherein he establishes the church, as engrafted onto Israel, to be the communal embodiment of covenant fulfillment, as well as the form and manner—animated by the Holy Spirit—of the opening of Israel to the rest of the world. This is the subject of Chapter 5, which examines the linkages between Israel and the church via Jesus Christ and determines that the character of the theopolitics of Israel is normative for the church, and is also singularly carried forth in the church throughout the Messianic Age. This is of central importance to the present study, for if Israel's theopolitics as perfected in Christ is to be embodied in the church, then the church is similarly accountable for faithfulness to Christ's covenant in the face of contending theopolitical communities. Christian nationalism in any form, then, directly challenges ecclesial identity.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine concrete instances of this very problem. Chapter 6 takes on the nationalist discourse of the American Christian Right, which syncretizes elements from the biblical and American national narratives into a story of God's election of America as the New Israel. This fused narrative, which the movement then seeks to institutionalize in American politics for the sake of cultural renewal, fits well into the theoretical framework supplied by nationalism scholarship, which means that as Christian Right nationalists seek to authenticate their vision of American national identity as *the* national identity, they simultaneously distort the Christian biblical and theological traditions on which they rely for narrative content as well as for popular support. In the end, their nationalist narrative supplants the church with America, redefining for millions of Christians their primary community of theopolitical identity.

Chapter 7 takes on the ideas of two American political theologians who undertake more sophisticated projects of interweaving the Christian biblical and theological traditions with the American national narrative. In both cases, though by different routes, these scholars present an account of American exceptionalism that entails the distortion of biblical theopolitics in order to portray the nation as uniquely endowed and called by God to prefigure the kingdom of God on

earth. I therefore examine their accounts and critique them both for their internal inconsistencies as well as their aberration from the biblical theopolitics presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

This study is clearly interdisciplinary, as demonstrated by its engagement with social-scientific and historical scholarship on nationalism. I appropriate such scholarship where it helpfully reminds theology of matters requiring theology's attention, as well as where it identifies nuances in the phenomenon of nationalism of which theology should be mindful. However, this project is primarily a theological endeavor: I engage what I perceive as a prominent challenge to the faithfulness of the church in our contemporary context, and I aim to address that challenge via a theological appropriation of the Christian scriptures, one that I hope is faithful both to the biblical narrative and to the church that claims—and is claimed by—that narrative. With much appreciation, I leave it to the reader to discern to what extent this endeavor has been successful.

CHAPTER 1: THEOPOLITICS AND NATIONALISM

Introduction

Theopolitical scholarship, which in this study is associated with the work of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and their students, is well known for its trenchant analysis of contemporary Western politics and economics and their widespread theological rationales. While specific approaches vary, this scholarship typically examines the roots of these phenomena in modernity, identifying soteriologies at work within them that contend with, and ultimately amount to simulacra of, the Christian salvation narrative. In response, the scholarship proposes a reorientation of Christian allegiances via a renewal of ecclesial identity, usually in the form of a recovery of traditional Christian beliefs and practices that would resist and ultimately subvert contemporary politics and economics by embodying an alternative as normed by the Gospel.

In view of their work, it would seem that nationalism would be at the forefront of their concerns, a distinct subject of robust theological analysis and evaluation. Yet all too often, these scholars simply subsume nationalism under the modern state, without accounting for it as a distinct phenomenon, many of its manifestations independent of state agendas and activities, or even contrary to state interests. They not only provide an empirically untenable portrayal of nationalism, but in doing so, they inadvertently obscure or even preclude the key problem of nationalist discourse and practice emanating from within the church itself. To different degrees, they overlook the fact that various forms of “Christian nationalism” may be operative, wherein the present nation supplants the church by being framed as the proper extension of biblical Israel, as the definitive theopolitical community chosen to carry on God’s salvific plan in the world.

Additionally, the potential response of theopolitical scholarship to the problem of nationalism is hampered by an inadequate account, to greater or lesser degrees, of the importance of biblical theopolitics—particularly that of Israel—for ecclesiology. Often, biblical Israel is neglected or inadequately appropriated as a model for the church. Sometimes this appears as a

rather narrow focus on the New Testament, and within that, the gospel accounts. A more robust understanding of Israel's covenant calling, its divergence from that calling in the form of a centralized state and *realpolitik*, and the prophetic critique of that digression along with exhortation to repentance, all provide for the church a clearer view of Israel's relevance for the church, as well as an understanding of Jesus Christ not only as the incarnation of God and humanity in general, but even more specifically, as Yahweh and Israel. Jesus fulfills Israel's covenant with Yahweh, and the church is to embody that fulfillment; yet this is impossible without more fully understanding more precisely what was at stake in Israel's story, and therefore what was fulfilled in Jesus.

This chapter examines various selections from theopolitical scholarship to see (1) what they understand as the chief problems facing faithful ecclesial identity and practice today, and especially whether and how they conceive of nationalism in that context; and (2) what they conceive of as the church's proper theopolitical response to those problems, particularly as it relates to the Christian scriptures, which in Christian nationalism is taken up into nationalist discourse. I will show that while this scholarship is robust and helpful in important ways, it ultimately fails to properly understand the problem of nationalism or to deal with nationalism effectively as it effectively alters Christian identity and mission. This is in great part because no theological approach can adequately address such challenges to ecclesial identity without accounting for the *interweaving of narratives*, in this case biblical and national. Yet such interweaving receives little to no attention in the work of these scholars, and as such, represents a lacuna in their theopolitical approaches.

This chapter thus identifies the current state of the problem and lays the groundwork for the chapters to follow, in which I will present a discussion of nationalism scholarship and the importance of accounting for nationalism in relation to specific elements of the Christian theological tradition, followed by an account of a robust ecclesial theopolitics located in the biblical narrative. From there, I will undertake as demonstrative case studies an examination and

evaluation of Christian nationalism in America, first in the discourse of the Christian Right and then in the political theologies of two key contemporary political theologians. What is offered in this project is by no means a repudiation of the theopolitical scholarship discussed here; rather, it is a supplement, intended to address perceived deficiencies toward the advancement of their theopolitical project as a whole.

Nationalism as a Challenge to Ecclesial Identity

This section surveys the work of prominent thinkers in theopolitical scholarship to take stock of their understanding of contemporary challenges to ecclesial identity, with special attention whether and how nationalism figures into their schemas. While I am in agreement with the vast majority of their thought, I will show that they fail to give the challenge of nationalism proper attention, and that this failure renders their approaches inadequate where it comes to diagnosing the habits of thought and practice that give way to altered ecclesial identity today.

John Howard Yoder

According to Gerald Schlabach, it is not clear whether Yoder considered “Constantinianism” to be the most basic problem for the church’s ethics,¹ but the concept is certainly central to Yoder’s theopolitics. The term refers in part to a series of historical developments centering on the reign of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, but more importantly, it designates an ongoing theological problem encompassing the practices of the church and the effects upon both church and world of having the ecclesia aligned with the

¹ Gerald Schlabach, “Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What Is the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics?” in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 451 n.3.

powers.² Indeed, for Yoder, “Constantinianism always begins before there is some Constantinian settlement proper...some other problems always arise before some emperor presents his tempting offer.”³ Constantinianism is best characterized as the church absolutizing itself—its own security and survival—and refusing to conform to its properly contingent role at any one place and time. This is most typically accomplished by acquiring a stake in the powers-that-be, by positioning itself as their indispensable support. Thus, the chief agent of the Constantinian challenge is the church itself, which, by seeking dominance, actually undermines its own distinctive identity, its own alternative political identity and ethic:

Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a believing Christian community but one had to ‘take it on faith’ that God was governing history. After Constantine, one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, within the larger nominally Christian mass, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history. Ethics had to change because one must aim one’s behavior at strengthening the regime, and because the ruler himself must have very soon some approbation and perhaps some guidance as he does things the earlier church would have disapproved of.⁴

This statement is key to understanding Yoder’s theopolitics. Confidence in Christ’s lordship within a situation of marginalization and threat concretized the Christian community and prompted a certain ethical orientation that emphasized humble faithfulness without certainty of immediate outcome. With the Constantinian shift, however, God’s control of history seemed to

² Various historiographical characterizations of Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea (Constantine’s contemporary biographer and arguably the father of the theology of empire), and the Constantinian settlement can be found in T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Barnes, *From Eusebius to Constantine* (Aldershot, NH: Variorum, 1994), Chapter IX; and Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, “Introduction,” in Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Cameron and Hall, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1-53. In terms of the historical portrayal of the settlement, these sources tend to support Yoder’s understanding. Again, Yoder sees Constantinianism primarily as a type of problem, symbolic of a particular theopolitical move. Arguments that emphasize the accuracy of Eusebius’ accounts (panegyric notwithstanding) or the authenticity of Constantine’s conversion over against Yoder’s characterizations are misplaced. Yoder’s understanding assumes these elements; his concern is how the Christian church and theology change as a result.

The “powers” as Yoder understands them are discussed in the next section, but it is sufficient here to say that they are those norms and institutions that were intended to serve the redemptive order by restraining sin short of the coming of the kingdom of God, but absolutized themselves in rebellion to that order, attempting to exercise sovereignty over humanity. That sovereignty was broken by Christ, but Yoder’s point here is that Constantinianism occurs where the church fails to recognize this truth.

³ Schlabach, “Deuteronomic or Constantinian,” 454.

⁴ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 137.

be realized in the empire, and a contingent ecclesial life centered on faith in Christ's lordship was no longer necessary. Securing the empire was, and Christian theopolitical practices changed accordingly, aiming at the moral and structural integrity of the imperial power: "Social ethics' means not what everyone should think and do about social questions, but what people in power should be told to do with their power." The role of the church, then, is relegated to chaplaincy, "i.e., a part of the power structure itself. The *content* of ethical guidance is not the teaching of Jesus but the duties of 'station' or 'office' or 'vocation.'" ⁵

Undergirding the power structure takes on added meaning with the development of the "modern sense of nationhood" as "the definition of cultural identity and historical meaning." Globally, and even where governments oppose Christianity, "Christians remain patriotic." Not only does catholicity suffer as the church is divided among national loyalties, but so does the church's ability to be critical, either of itself or of the country in which a part of the church might reside. ⁶ In the American instance, it has meant a "moral identification of church with nation," which has historically included a "Christian," and often Protestant, tone to political discourse. ⁷ Hence the rise of a particular American "civil religion," whose first problem is its theological underpinning of coercive politics, given that its political community is involuntary and overseen

⁵ Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 138. A literal example of this today is promotional material for the military chaplaincy. As of this writing, the current webpage for the US Army Chaplain Corps calls Army chaplains "our nation's Soldiers who minister to our nation's sons and daughters," the latter who "need qualified, committed, and called men and women to serve as spiritual leaders to them *in the fulfillment of their duty*....Qualified and sent by their religious bodies, trained by the U.S. Army, and led by the God that they serve...Army Chaplains are the 'soul and conscience' of our nation's Army" (emphasis added). And to directly confirm Yoder's characterization, "Army Chaplains serve on a Commander's special staff in order to ensure that their spiritual gifts and leadership are integrated in the daily exercise of command decisions." See <http://www.goarmy.com/chaplain/> (accessed August 2009). Here, the church serves as an auxiliary of the state, assisting state functions and making them more spiritually palatable, helping to spiritually prepare members of the military to serve the interests of the state. This appears to be a sensitized version of a slightly older, more explicitly functional promotion recruiting chaplains to perform "religious support duties" to help "young men and women become effective Soldiers in body, mind and spirit" (<http://banner.goarmy.com/banrtrck/banrdocs/armyop46.jsp;jsessionid=A6FEC94B302A8F96AE616AE25C300DC2?banner=CHPO-7021-CH02-0107-46>, accessed February 2007).

⁶ Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 144.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

by the state.⁸ Other elements include the belief that the identity and interests of this civil community are of special concern not only to the citizenry but to the deity upon whom they call. By its very nature, this civil community has outsiders and enemies, “usually defined territorially, usually ethnically, sometimes religiously,” and its special relation to God often necessitates violence against them. Therefore, no moral or theological commitments should hinder the support religious resources provide to the establishment, such as “specific ‘sectarian’ matters of identity.” For Yoder, those clergy or religious/humanist elite who do show such support are themselves part of the establishment in question: “They have access, as a group, taking turns, to subsidized chaplaincy services in public institutions. They reciprocate by assuring the powers that be of divine blessings in general and by reminding them occasionally of divine imperatives.”⁹ In this manner, the church gives up its ability and responsibility to embody an alternative to state politics.

Yoder saw himself as part of a Radical Reformation movement of “challenging establishment: i.e., of rejecting, or at least doubting fundamentally, the appropriateness of letting the Christian faith be the official ideology of a society, especially of the elite within a society.”¹⁰ The proper theopolitical response is a return to the politics of Jesus. Part of Yoder’s argument in this regard is a critique of the notion that politics necessarily entails violence: “I have preferred to contest the meaning of the term [politics], insisting that nonviolence and nonnationalism are relevant to the *polis*, i.e., to the structuring of relationships among persons in groups, and therefore are political in their own proper way.”¹¹ And it is not merely violence that is renounced by Christ and therefore his disciples, but “the compulsiveness of purpose that leads men to violate

⁸ The problem here is at least the theological endorsement and support of the nation-state’s politics, but consistent with Yoder’s Anabaptist sensitivities, is likely also civil religion’s implicit theological coercion. By “state,” I refer to Yoder’s description of a civil community in which “a function of coercively sanctioned organization claims jurisdiction over all the participants, normally within a territorial definition of physical frontiers and normally with a substantial degree of centralization of power” (Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 173). The importance of the distinction between “state” and “nation” for this study will be explored below.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 173ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1972, 2000), 42 n.36.

the dignity of others. The point is not that one can attain all of one's legitimate ends without using violent means. It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb."¹² For Yoder, the renunciation of coercive power and the taking up of active peacemaking thus constitute a fully fledged alternative, Christian politics.

I affirm Yoder's understanding of Constantinianism as an ongoing problem emanating primarily from within the church. I think he is right to perceive this as a central challenge to ecclesial identity, a challenge which too often has less to do with co-option from without than with idolatry from within. Calling attention to civil religion is quite helpful, especially in noting its "moral identification of church with nation" and its tying of political interest to a community's deity. Indeed, Yoder's discussion of chaplaincy can easily be connected to discussions of "authentication" in nationalism literature, that process by which nationalists determine what constitutes the "true" nation.¹³

However, Schlabach brings up an important consideration with regard to Yoder's anti-Constantinian theopolitics, namely that Constantinianism is merely a manifestation—albeit perhaps the most important one—of a deeper challenge located in the warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 6-9, namely the temptation at the moment of receiving God's blessing to possess and secure that blessing however they so choose.¹⁴ This challenge suggests that critique by itself does not constitute an adequate ethic or theopolitics. Rather, there is something given by God that is to be affirmed in some way and to some degree, to be oriented to properly as the church: "Our most basic problem, then, is the Deuteronomic challenge of receiving and celebrating God's gift without oppressing, violating, and hoarding in new ways."¹⁵ Even Christendom can be affirmed in a qualified sense, suggests Schlabach, seen as "that *societas* in which right

¹² Ibid., 243-44.

¹³ This process will be discussed in later chapters on nationalism scholarship and religion in nationalism.

¹⁴ Schlabach, "Deuteronomic or Constantinian," 450-51.

¹⁵ Ibid., 454.

relationship with God is rightly ordering and reintegrating every relationship and all of life.” With Deuteronomic priority rather than Constantinian, Christendom can then properly be critiqued as “a premature effort to grasp through faithless violence at the fullness of life that is God’s to give fully at the eschaton.” Peace churches and theologies would therefore be able to more effectively witness to the Constantinian establishment if such is not viewed as “utterly fallen.”¹⁶ Indeed, as an Anabaptist convert to Catholicism, Schlabach is concerned about the tendency of “anti-Constantinians to turn a deaf ear to the wisdom that has in fact emerged from ‘classical’ theology as done within ‘mainstream’ parts of the Christian tradition.”¹⁷ Schlabach’s points here are well-taken, and his essay as a whole is quite balanced. However, he seems to take for granted that even in situations of abuse, the right desire is always present, just pursued wrongly. This misses the fact that in some contexts and concerning certain phenomena, even desire and the conception of the end in question is fundamentally distorted. Thus, it is not enough in those situations to merely correct the ethics of the pursuit of *shalom*, as Schlabach suggests, but to challenge the very conception of it. This may well entail a sharper critique than Schlabach suggests.

I find Yoder’s analysis to head very much in the right trajectory, namely the involvement of the church in the problem rather than merely being acted upon by forces outside it, but it remains for the purposes of this study considerably underdeveloped. His discussion of political identity occurs firmly within the context of the state, without regard to the nation as a potentially distinct field of political claims and activities. Even where he mentions “nation” and “nationhood,” or where he argues for the priority of “nonnationalism,” the significance of these terms goes unexplored. What is nation? How is the national form of polity, or even of the state,

¹⁶ Ibid., 456.

¹⁷ Ibid., 455. Schlabach continues on the same page, “the teaching, liturgy, sacraments, and spirituality of the larger Christian tradition can remind pacifists of what they may learn too late if they seek to follow Christ and form communities of love through their own efforts alone: *God’s grace must sustain discipleship*. We love because God first loved us. We need God’s grace even to receive rightly God’s gifts and respond faithfully. Prophets, too, need pastors.”

significant for Constantinianism over against other forms? What is the nature of nationalism, particularly if its “compulsiveness of purpose” is formulated, justified, and propagated apart from the state apparatus, and why would its repudiation be important? Do we miss something by concentrating primarily or even solely on the civil order? It is not merely the civil community and its institutions of coercive power that are at issue; it is also, and in many case far more importantly, the national community and its claims on the communal identity of Christians residing within it that challenge ecclesial identity and faithfulness to the Gospel. As such, a more thoroughgoing engagement with those claims—and particularly with how they are interwoven with existing Christian claims in order to reorient Christian loyalties—must be undertaken.

Stanley Hauerwas

Stanley Hauerwas shares Yoder’s understanding that Christian theopolitics has been problematized by Constantinianism, which Hauerwas characterizes as “the attempt to make Christianity necessary to make the church at home in the world, in a manner that witness is no longer required.”¹⁸ Thus, “our best minds were enlisted in the Constantinian enterprise of making the faith credible to the powers-that-be so that Christians might now have a share in those powers,” and so that they would have a language intelligible to the powers in order to retain their cultural significance.¹⁹ Like Yoder, Hauerwas sees this phenomenon manifested in the form of the modern liberal nation-state. In the United States, it is particularly present in those churches, both conservative and liberal (albeit in varying manifestations), which “assume wrongly that the American church’s primary social task is to underwrite American democracy.”²⁰ This has been reflected in academic theological ethics at least since Walter Rauschenbusch, insofar as the

¹⁸ Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 221.

¹⁹ Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21. Or as he puts it shortly thereafter, it is “the project...to enable Christians to share power without being a problem for the powerful” (27).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

discipline's main agenda has been "to show why American democracy possesses distinctive religious status. The primary subject of Christian ethics in America has been America."²¹ In short, not only is liberalism an agent of modern Constantinianism, but it is abetted by those within the church who have conflated democracy with the Christian faith.

Yet, as he subtitles one chapter, "even a democratic state is not the kingdom."²²

Responding to the general claim that democracies have institutionalized the limited state, Hauerwas argues that any state, by definition, seeks to surpass its limits, democracy or not.²³ Hauerwas is responding to an article by Richard John Neuhaus, wherein Neuhaus's theological justification of democracy fails "to supply us with the discriminating moral and intellectual skills we need to recognize when the state, and in particular the democratic state, has become less than limited. There is no state we should fear more than the one that claims to be 'limited.'"²⁴ Arne Rasmussen notes that for Hauerwas, liberalism is associated institutionally with "an allegedly limited state in service to a social and economic order based on exchange relations.' One part of this project was thus to emancipate people from the historical particularity of their traditions and communities, which politically meant that the two basic units in modern societies are the individual on the one hand and the state on the other."²⁵ For Hauerwas, "no state will keep itself

²¹ Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 177. Quoted in Arne Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 224.

²² Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), 122.

²³ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.* See Richard John Neuhaus, "Christianity and Democracy: A Statement of the Institute on Religion and Democracy," *Center Journal* 1, no.3 (Summer, 1982): 9-25. I believe Hauerwas's point is well taken, especially when "limited" is typically too narrowly defined in terms of control over the domestic citizenry and not equally in terms of a state's projection of power beyond its borders. Neuhaus's political theology, and particularly the nationalism undergirding it, will be taken up in Chapter 7.

²⁵ Rasmussen, *Church as Polis*, 250. Hauerwas's assertions foreshadow and inform the work of both Daniel Bell and William Cavanaugh, discussed below.

limited, no constitution or ideology is sufficient to that task, unless there is a body of people separated from the nation that is willing to say ‘No’ to the state’s claims on their loyalties.”²⁶

The modern liberal state, although created to secure rights, is rooted in an irresolvable paradox: it claims merely to be a means toward an end, yet it must convince its citizenry that it can provide a meaningful identity since the state is the only means of achieving the common good.²⁷ This identity proves ultimate, since even democracies must ask their citizens to die on the state’s behalf.²⁸ While confessional orthodoxy is kept private, general religion is advanced as functional for both individual and society. This leads to the necessity of civil religion as a “transcendent principle of criticism which can sustain the democratic system and ethos.”²⁹ Civil

²⁶ Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 123. Despite his rather strident tone in response to Neuhaus, Hauerwas has since become involved in conversations concerning “radical democracy,” an approach to social life that emphasizes the importance of personal and local relationships, the politics resulting from neighbors actually getting to know one another. See Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008). Here, as conceived between a Christian and non-Christian, “radical democracy refers to political acts of tending to common goods and differences. Such acts are dynamically responsive to a world that always exceeds our terms and settled institutional forms. They always exceed state formations that claim to be the exemplary shape of democracy” (3 n.4). Radical democracy, in short, is “the politics of small accomplishments” (4). Such a politics, focused on the nitty-gritty of everyday life, the details of each specific case and situation, actually works to resist liberal notions of democracy as aiming at “universal redemption” (6-7), notions that are, for Hauerwas and Coles, “insufficiently political” since politics “is not finally about results” but “about relationships between people dead and alive, relationships that are as painful as they are unavoidable” (2). Modern liberalism, for Hauerwas, is “the attempt to avoid the challenge of democratic politics.” Hauerwas relies for this indictment on the work of Sheldon Wolin, for whom “the development of political liberalism looks very much like the attempt to deny contingency—a denial that often is associated with empire—that lies at the heart of the political.” In short, radical democracy, by its very nature, shores up genuinely democratic politics over against the problem of liberalism. See Hauerwas, “Democratic Time: Lessons Learned from Yoder and Wolin,” *Cross Currents* 55 n.4 (Winter 2005-6): 534-52.

²⁷ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 34-35.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35. Or, one could claim, to kill on the state’s behalf. This claim is substantiated by empirical study of the so-called “democratic peace” theory, which seeks to explain why democracies seem not to fight each other. Such scholarship has shown that democracies are, in fact, more prone statistically to exercise force against non-democracies than are non-democracies against each other. See Zeev Moaz and Bruce Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624-638.

²⁹ Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis*, 299. See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, 2002), 12-13. Both the political left and right in the United States share a commitment to civil religion. Hauerwas references the work of Jan Dawson, who argues that “at the turn of [the twentieth] century there developed a ‘faith in the spiritual oneness of Christianity and democracy, based on the democratic theology of Christianity and concerned primarily with the survival of Christianity in troubled modern democracies.’ To support democracy became a means of supporting Christianity and vice versa.” Democracy and religion were seen as interdependent, and even such critics of the social gospel as Reinhold Niebuhr never questioned that

religion reconceives traditional faith as “the morality-bearing part of culture, and in that sense the heart of culture,”³⁰ which requires Christians to make their religious speech accessible to the wider public and to continue to pursue a commitment to democracy as the appropriate social form for a Christian society.³¹ Furthermore, it posits that the lives of American Christians make sense only within the context of “biblical and republican traditions” that currently face the danger of erosion, and that are our hope “if we are ever to enter that new world that so far has been powerless to be born...”³² In such a view, ““Only the biblical religions can provide the energy and vision for a new turn in American history, perhaps a new understanding of covenant which may be necessary not only to save ourselves but to keep us from destroying the rest of the world.””³³

What bothers Hauerwas about such views, coming from both the right and left in American political discourse, is that they assume “Christians should or do have social and political power so they can determine the ethos of society,”³⁴ taking upon themselves the

democracy was the best form of society and government for Christians. See Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique of Christian America,” *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 466. Quotation taken from Jan Dawson, “The Religion of Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century America,” *Journal of Church and State* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 47.

³⁰ Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 469. Quoted from Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 154.

³¹ As Neuhaus affirms, “The main line story was confidence and hope regarding the Americanizing of Christianity and the Christianizing of America,” a commitment to which most liberals still hold (Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 470). For clarification, Hauerwas notes, “In an unpublished paper, ‘Democratic Morality: A Possibility,’ Neuhaus responds to this essay and qualifies the starkness of this claim. As he says, ‘I count myself among the many Christians, perhaps the majority of Christians in America, who have the gravest reservations about the idea of ‘Christian America.’ It makes sense to speak, always cautiously, of America as a Christian society in terms of historical forces, ideas, and demography. But no society is worthy of the name of Christ, except the society that is the church, and then it is worthy only by virtue of being made worthy through the grace of God in Christ’ (6)” (Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 470 n.23).

³² Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 472. Quoted from Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 282-283. It is difficult to miss the eschatological overtones of this statement.

³³ Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 472. Quoted from Bellah, “The Revolution and Civil Religion,” in *Religion and the American Revolution*, ed. Jerald Brauer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 73.

³⁴ Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 474. As Hauerwas notes, we see again the effects of the moral changes identified by Yoder in the Constantinian problem: as “Christendom” fragmented into nation-states with the Renaissance and Reformation, Christians came to believe that “Christian societies could wage war on one another in the name of preserving their Christian culture.” While the Enlightenment severed the

responsibility to create “a nation structured according to the will of God.”³⁵ This “habit of thought,” asserts Hauerwas, must be surrendered, or Christians will continue to implicitly or explicitly assume that “insofar as America is a democracy she is Christian.” When this happens, “Christians lose exactly the skills necessary to see how deeply they have been compromised by the assumption that their task is to rule, if not the government, at least the ethos of America.”³⁶ What is required, then, is a revitalization of a counter-politics, the theopolitics of the church in its liturgy and practice, to cultivate such skills of discernment, resistance, and alternative construction of community.

As with Yoder’s, Hauerwas’s take on Constantinianism has been profoundly formative for me, and I concur with his reading of ecclesial accommodation to liberal democracy. I affirm his moves to at least partially locate the agency of this problem within the church, though I think he does so less centrally than Yoder, attributing the problem also to liberalism and the modern state. In particular, the centrality of politics to Christianity in Hauerwas’s work and the socio-ethical role of the church *as the church* have been central to my own theopolitical development. While, like Yoder, his work tends to stay within the confines of the state, he does at least mention the notion of societal ethos, which can be related to nation and nationalism with further elaboration.

However, I believe his response to the civil religion question to be illustrative of the shortcomings of his approach, which tends to overlook the fundamental problem of distorted theopolitical identity by concentrating too narrowly on the church’s moral practices.³⁷ Hauerwas is disturbed that Christian advocates of civil religion assume the exercise of power by Christians to determine the ethos of society; in his view, such a move robs Christians of the ability to resist

union of church and state, “the moral identification of Christians with the state remained strong” (476). This notion of “preserving their Christian culture” will prove salient in our discussion of nationalism.

³⁵ Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 476. Quotations from Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 142.

³⁶ Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique,” 476.

³⁷ This point dovetails with criticism of Yoder below that he neglects Israel’s covenant identity in favor of a “moral history” of the Jewish diaspora since the exile.

the temptation to rule, which contradicts Jesus' noncoercive ethic. While I believe he is correct on this point, it is arguably not the root problem, which is rather the misconstrual of theopolitical identity inherent in civil religion—the misappropriation of biblical theopolitics for one's given nation and/or state—that creates the possibility for such a contradictory ethic. Put differently, we can grant that such an ethic is problematic and contradictory to the Gospel, but we must ask how or why such an ethic is even possible. What occurs theologically to allow such a “habit of thought” to develop? Addressing this question necessitates both a robust biblical theopolitics of Israel and the church from both testaments, as well as an examination of the identity-forming processes going on in various political contexts.

It is particularly on this point of identity formation that nation and nationalism must be taken into consideration. First of all, as indicated by his statement, “a body of people separated from the nation that is willing to say ‘No’ to the state’s claims,” Hauerwas could be understood to conceive of the “state” as that entity which rules over the “nation.” Yet, what actually constitutes or coheres this nation remains unclear, as does any possibility of claims distinct or independent from those of the state, yet constituting a challenge to ecclesial identity. For instance, it could be argued the primary problem for ecclesial identity in the United States is not so much that America will be considered Christian because it is democratic, but rather because it is thought to be elect of God, the New Israel. Where America is considered a Christian nation, it is so primarily in terms of divine election to a particular mission, the latter which is often interpreted to entail a certain state form. Liberal democracy as a form of government is thus conceived as a function of its mission, not its election; that is, America is not Christian because it is democratic, but rather democratic because it is Christian. Thus, its supposed identity as a Christian nation must be rooted elsewhere, and I believe this is only discernible by a systematic treatment of American Christian nationalism.

Daniel M. Bell, Jr.

While in general agreement with the sentiment of the preceding theologians, Daniel M. Bell conceives of capitalism, not the modern nation-state, as the primary problem facing the church today, particularly as it involves various “technologies of desire” that supplant Christian identity and practice.³⁸ In this context, the state is merely in service to the market. For this reason, James K. A. Smith notes that for Bell, the theopolitical work of Yoder and Hauerwas “is a dated and therefore somewhat impotent mode of analysis and critique, for in a globalized world it is no longer states that wield imperialist power but rather capitalism and the market.”³⁹

Appropriating the postmodern continental philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Bell argues that capitalism is primarily an ontological project, in that it “disciplines the constitutive human power, desire.”⁴⁰ While the human being as created is constituted by a desire for God, the Christian tradition claims such desire has been disordered by sin; capitalism “is a form of sin, a way of life that captures and distorts human desire in accord with the golden rule of production for the market.”⁴¹ Christianity, on the other hand, liberates and heals desire from sin; “it is a therapy, a way of life that releases desire from its bondage, that cures the madness so that desire may once again flow as it was created to do.”⁴²

Bell argues that capitalism’s project of controlling human desire is made possible by the work of social machines, particularly that of the “state-form,” which as organizer of the social basis of production, has sought to capture desire through its (the state-form’s) various manifestations. Despite its various mutations through the centuries, however, the state has been

³⁸ Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3. Bell’s argument in this book has to do with the inadequacy of liberation theology in the face of the apparent triumph of capitalism, particularly as that theology relies on a “politics as statecraft” in order to resist capitalism, which in Bell’s conception is unworkable. The present study does not address that argument per se, but focuses rather on the notion of capitalism as primary contender with the church for Christian theopolitical identity.

³⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 248.

⁴⁰ Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

unable to subjugate the flows of desire, but has become part of them.⁴³ Ultimately, capitalism is born amidst the state's inability to tie labor and capital to specific people or objects; labor becomes depersonalized and free, and wealth becomes "a filiative capital where money begets money and value begets surplus value."⁴⁴ Capitalism is thus a "force of deterritorialization" with which the state cannot contend.⁴⁵ This compels the state to mutate once again into the modern nation-state, which is the state-form "completely subsumed" to capitalism: "states serve capitalism by organizing and combining the various domains in which capital is realized. They organize the social basis of production and prepare it for insertion into the worldwide capitalist machine...."⁴⁶ In short, "the capitalist machine deterritorializes desire: it overruns all previous social formations and releases the flows of desire that these formations had organized and regulated. The capitalist machine also reterritorializes desire: it subjects desire to the governing principle of market production. In this process capitalism relies on the state-form to prepare desire for participation in the capitalist order." Such is the state's *raison d'être*.⁴⁷

⁴³ As Bell narrates (via Deleuze), the state-form was first incarnated as the "archaic imperial state," which dissolved earlier social bonds, or "territorial codes," and reformed or "reterritorialized" them according to the ancient imperial model whereby the emperor became the sole owner of public property and the organizer of labor, constituting a "higher unity" under which subjects are made "pieces of a machine." Desire is now the property of the sovereign, yet not all desire, for the imperial state can subjugate only what it captures, and multiple "flows of desire" escape (15). Quoting Deleuze: "The State does not create large-scale works without a flow of independent labor escaping from its bureaucracy (notably in the mines and metallurgy). It does not create the monetary form of the tax without flows of money escaping, nourishing or bringing into being other powers (notably in commerce and banking). And above all, it does not create a system of public property without a flow of private appropriation growing up *beside* it, then beginning to pass beyond its grasp" (16). Thus, over time, the archaic state mutates into more diverse states of the medieval period, which, unable to enslave desire, seek to "organize conjunctions" of its free flows. This state-form is no longer a transcendent unity, but becomes "immanent to the field of social forces." The most it can do is regulate these flows, "that is, it manages to fix or limit the relations between persons and things, between labor and capital," and yet, it is unable to do this for long (16).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁵ Capitalism by nature is abstract, "not constrained by any territory or tied to any organizing center," and is manifested in "an 'enormous, so-called stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a *de facto* supranational power untouched by governmental decisions.'" It is concretized most clearly in the transnational corporation, which is marked by internationalization and flexibility of manufacturing systems, as well as "complex systems of credit and exchange" (17).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Bell supplements Deleuze's work with that of Michel Foucault on "governmentality." Foucault insists that any theory centered on the state is misguided, given that there are very many ways power is exercised apart from the state. According to Foucault, "reality is constituted by a positive power that is dispersed, present everywhere, with no singular or unique source." When the state projects power, "it does so only to the extent that it manages successfully to harness or capture some of those always already existing forces."⁴⁸ Governmentality, or all the ways conduct is governed at the micro and macro levels of political life, involves the convergence of "technologies of the self," what Foucault refers to as "pastoral" powers that aim at improving individual life via systems of self-control, and "technologies of power" that dominate the subject, particularly the self-justifying state.⁴⁹

With the emergence of capitalism, however, a new perspective arose focused on the society and its economy as generative of their own order. This developed into the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, wherein individual interests converged in the public interest, and "society was a self-regulating mechanism that only suffered under the weight of excessive and detailed regulation of the sovereign state's police science." The economy thus escapes state control, and reverses the situation, essentially taking over the reins of the state.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, the concept of "civil society" emerged, developing into a self-organizing and self-governing entity with its own natural laws and patterns to which the state must conform. With this concept conjoined to *laissez-faire*, "the objective of liberal government is the securing of the optimal conditions for the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹ Foucault identifies "reason of state" and "science of police" as paramount technologies of power. In a departure from medieval notions of government subordinated to supernatural ends, reason of state held that "the principles of government are immanent in the state itself" (23). As opposed to late medieval/early modern notions of public power—"the state"—located in the prince, reason of state concerned itself with the integrity of the state regardless of particular rulers. Now, "political power...is equated with an ensemble of institutions and means of coercion distinct from both the people and the prince...it now concerns the apparatuses of government that the ruler is obliged to maintain. In other words, the state emerges in its own right and the aim of government is to strengthen the state" (24). This development is combined with a complex system of self-discipline wherein the body politic is trained to surveil itself (25-26).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

autonomous functioning of the economic processes within society.”⁵¹ Hence one of Bell’s key assertions, that “liberalism cannot be rightly understood as opposed to government. Liberalism does not juxtapose government and freedom. Rather, liberal government is government *through* freedom.” In the end, by advancing civil society, liberalism does not do away with government, but merely broadens its identification with powers beyond the state.⁵² Moreover, late modern neoliberal government pursues the expansion of economic reason into every aspect of human life: “economic or market rationale controls all conduct.”⁵³ In this sense, “capitalism has prevailed. It has subsumed society; it has become social.”⁵⁴

Attempts by various political theologies to transform the state or turn it toward the common good—“politics as statecraft”—are therefore futile, according to Bell. In contrast, he argues alongside Yoder, Hauerwas, Cavanaugh, and others for reclaiming “Christian community as a public *sui generis*, that is, as a social, political, economic formation in its own right.” Resistance to capitalism requires “Christianity’s reassertion in the material realm as the true politics. Christianity is the true politics, the true polity, over against the agony of capitalist discipline, in the Augustinian sense that the Church embodies the true form of human social, political, and economic organization because its order is one of liturgy, of worship of the triune God.” Integral in this political life is the virtue of forgiveness, as it enables mutual participation borne out of a redemptive reordering of desire, and a “refusal to cease suffering,” as an act of hope in God, and “an instantiation of a crucified power and of a suffering against suffering.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵² Ibid., 29-30.

⁵³ The question of its source aside, many of us lament this specific development in the academy, where now even ostensibly Christian institutions of higher learning often operate according to corporate, managerial models. I have seen academic administrators in such settings look to the Disney Corporation for management inspiration and “wisdom,” and have seen spiritual formation assessed via quantitative measures (necessary, of course, for quality assurance). Our commodification of education was brought home to me in a small but telling way once when I had to demonstrate to a group of incoming graduate students how to make a course selection using our online registration system and, as a final step, to drop it into their “shopping cart.”

⁵⁴ Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

I believe Bell is largely correct in his reading of capitalism as a massive distorter of desire, and by extension, social community, and in his concluding that Christianity through its therapies of forgiveness and participation can effectively resist capitalism and heal said desire. I also believe Bell's characterization of "Christian community as a public *sui generis*, that is, as a social, political economic formation in its own right"—or at least as engrafted onto Israel—to be absolutely correct and profoundly significant for Christian ecclesiology.

Yet, of the scholars discussed in this chapter, I believe Bell is least able to sufficiently account for the problems of nation and nationalism, due in no small part to a sort of economic determinism at work in his thought. Bell is convinced that capitalism has triumphed in a totalistic way. Yet, how can capitalism be said to have so completely and successfully deterritorialized and reterritorialized identity for market production when states around the globe are riven by ethnic and nationalist violence—which by definition is tied to competing claims to territory—or when nationalist movements for cultural renewal span racial and socio-economic divides? It seems that Bell's use of Deleuze and Foucault, while compelling in theory, remains unsubstantiated in fact: political communities around the world continue to operate according to identities and interests that are rooted in culture, shared memory and values, *and territory*, and that sometimes have very little to do with the demands of the market or economic self-interest. To the degree that this counter-claim is accurate, then new possibilities of political identity formation open up and must be accounted for theologically. Conversely, it could be that challenges to biblical theopolitics and ecclesial identity yet arise elsewhere.

Additionally, it is interesting that Foucault as Bell appropriates him only defines governmentality according to the technologies of power and of the self, and not also the "technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or significations."⁵⁶ The first two suggest a raw application of power—at the individual and societal levels—to forcibly craft and refine identity, a view that certainly lends itself to neo-realist or neo-

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

Marxist accounts of international politics and political economy. Yet, the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) use of signs, meanings, and symbols—even competition between different uses thereof—is central to nationalism, and the absence here of their consideration may be a further reason why nationalism cannot be accounted for in Bell’s schema.⁵⁷

William T. Cavanaugh

William Cavanaugh presents one of the most thoroughgoing accounts of Christian theopolitics in contemporary scholarship. By his telling, modernity—particularly the modern state and its theoretical proponents—presents the greatest challenge to an orthodox ecclesial identity. It does so by conveying an alternative salvation history, of which the modern state is the definitive political embodiment. This salvation narrative contends against that proclaimed by the church, and the church ends up domesticated, reduced to the oversight of the interior dispositions of individual souls. Of the scholars discussed in this chapter, Cavanaugh provides the most direct treatment of the phenomenon of nationalism, as well as the only direct engagement with the interdisciplinary field of nationalism scholarship. He therefore warrants more extended discussion.

For Cavanaugh, the chief challenge to proper ecclesial identity is modernity, and in particular the modern state and its theoretical justification. Modernity, he argues, assumes the separation of theology and politics as proper, with politics residing in a different autonomous space from that of the church. The church must therefore approach politics indirectly and from a distance. Cavanaugh’s alternative is to view politics as embedded in core Christian theological themes, reimagining the political as a direct response to God’s activity in the world. Thus, “there

⁵⁷ See also Charlie Pinches’s critique of an overdependence on Foucault in Bell, Cavanaugh, and other students of Hauerwas in “Hauerwas and Political Theology: The Next Generation,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2008): 536-537.

is no separate history of politics apart from the history of salvation,” and “the church is indispensable to the history of salvation.”⁵⁸

Competing with Christian salvation history is that of the modern state and modern political theory, which presents religion as the source of violence from which the state saves us. Cavanaugh undertakes a thoroughgoing critique of this modern narrative throughout his work, most recently and comprehensively in his book, *The Myth of Religious Violence*.⁵⁹ Here, he deconstructs the idea of “religion” itself, which operates in both modern political theory and religious studies as an essentially transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon. His thesis is twofold: (1) there is no such thing as transhistorical and transcultural religion, inherently inward and private, and thus separated from politics; rather what qualifies as religion in a given context “depends on different configurations of power”; and (2) the attempt to assert such a transhistorical and transcultural “religion” separate from the “secular” is itself part of a particular configuration of power, that being the modern liberal nation-state.⁶⁰

Examining the treatments of religious violence by a number of philosophers of religion and religious studies scholars, Cavanaugh concludes that more often than not, not only is their understanding of religion unclear, but that vague definition is applied far too specifically to things called Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, etc., when phenomena like nationalism or capitalism could

⁵⁸ William T. Cavanaugh, “Church,” *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 394. As Cavanaugh explains, salvation is not merely about “pulling a few individual survivors from the wreckage of creation after the Fall,” but rather concerns the renewal of creation, central to which is the creation of a community of people to be a foretaste of that new creation, a community living radically differently from the world around it.

⁵⁹ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). This source provides the bulk of information for this discussion of Cavanaugh, given that it incorporates much of his previous work on the salvation narrative of modern liberalism. Previous writings by Cavanaugh on the same include “‘A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House’: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State,” *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 397-420; *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002); and “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, 182-200 (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁰ Cavanaugh, *The Myth*, 9.

qualify as “religious” according to a functionalist understanding.⁶¹ By and large in their works, the categorical distinction between religious and secular is simply assumed, neither examined nor justified. Cavanaugh argues that to attribute violence or a certain ferocity thereof exclusively to “religion” is to miss the fact that not merely do nationalism, capitalism, etc., themselves underwrite extensive violence in the late medieval and modern eras, but that according to empirical investigation, there is no coherent way of separating religious and secular violence in such a way as to conclude the latter is essentially more restrained than the former.⁶²

In fact, Cavanaugh asserts, religion is a contestable term, its definition depending on the configurations of power and authority in a given context. Specifically, the understanding of religion operative in the studies he critiques is a product of the modern liberal state: “the religious-secular distinction accompanies the invention of private-public, religion-politics, and church-state dichotomies. The religious-secular distinction also accompanies the state’s monopoly over internal violence and its colonial expansion.” In particular, these distinctions perform “an ideological function in legitimating certain kinds of practices and delegitimizing others.” They make religion essentially interior and private, distinct from the secular, public sphere; thus, something like Christianity can coexist peacefully with patriotism since (private) loyalty to God is separated from (public) loyalty to the state.⁶³

⁶¹ These scholars include John Hick, Charles Kimball, Martin Marty, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Scott Appleby.

⁶² Cavanaugh, *The Myth*, 16, 56. In his first chapter, “The Anatomy of the Myth,” Cavanaugh sorts contemporary scholarship into three groups which he believes characterizes the main themes of their respective treatments of religious violence as either primarily absolutist, divisive, or insufficiently rational. In each case, he argues, the scholar in question has artificially and inconsistently attended to certain kinds of violence over against others, namely “religious” over against “secular,” and has subscribed to the prevailing understanding that the former is inherently more absolutist, divisive, and irrational than the latter. Such a distinction—firmly anchored on an understanding of religion as timeless and universal—is neither explicitly examined nor justified, and ignores other prominent scholarship which recognizes that things like “secular nationalism” can themselves be characterized as religious, thus negating such a distinction.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 59.

This medieval conception of *religio* as a “virtue embedded in particular bodily disciplines”⁶⁴ is overtaken in early modernity by the invention of “religion,” a universal category containing particular species demarcated by systems of propositions, an “essentially interior, private impulse,” and existing as distinct from public, non-religious endeavors like politics.⁶⁵ This process is catalyzed by the Reformation, in various strands of which religion comes to be associated with particular saving knowledge, “a body of objective truths to which the believer could assent or withhold assent.”⁶⁶ Subsequently, in both Protestant and Catholic understandings, distinct doctrines come to signify separate religions, an understanding which during the seventeenth century comes to include Christianity as juxtaposed with Judaism or Islam.

Integrated into early modern political philosophy, religion is primarily state of mind, something that cannot be enforced by civil authority or force. It is distinct and separate from the activities of the body. For example, John Locke propagates a division of labor between the public interests of the state and the private interests of the church, a line which neither must cross in order to secure civil harmony. Violence is the purview of the state, rather than the church, the latter which constitutes a voluntary society of persons rooted in their interior religious dispositions.⁶⁷ Thus “in Locke, we find a modern version of the spatial division of the world into

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71. For Augustine, *religio* meant worship; true *religio* was worship of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, while false *religio* was directed to elements of creation. This *religio* is not contrasted with some sort of secular realm free from it; *religio* cannot be compartmentalized from the rest of life, but rather, the rest of life put in proper order and relation to the Creator constitutes its true form (63-64). With Thomas Aquinas, *religio* is a virtue, a habit cultivated by repeated practice. Rather than being a “universal genus of which Christianity is a particular species,” true *religio* reveres the Triune God, and particularly “as the first principle of the creation and government of things” (65). It is a habit which brings the person to participate in the life of the Trinity, in both body and soul, in both private and public dimensions alike.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁷ Indeed, this is an underlying motif of early modern political philosophy. Discussing Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Locke, and others, Cavanaugh explains how a transnational church becomes for them a threat to state unity. The church must therefore be “domesticated,” a process that quite easily includes notions of religious liberty, though rooted in a notion of Christianity as a set of universal moral truths underlying all faiths, rather than “theological claims and practices which take a particular social form called the Church” (“A Fire Strong Enough,” 404).

And the Church is not the only entity targeted: “in practice the modern sovereign state has been defined by its usurping of power from lesser communal bodies,” arising from “opposition to kinship and other local social groupings.” As he quotes Robert Nisbet, “The history of the Western State has been characterized by the gradual absorption of powers and responsibilities formerly resident in other

religious and secular pursuits,” as opposed to the medieval conception of the secular as “this world and age”⁶⁸ All this is to say that religion itself has a history, and therefore cannot be considered transhistorical and transcultural in essence. In the end, the modern notion of religion is not merely a *description* of a social phenomenon, but actually helps *create* and *reinforce* that phenomenon: in short, “religion is a normative concept.”⁶⁹

The normativeness of “religion” is nowhere more apparent than in the so-called “Wars of Religion,” whose commonly accepted interpretation Cavanaugh effectively debunks. He challenges the narratives put forward by contemporary political theorists such as Jeffrey Stout, Judith Shklar, and John Rawls, in which liberalism arises to save humanity from the ravages of religious strife. Rather, Cavanaugh finds the historical record to reveal that “The so-called wars of religion appear as wars fought by state-building elites for the purpose of consolidating their power over the church and other rivals.”⁷⁰ Yet, rather than simply arguing these wars were

associations and by an increasing directness of relation between the sovereign authority of the State and the individual citizen....The real conflict in modern political history has not been, as is so often stated, between State and individual, but between State and social group.” Cavanaugh, “The City,” 191-192. Quoted from Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 104.

Cavanaugh’s own research bears this out. In his significant study of the use of torture by the Augusto Pinochet regime in Chile, he argues that torture more than anything else was a social strategy to “discipline the citizenry into a complex performance scripted by the state” with the effect of “dismantling other *social* bodies which would rival the state’s authority over *individual* bodies.” Hence, “torture is not merely an attack on, but the creation of, individuals.” Through torture, Cavanaugh writes, the state aims to usurp the authority and power formerly residing in various local bodies in medieval society and constructing in their place a direct relationship between the state and the individual. See Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*. Quotations from pp. 2-3.

⁶⁸ Cavanaugh, *The Myth*, 78-80.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 85. Cavanaugh tests various substantivist and functionalist accounts of religion, preferring the functionalist but finding them both ultimately inadequate. The substantivist falls short in failing to define the terms of its own definition of religion, such as “transcendent,” “sacred,” or “supernatural,” in such a way as to maintain the transcultural quality of religion while also maintaining the usefulness of religion as a category over against “secular” phenomena. The functionalist approach, looking at how a belief system works—i.e., the various tasks it performs in a certain context—is more helpfully rooted in empirical observation of behavior, but it has the disadvantage of often expanding the category to the point of meaninglessness. Moreover, functionalist approaches, like substantivist, consider religion to be a universal phenomenon, both transhistorical and transcultural. That said, functionalist studies have demonstrated the many ways in which practices such as nationalism or civil religion qualify as religion by means of their exclusivity, their symbols, and their practices that can quite easily be characterized as liturgical. In so doing, they have demonstrated the questionable and arbitrary nature of the religious-secular distinction. See pp. 102-118.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 161-162. Cavanaugh breaks the myth of the Wars of Religion down into four main component assertions: (1) combatants were defined according to different and opposing religious doctrines and

conflicts over political and economic interests rather than religious, Cavanaugh asserts that they were in fact part of the process of creating the distinction between those areas, a distinction that would serve to enflame the wars and support the rise of the modern state. In short, the myth of religious violence operates as part of Western folklore. Rather than merely relating history, it actually authorizes certain configurations of power. And it is quite theological, underwriting a distinct salvation narrative. The typical narrative of the “Wars of Religion” acts as the “creation myth for modernity,” wherein the forces of order overcome some preexisting chaos. The myth is also the state’s soteriology, its narrative of the salvation of humanity from religious division and violence: “It is a story of salvation from mortal peril by the creation of the secular nation-state. As such, it legitimates the direction of the citizen’s ultimate loyalty to the nation-state and secures the nation-state’s monopoly on legitimate violence.”⁷¹

The church’s acquiescence notwithstanding, the state’s soteriology fails theologically on multiple counts. For one thing, it is rooted in a “‘theological’ anthropology which precludes any truly social process.” Conceiving of human beings as essentially individual, relations can be had only by means of contractual arrangement, to which notions of “participation in God and in one

practices; (2) religion was the primary cause of the war, as opposed to politics or economics; (3) religious causes are at least analytically separable from political or economic causes at the time of the wars; and (4) the modern state arose not as a cause of the wars, but rather as a solution to them. Cavanaugh then examines the historical record and finds a plethora of examples of combatants opposed to each other militarily, who in fact shared a commitment to the same doctrines; conversely, he finds numerous examples of allies committed to disparate doctrinal positions or traditions. The fact that these examples are frequent and widespread indicates that religion could not have been the primary *casus belli*, in which case these could not qualify as religious conflicts (142-155). This negates the first two components of the myth.

Cavanaugh challenges the third component by pointing out the anachronism of reading the modern distinction between religious and secular onto historical figures who would have made no such distinction. This distinction more often than not involves seeing society as basic and religion as a sort of secondary, and often less than rational, interpretation of the social, subsequently imposed upon it. Yet as other scholars have shown, once religion was isolated, no society remained in sixteenth century thought. Finally, Cavanaugh shows the fourth component as suspect by discussing the new configuration of early modern Christian society “in which many legislative and jurisdictional powers and claims to power—as well as claims to the devotion and allegiance of the people—were passing from the church to the new sovereign state.” According to Cavanaugh, the Reformation and the subsequent rise of confessionalization on the part of all sides were themselves part and parcel of the political developments of the time, i.e., used often for the sake of social conformity under the prince (168-171).

⁷¹ Ibid., 226.

another” are threats.⁷² What follows is human unity in a “body of a perverse sort.” Since individuals operate with no common ends, the best the state can do is prevent them from interfering with each other’s rights. The modern liberal view is thus that of “a monstrosity of many separate limbs proceeding directly out of a gigantic head,” the members of society adhering to the state, rather than to each other. This is particularly apparent as the state moves to replace other “local communities of formation and decision-making.”⁷³ Finally, and most blatantly, the state at the heart of its *mythos* has promised peace, but has brought violence instead. This is evidenced by the violence within a territory as a state tries to secure itself, but also “the establishment of territorial borders with a single authority within each assumes a ‘state of nature’ between territorial states, heightening the possibility of war.” Lacking shared ends, the modern state must be defined by its means, which is its supposed monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Thus war becomes “the primary mechanism for achieving social integration in a society with no shared ends.” Violence is the state’s “*religio*, its habitual discipline for binding us one to another.”⁷⁴

Cavanaugh’s response to the theopolitics of modernity is a “Eucharistic counter-politics” rooted in the true story of the world, that by its very nature “is already to be engaged in a direct confrontation with the politics of the world.”⁷⁵ In the Eucharist, a “stunning ‘public’ *leitourgia*,” we are made members of Christ’s Body and of each other. Such unity is a gift, thus subverting “the primacy of contract and exchange in modern social relations.”⁷⁶ As opposed to the distorted state body, the Eucharist builds the Body of Christ by relating its members to one another, not through Christ the Head alone, “for Christ himself is found not only in the center but at the margins of the Body, radically identified with the ‘least of my brothers and sisters.’” While state

⁷² Cavanaugh, “The City,” 192-193.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁵ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 11-13.

⁷⁶ Cavanaugh, “The City,” 195. For an in-depth discussion of the Eucharist as solution to the state project of globalization, see Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, especially Chapters 5 and 6.

unity depends upon absorbing the local and particular into the universal, in “true catholicity,” “the antithesis of local and universal is effaced.” The Eucharist found in each local community makes the whole Christ present, so all are united in Christ. The Eucharist transforms political identity as well, as it “transgresses national boundaries and redefines who our fellow-citizens are.”⁷⁷

Cavanaugh presents a highly compelling portrayal of modernity’s salvation history and its attendant politics. I find his narrative convincing by and large, and I believe he successfully debunks certain significant liberal readings of history and politics since the Middle Ages. Cavanaugh has certainly informed my own thinking as much as any other theopolitical scholar. However, it is in the specific matter of nationalism where I must challenge his schema. Cavanaugh’s preoccupation with the modern state causes him to present an overly narrow understanding of nation and nationalism. He defines nation as “a unitary system of shared cultural attributes,” consolidated by the state. Nations most commonly entail some sort of shared ethnicity, language, or history, but these are themselves constructed. National identity is “a matter of ‘common feeling and an organized claim,’” but he argues, “this claim is first organized by the state.” Only after the state’s claims to sovereignty within a territory are established does nationalism arise to “unify culturally what had been gathered inside state borders.” While nationalists construct myths of national origin stretching back into antiquity, nationalism itself only appears in the eighteenth century with the nation-state, that latter which only comes to

⁷⁷ Cavanaugh, “The City,” 196. For his understanding of the theopolitics of the Eucharist, Cavanaugh draws upon the *ressourcement* work of Henri de Lubac to demonstrate how Eucharistic theology has changed over the centuries, resulting in a depoliticization of the church. While the church had previously been understood as *corpus verum* (the true Body of Christ) and the Eucharist as *corpus mysticum* (the mystical Body of Christ), in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, these came to be reversed, a move that was “associated not only with changes in the liturgical life of the church, but also with the reconfiguration of the relationship of the church and the civil authorities in the late medieval period” (*Torture and Eucharist*, 214ff). This mistaken inversion contributed to the idea that state and church, instead of occupying two different *times*, the temporal and the eternal respectively, actually occupied two different *spaces* or jurisdictions (216, 219). As the church became accustomed to this reconfiguration, its “urgent sense of pilgrimage through a temporary world toward an eternal end was muted” (222). But the church is to be a “reimagining of worldly time” through a recognition of the past, present, and future—as well as earth and heaven—brought together in communion (225-7). The secular imagination is overcome, and the Body of Christ is literally “re-membered” as Christians are united together and made visible through the liturgy, leading ultimately to the undoing of the state project.

prominence in the nineteenth,⁷⁸ as “the vertical relationship of state and individual is opened to include a horizontal relationship among individuals, an increasingly cohesive mass relationship.”⁷⁹

While I address the theory of nations and nationalism more at length in Chapters 2 and 3, it is important here to note that Cavanaugh relies for his understanding on a rather one-sided appropriation of nationalism scholarship, which argues “nations are only possible once states have been invented, and that nations, even seemingly ‘ancient’ ones, are the product of the last two centuries.”⁸⁰ This is the argument of the “modernist” school of nationalism studies, which sees nationalism as a mid-to-late modern development, an exclusive state project for the state’s own cohesion. Scholars Cavanaugh cites include Benedict Anderson, who argues that nations arose largely as the result of capitalist development (particularly in the realm of print literature), and Eric Hobsbawm, whose contribution revolves around his notion of “invented traditions.” Yet the modernist argument has been assailed in the past two decades for its lack of attention to pre-existing culture and culture’s constraints upon nationalist elites, as well as its rather monolithic conception of popular allegiance. Even in Cavanaugh’s own explanation, constraints must be inferred. Granting that elements such as ethnicity (whether biological or cultural), language, and history are constructed, is he really claiming these only come about in the modern period, invented from scratch without so much as a premodern precedent? That would be an absurd claim of utter discontinuity between premodern and modern periods, which is empirically untenable. It can only be that to a degree varying case by case, pre-existing elements of culture—which Cavanaugh, given his theopolitical sensibilities, would have to acknowledge includes some

⁷⁸ Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, n.2 (April 2004): 246.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 250. This “horizontal relationship,” it should be noted, seems to contradict to some degree Cavanaugh’s picture of modern society as “monstrosity,” a “body of a perverse sort” where individuals have no connection to each other but only adhere directly to the state (“The City,” 193).

⁸⁰ Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 261.

form of political community⁸¹—continue into modernity; and if they continue, they must in some way guide and constrain the activities of nationalist elites.

In particular, the ethnosymbolist approach of Anthony D. Smith has demonstrated, contra modernist claims, that nationalists have limited options when it comes to crafting their message; they must, in fact, work within already existing parameters in order to effectively galvanize a populace behind a given conception of national identity. Cavanaugh dismisses ethnosymbolism, and Smith in particular, as having been criticized for overstating the “group consciousness” of premodern groups and for failing to attend to the lack of institutional undergirding there. Cavanaugh also argues against them that “most importantly, ‘nationalism is not simply a claim of ethnic similarity, but a claim that certain similarities should count as *the* definition of political community.’”⁸²

Unfortunately, Cavanaugh takes these critiques for granted and does not directly engage Smith’s work. Had he done so, he would have noticed that the heart of Smith’s ethnosymbolic approach is the notion of *authentication*, the process by which nationalists determine from an assortment of cultural elements what precisely defines their “true” nation. For Smith, authentication is what enables nationalists to present a convincing national narrative to their compatriots and to outsiders. It entails selecting, interpreting, and reappropriating elements of a people’s cultural heritage in such a way that the present community is purified of foreign elements and galvanized toward the re-embodiment of some ideal presented as the people’s past. Certainly, Smith asserts the preexistence of such cultural elements and ethnic identity, sometimes in rather sophisticated form; however, the process of authentication entails the nationalists’ own activities of selectively interpreting and reappropriating elements so as to galvanize the public. This is, to greater or lesser degrees depending on the case, a constructive process, and one which

⁸¹ If salvation histories can be found throughout various historical epochs, and if they necessarily entail a politics, then such politics is a recurrent phenomenon, not merely a modern innovation.

⁸² Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 262. Internal quotation taken from Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 185.

Smith attends to in far more detail than do the modernists, who tend to move from programs of state nationalism to popular loyalty without really accounting for how that loyalty is in fact cultivated.

Additionally, not attending to the substantive critiques of the modernist nationalism scholars Cavanaugh cites allows him to overlook some potentially problematic aspects of their own approaches. For example, while Anderson emphasizes the role of modern capitalism and publishing in solidifying written vernaculars, which then solidifies national identities, Adrian Hastings points out that he completely neglects the centrality of the Bible in cultivating European nationalism from the late Middle Ages on; and indeed, it was not merely the biblical text itself, but clerical instruction in those texts that contributed. This leads to a point by Paul Brass that in some cases, communities can be mobilized politically apart from modern systems of mass communication, “especially through traditional networks of religious communication.”⁸³ As such, national identity is quite able to emerge without the mechanisms of modern capitalism or the state.

Moreover, Smith has pointed out that Hobsbawm’s notion of “invented traditions,” like modernist scholarship generally, tends to overstate the ability of elites to be innovative, to craft the nationalist message from scratch. Hobsbawm does state that the nationalist message must be on a wavelength that will resonate with the people hearing it, but as Smith points out, Hobsbawm fails to explain how such a wavelength arises if there are not preexisting elements of national identity and culture—in short, *inherited* traditions—to which the nationalist can refer. Indeed, according to both Smith and Brass, as well as Anthony Marx,⁸⁴ nationalists themselves are often formed according to different cultural and religious traditions, which then inform their understandings of what nationalist discourse would be both appropriate—reflecting the “true”

⁸³ Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Dehli: Sage Publications, 1991), 15.

⁸⁴ Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75.

nation—and effective at galvanizing the populace. This leads again to Smith’s notion of “authentication.” Not only does elite formation point to the existence of prior elements of identity, it begs the question in Christian and other faith-associated nationalisms of what is going on theologically at these various points in the process of interpreting and appropriating cultural elements. If we do not assume that nationalists and peoples alike are initially blank slates, then a Christian nationalism, for instance, must replace some pre-existing—perhaps more orthodox— theological understanding. Such an understanding must be there for Christian nationalism to have any traction, and there must be some sort of theological realignment going on in the process of its reception. Neither Cavanaugh nor his sources account for this.

Smith also criticizes Hobsbawm for his portrayal of the people or masses as essentially passive, receiving in an unquestioned or unqualified manner whatever discourse nationalists—or, for Cavanaugh, the state—wishes to utter. Not only does this ignore the nuances of public reception and agency, it also ignores the fact that not all nationalist movements are successful, including state nationalisms.⁸⁵ Here again, I believe Cavanaugh overstates the state’s success, particularly its ability to create a “unitary system of shared cultural attributes.”⁸⁶ As Brass demonstrates, elites compete over symbol selection in the formulation of nationalist discourse; neither Hobsbawm nor Cavanaugh seems to recognize that nationalism is itself a contested process.⁸⁷ Yet, particularly in contexts where the meaning of the nation is at stake, such as with movements for cultural renewal, the competition *between* nationalisms can be significant for the formulation of national identity, which can have such a profound impact on ecclesial identity to the degree that the church receives, and even participates in, said competition.

⁸⁵ As Josep Llobera writes, “state nationalism is not always successful precisely because of the importance of nationalisms against the state.” See Josep R. Llobera, *Foundations of National Identity: From Catalonia to Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 48.

⁸⁶ Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company,” 246.

⁸⁷ Brass, 20-21. This, too, points perhaps to an overreliance on Foucault, if Foucault himself neglects the significance of “technology of sign systems” for “governmentality.” Such technologies “permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or significantion,” according to Foucault, and yet are not included in governmentality. See Bell, 21. Foucault quotation taken from Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the present study, Cavanaugh's focus on so-called "secular" nationalism strongly implies that nationalism by definition relies on the modern notion of religion as transhistorical, transcultural, interior and private. This is, after all, how the religious-secular distinction actually enables the rise of the state: private loyalty to God is separated from public loyalty to the state. Yet with regard to nationalism, this fails to acknowledge the fact that in many cases, nationalist movements do not consider religion to be transhistorical or private at all. Cavanaugh himself mentions the "curious blend of Enlightenment and Christian themes and symbols" in American civil religion, including the Puritan use of biblical images and the identification of their colony as a new Israel chosen by God; over time this "new Israel" becomes the United States (rather than the church), which acts as the world's savior via the propagation of democracy and capitalism. But how can religion in this type of nationalism be considered transhistorical and transcultural?

Rather, the identity, mission, and destiny of the nation are actually being syncretized with specific features of a particular faith, that is to say, with quite particular historical and cultural narratives and features. In fact, it is the narratives of *two peoples* being fused together that marks this still prevalent form of nationalism. Cavanaugh actually alludes to this in earlier work where he briefly describes the notion of America as the New Israel, including Puritan biblical covenant imagery, which combined with certain "Revolutionary ideals" into America as a "kind of metachurch."⁸⁸ This notion was picked up by others in the eighteenth century (Herman Melville among them) who referred to America as the "political Messiah," such that "we see a shift from a nation under God to a nation as God's incarnation on earth, the nation as Messiah." Here,

⁸⁸ Cavanaugh, "Messianic Nation: A Christian Theological Critique of American Exceptionalism," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005-2006): 262-4. Some of these themes are reiterated in his slightly later article, "The Empire of the Empty Shrine: American Imperialism and the Church," *Cultural Encounters* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 7-19.

explains Cavanaugh, “we see the blending of the biblical notion of election with American ideas of progress, expansion, and capitalism.”⁸⁹

Cavanaugh says that another strand of American exceptionalism is found in such “Enlightenment ideals” as political and economic freedom, where the “freedom of the human will” makes America the firstborn of universal nations. Here, “freedom is not a substantive good but a formal structure that maximizes the possibility of each person to realize his or her particular goods.”⁹⁰ This kind of exceptionalism uses a “kind of secularized version of providence” called “history.” History calls America to be the “destiny of the rest of the world.”⁹¹ The main theological danger of this form of exceptionalism is a messianic nation “that does not simply seek to follow God’s will, but acts as a kind of substitute God on the stage of history.” The nation worships its freedom to worship, which is inherent to its identity, and thus it worships itself.⁹²

Cavanaugh finds these two themes, biblical and Enlightenment exceptionalism, woven together in the work of American theologian Stephen H. Webb, who combines evangelism of the gospel with evangelism of American freedoms. This breeds a certain alarming evangelization-through-violence: regarding Muslims, for instance, Webb suggests that they can be forced militarily into democratic political arrangements so that they may subsequently choose freely to accept Christianity. Here, suggests Cavanaugh, “American-style democracy provides the empty form for evangelization, but the Christian gospel provides the content.” Yet, there is great danger that this configuration would be inverted, such that the biblical narrative of God acting in history becomes the form, and American-style democracy and capitalism become the content, i.e., “America itself becomes the criterion for locating God’s activity in the world.”⁹³

Webb’s arguments will be explored further in Chapter 7. What is important here is to note that what Cavanaugh critiques Webb for is actually a type of nationalist discourse.

⁸⁹ Cavanaugh, “Messianic Nation,” 264.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 268.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 270.

Cavanaugh does not identify it as such, perhaps because his concept of nationalism is too modernist and too narrowly applied to state projects alone. Yet, Webb's discourse is neither state-driven nor does it rely on a transhistorical, transcultural, private notion of religion. Rather, it is a message crafted from within Christian theology deliberately tying the American national narrative to a pre-existing national narrative, that of biblical Israel. Cavanaugh's schema in *The Myth of Religious Violence* cannot account for this discourse, for here, loyalty to the nation (or state, or both) is not a public function alongside a privatized faith; rather, loyalty to God and loyalty to nation or state are one in the same, and this syncretized loyalty is both particular and public. This means nationalism can take the form of a non-state, Christian theopolitical project, to greater or lesser degrees of sophistication and formality; the implications of this for ecclesial identity are potentially significant and therefore require more sustained, systematic treatment.

Salvation History and Biblical Theopolitics

For each of the following scholars, the salvation narrative of the Christian tradition is fundamental to ecclesial identity and practice. In all cases, it significantly marks, if not drives, their conceptions of the church as political community. Part and parcel of these conceptions is their respective appropriations of the biblical narrative, which plays an important role for each scholar, but informs their work in somewhat different ways. One of the clearest differences is the degree to which the Old Testament is appropriated, and particularly the elements of Israel's election and covenant. This is of key concern to the present study, given that I consider Yahweh's election and covenant with Israel to be of the utmost importance for discerning a proper theopolitical ecclesiology in our late modern context. Israel is that theopolitical community called to be a visible sign of God's salvation to the world, a vocation fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and to be embodied subsequently in the church, which is, through Christ, engrafted – organically attached – back onto Israel.

Yet “Christian” nationalism – those movements arising from within or with the indispensable support of the church – typically misappropriates the biblical narrative, portraying a given earthly nation as Israel’s proper theopolitical extension. Israel’s theopolitics is misread – for example, often understanding Yahweh to bless Israel’s efforts to secure itself through power politics rather than calling Israel to be a theopolitical alternative in the world – and Israel is subsequently and consequently co-opted for the nationalist agenda. Therefore, theopolitical scholarship must recover a proper understanding of biblical Israel’s theopolitics in order to discern and adequately address the nationalist challenge today.

John Howard Yoder

“That all identity is historical is a platitude, but not one that we can afford to leave unspoken.”⁹⁴ This sentence, with which the Mennonite John Howard Yoder begins one of his better known works, is indicative of his understanding of the ecclesia as contingent, even tentative. It is so because the vocation of the church is to be a movement through time, its faithfulness “realized in particular times and places, never assured and always subject to renewed testing and judgment.” Such an approach is confident about God’s ultimate project, but it is highly skeptical about human attempts to control history toward that end, and especially the exercises of power that have historically accompanied such attempts.

For Yoder, the history of salvation is the story of how in the suffering of Jesus Christ, God has inaugurated the coming of God’s kingdom and has effected the reconciliation of humanity, both to God and among peoples, and particularly between Jew and Gentile. Jesus, in his divinely mandated role, bore a new possibility for human socio-political community, one that was inaugurated in his baptism and culminated in the cross, “the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new kind of life.” In

⁹⁴ John Howard Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 2.

the context of Jesus' temptation to either concede to empire or to subvert it through violence, Yoder views the cross "not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation but as the political alternative to both insurrection and quietism."⁹⁵ It is not merely the way to the kingdom of God, but "it is the kingdom come."⁹⁶ The communal outworking of this salvation history is thus "a visible social-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God," accomplished by divine intervention in the person of Jesus.⁹⁷

Key to Yoder's understanding of salvation history is how God's intervention in Jesus Christ reordered the powers of the world. The New Testament makes clear three things about these powers: (1) as "a network of norms and regularities to stretch out the canvas upon which the tableau of life can be painted," the powers were created for humanity's good; (2) these powers have rebelled and are fallen, unwilling to accept their inherently modest divine mandate; and (3) despite their rebellion, they cannot escape divine sovereignty. If humanity is to be saved but still be properly human, the powers cannot be destroyed; rather, "their sovereignty must be broken." This Jesus Christ did, "concretely and historically," by living an alternative existence: he willingly submitted to them, but refused to endorse or participate in their self-absolutization.⁹⁸ Consequently, according to the apostle Paul, the church's very existence is its foremost task, in that "it is in itself a proclamation of the lordship of Christ to the powers from whose domination the church has begun to be liberated." Christ has successfully and salvifically triumphed over the powers. The responsibility of the church, then, is to refrain from being seduced by them, i.e., to maintain an existence that "demonstrates that their rebellion has been vanquished."⁹⁹

As the outworking of this salvation history, the church is a political community by nature. In addition to its role in Christ's reordering of the powers, the church is a political reality in

⁹⁵ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 36. I do not find these positions to be mutually exclusive as Yoder seems to here.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-53.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142-145.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150. It should be noted that Yoder's understanding of "the powers" is operative for the present study as a whole.

general terms because it is a “structured social body” with “ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks.” Indeed, “to be political is to make decisions, to assign roles, and to distribute powers, and the Christian community cannot do otherwise than exercise these same functions, going about its business as a body.”¹⁰⁰ Its theopolitical “business” can roughly be characterized for Yoder in terms of a sacramentality of ordinary life. He rejects as unbiblical the notion that “there is a special realm of ‘religious’ reality—so that when you speak special prescribed words, peculiar events happen.”¹⁰¹ Instead, sacraments are understood biblically as those practices of regular life that manifest the reign of God in Jesus Christ in community.

For example, Yoder refers to “binding and loosing,” rooted in the promise of Matthew 18:15 that the Holy Spirit would be active when Jesus’ disciples, in community, determine a particular theological/ethical understanding or course of action, following a specified decision-making process that is constituted by the priorities of dialogue and reconciliation. In such a context, disciples can justifiably claim, “it seemed good to the Spirit and to us.”¹⁰² Another key sacrament is that of the Lord’s Supper, which Yoder understands as a regular common meal taken together by Christians. This reorders social relations, extending the sharing of the common table into all areas of socio-economic interaction. Indeed, “it demands some kind of sharing, advocacy, and partisanship in which the poor are privileged, and in which considerations of merit and productivity are subjected to the rule of servanthood.”¹⁰³ A third central sacrament is that of baptism, which, according to 2 Corinthians 5, “introduces or initiates persons into a new people” in such a way that “all prior given or chosen identity definitions are transcended.”¹⁰⁴ According to Ephesians 2, Christ brings peace between Jew and Gentile, thereby creating a new humanity;

¹⁰⁰ Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992, 2001), viii-ix.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1, 6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

with Galatians 3, this peace is subsequently manifested in other areas of social, economic, and political division. Therefore, “the primary narrative meaning of baptism is the new society it creates, by inducting all kinds of people into the same people.”¹⁰⁵ This new society is the church, which acts as exemplar for the world. All together, these insights clearly place the church at the center of Christian theopolitical identity. Despite Yoder’s apparent eschewal of “religious” sacramentality, these points indicate at the very least certain extraordinary moments in the life of the church that are profoundly constitutive of ecclesial identity.

Yoder also draws on certain elements of the Old Testament narrative for understanding how the church should approach its mission. In particular, he relies on what he calls the “Jeremianic turn” to argue the church should embody an exilic identity. This is, according to Michael Cartwright, a sensibility stemming from Yoder’s free church formation and concern for resisting the challenge of Constantinianism. As Cartwright explains, Yoder concentrates on the exile, “where ‘the synagogues and the rabbis of Babylon’ entered ‘creatively into the Jeremianic phase of creating something qualitatively new in the history of religions.’ According to Yoder’s inductive reconstruction of the logic of this shift, ‘living without a temple, while yet retaining the mythic memory of the temple and the hope of the return to the messianic age, enabled the creation of a faith community with a globally new gestalt...’” This new communal structure is marked by the centrality of a text that can be duplicated and read anywhere, as well as by identity defined in the common life of the community. No special hierarchy or liturgy is necessary; the texts ground worship, and ordinary, daily practices hold the community together.¹⁰⁶ The vocation of this diaspora is to seek the welfare of the community into which it is sent.

This vocation, explains Cartwright, is part of a counter-narrative Yoder uses to connect various developments: “The hermeneutical trajectory that Yoder ultimately discerns within the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁶ Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs, “Editors’ Introduction,” in John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 21. This is discussed by Yoder himself on p. 187.

canons of Scripture in the Old and New Testament links the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 to the prophecy of Jeremiah 29. It then reads the latter texts through the lens of Ephesians 2-3, which provides the vision of reconciled humanity that Yoder sees dramatically displayed in St. John's visions in Revelation 5, 7, and 22."¹⁰⁷ Yoder thinks it especially important that the Deuteronomic history is remembered and then organized within a diasporic context, such that "it constitutes a document of the acceptance of the Jeremianic turn," one which acknowledges the divine disapproval of the Davidic project of state centralization and territorial security, and which approves in its stead an exilic communal life free of irredentism.¹⁰⁸ As such, the Jeremianic model prefigures the ecclesia both in terms of its mission and the character of its communal life as well as the potential challenges it might face in tending to become too settled or secure in one context.

In examining Yoder's approach to salvation history, I appreciate his Messianic understanding of Jesus as the definitive presence, rather than merely forerunner, of the Kingdom of God, and that in Jesus' death and resurrection (the latter which seems relatively under-examined), the powers of the world are reordered. I also follow Yoder's argument that Jesus' mission inherently entailed a new social order, into which baptism initiates the believer. However, in doing so, Jesus was in part fulfilling Israel's own covenant identity and mission, an important point Yoder does not dwell on, but which arguably provides additional important insight into the nature of that alternative communal life he advocates. For instance, Christ's reordering of the powers is, in significant ways, well in line with Yahweh's defeat of the Egyptian imperial system in the exodus, which then provided space for the alternative community of Israel. How might such a connection between Old and New Testaments be significant theopolitically? Additionally, with regard to sacraments, one sees in Israel that the social order Yahweh establishes through Torah is one in which the ordinary life of the people as a "royal priesthood" is sacramental in and of itself and vis-à-vis the world; but still within that ordinary life there were

¹⁰⁷ Cartwright, "Editor's Introduction," 22.

¹⁰⁸ Yoder, *Schism*, 188.

extraordinary moments of celebration and symbolism from which the people derived their identity. It would seem both of these, in tandem, would constitute proper sacramentality, and that any biblically informed treatment of sacrament and liturgy must take this into account.

While there is much to be said for a diasporic model of ecclesial life, I think Michael Cartwright attends well to perhaps the most significant difficulty in Yoder's appropriation of the Old Testament. He suggests that Yoder may inadvertently—especially since Yoder explicitly states otherwise—tend toward supersessionism when he appropriates exclusively the exilic model of Israel for the church, and that understanding this requires engagement with a “topic that Yoder largely avoided—the matter of God's covenant with the Jewish people, the election of Israel to be God's ‘chosen one’ for the nations.”¹⁰⁹ For Yoder, Jesus has restructured Israel's conception of peoplehood from what Israel had understood during the monarchy.¹¹⁰ Yoder goes on to differentiate the “faith” of Abraham from “ethnic-political peoplehood,”¹¹¹ but as Cartwright points out, “Yoder's definition of what it means to be a ‘child of Abraham’ actually turns out to converge with the modernist pattern of Christian supersessionism inasmuch as the emphasis on ‘faith’ functions to detach Abrahamic identity from its historical embodiment in the people of Israel.”¹¹² Moreover, Yoder bypasses the notion of “election” in Israel, tending to “shift discussion of ‘covenant’ and ‘election’ toward a conception of Jewish missionary vocation in exile.” Cartwright refers here to Douglas Harink, who argues that Yoder actually obstructs the doctrine of Israel's election by offering instead a “‘moral history’ of Israel's obedience through his reading of the Jewish diaspora history *since* the exile.”¹¹³ In short, Yoder neglects the theopolitically significant stage of Israel's election and covenant in Yahweh and locates its

¹⁰⁹ Cartwright, “Afterword: ‘If Abraham Is Our Father...’ The Problem of Christian Supersessionism *after* Yoder,” *Schism*, 206.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210. Cartwright refers here to Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 27-28.

¹¹¹ Yoder, formed by free church theology, was concerned about the priority of voluntary over ethnic membership in the faith community. For him, Jewishness after Jeremiah required such freedom. See Cartwright, “Editors’ Introduction,” 23.

¹¹² Cartwright, “Afterword,” 210-11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 211.

normative communal form much later in an existence that most directly resembles Yoder's own ecclesial background.¹¹⁴ For the present study, the problem with this move is not that a diasporic existence is not in some way normative for the church, but rather that Yoder's argument for such an existence lacks the theopolitical grounding only a careful treatment of election and covenant can provide.

Stanley Hauerwas

For Hauerwas, a community of faith radically alternative to the politics of the world requires a people formed in virtue via Christian sacrament and discipleship, inculcated with the skills to resist formation by the powers, especially that of the modern liberal state. This is a community formed by story,¹¹⁵ namely that related in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. This story "cannot be abstracted from those communities engaged in the telling and the hearing," since "as a story it cannot exist without a historic people, for it requires telling and remembering if it is to exist at all."¹¹⁶ Indeed, "the particularity of Israel, Jesus, and the Church must be taken up constitutively into what those who proclaim Jesus as Lord and Christ regard as true and good and right." The story of God as embodied in God's people is what makes God's kingdom visible in

¹¹⁴ Cartwright states, "the way that Yoder goes about affirming the 'Abrahamic model' as constitutive for Jews and Christians alike involves narrating the history of Jewish peace witness in a way that is determined by the Anabaptist tradition. As a result, the very coherence of the vocation of the Jewish people turns out to be reliant upon 'the free church vision.' The immodesty of Yoder's narrative can be measured by the fact that he virtually ignores the biblical vision of Israel as the elect people of God affirmed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and reaffirmed in Romans 9-11 by the apostle Paul" (229).

Cartwright contrasts Yoder's approach with that of Scott Bader-Saye, who Cartwright says "pays careful attention to Jewish theological views about election, covenant and promised redemption to support his 'post-Christendom' ecclesiology. Bader-Saye explicitly endorses Yoder's view that 'the call to "deconstantinize" [the Church] must be paired with a call to "re-Judaize" Christianity.' Contrary to Yoder's position, however, Bader-Saye argues, 'By returning to its roots in the people of Israel, the church can recover a doctrine of election that is not mere information...but rather formation, or better yet, conformation to the ways of the triune God'" (230). Bader-Saye's work will be discussed below.

¹¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 24-30. This "narrative mode" is integral to Christian understanding, as it is the most fundamental way of talking about God, as well as presenting our existence as that of contingent, historical beings. Moreover, Christian convictions constitute themselves "a narrative, a language, that requires a transformation of the self if we are to see, as well as be, truthful."

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

the world, lived out in a continually renewed community of faith and “embodied in a people’s habits that form and are formed in worship, governance, and morality.”¹¹⁷

While Hauerwas is clearly committed to the biblical history of salvation, he does not venture into much detail on the content of that narrative. As Jeffrey Siker notes, Hauerwas emphasizes the importance of understanding the story of Jesus in continuity with the story of Israel, yet, regarding Hauerwas’s use of the Old Testament, “the reader senses that he simply does not know it all that well.”¹¹⁸ Hauerwas does go so far as to briefly sketch the continuity of the narratives of Israel and Jesus, particularly in the context of *imitatio dei*, and with special, albeit limited, attention to covenant faithfulness. Interestingly, he states that proper biblical reflection on this theme must begin with Israel, ““for Jesus brought no new insights into the law or God’s nature that Israel had not already known and revealed.”” The content of the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, was a recovery of earlier ““habits of thought”” in Israel, cultivated through Israel’s experience with Yahweh.¹¹⁹

With regard to this continuity, however, Hauerwas limits his attention to the theme of office: prophet, priest, king.¹²⁰ Hauerwas primarily focuses on the New Testament, preferring the synoptic Gospels, particularly Jesus’ ethical teachings—paramount among these, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7)—and the centrality of the cross, which for Hauerwas summarizes Jesus’

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 97-98. Hauerwas sees a reciprocal relationship between Scripture and the church: “Of course Scriptures stands over the community exerting a critical function, but that it does so is an aspect of the community’s self-understanding. Scripture is the means the church uses to constantly test its memory....Scripture has authority in the church, not because no one knows the truth, but because the truth is a conversation for which Scripture sets the agenda and boundaries. Those with authority are those who would serve by helping the church better hear and correspond to the stories of God as we find them in Scripture” (98).

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 98. Siker’s portrayal of Hauerwas’s use of Scripture in ethics is quite positive, acknowledging the centrality of the Bible in Hauerwas’s conception of the church as ethical community. Here, though, he cites Hauerwas’s own admission, “I really do not know the ‘text’ of the Bible well” (238 n.9; quoted from Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993], 9.). Siker goes on to mention, “In private correspondence, Hauerwas has written that ‘when I started I simply did not know the Bible well enough to use it one way or the other’ (238 n.9; quoted from a letter to Jeffrey S. Siker, 17 Mar. 1992). This may explain the relative dearth of specific biblical citations in a number of Hauerwas’s own works (Siker, 238 n.5).

¹¹⁹ Siker, 98. Quotations taken from Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 76.

¹²⁰ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 76-78.

whole life.¹²¹ He also appeals to a number of Pauline writings, especially Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians, as normative for what the community of faith is to look like, and particularly, what type of habits it is to cultivate and manifest. Yet, Hauerwas misses key insights into the theopolitical nature of the People of God by focusing almost entirely on the New Testament—and more narrowly within that to snapshots of Jesus’ ethical teachings and prescriptions for community life—to the neglect of biblical Israel and its theopolitics of covenant as a model for ecclesial politics. If Jesus is, in fact, the fulfillment of Israel’s election and covenant calling, then a robust notion of the latter is necessary to more fully understand ecclesial identity and the problems posed to it by nationalism. Moreover, if there are, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, multiple conceptions of Israel’s identity vying against each other in the narrative, that could have significant implications for contested ecclesial theopolitics today.

Hauerwas sees Christianity as inherently political, its politics defined by the Gospels, wherein “the challenge of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange community, which is shaped by a story of how God is with us.”¹²² The Gospels proclaim that Yahweh proves himself king through the work of Jesus, in which we see God’s continuing rule over nature and history, reclaimed and restored in Christ’s redemptive order. Yet it is unclear what the significance of Yahweh’s reign is given the lack of any robust treatment of Israel. Christianity is inherently political, for a people is presumed by the principle of the “kingdom of God,”¹²³ and in the Beatitudes, “we see nothing less than the order of God’s kingdom, the charter of his commonwealth, as we are treated to a vision of life that can occur only when a people have been formed who know who the true Lord of the world is.”¹²⁴ Christians are by definition engaged in politics, but a politics that finds its locus in servanthood rather than domination, thereby exposing the theological backwardness of any politics rooted in falsehood and

¹²¹ Siker, 99.

¹²² Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 30.

¹²³ Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 115.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

coercion.¹²⁵ Truly, this is an ethic discernible in a study of the Sermon on the Mount, but again, one wonders how any robust theopolitics can be discerned from it without an understanding of the Torah, forming the heart of Israel's covenant, which Jesus claims *in this very sermon* to be fulfilling (Matt 5:17).

In terms of the communal outworking of the biblical salvation history, and in partial contrast with Yoder's emphasis on the processes of regular communal life as sacramental (in lieu of special liturgical rites), Hauerwas emphasizes the role of the community in producing habits of virtue within the individual via liturgy and sacrament, and through the practice of moral mentorship. Particularly important to Hauerwas are the church's sacramental liturgies, chief among them baptism, initiating the believer into Jesus' death and resurrection, and the Eucharist as "the eschatological meal of God's continuing presence" that enables a peaceable people. Such rites "are not just 'religious things' that Christian people do. They are the essential rituals of our politics. Through them we learn who we are."¹²⁶ As such, they are not merely the basis for Christian social engagement, but actually constitute that engagement. As Hauerwas asserts, "The church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic,"¹²⁷ and "these actions are our most important social witness."¹²⁸ I agree with Hauerwas on the importance of these practices for forming identity and enabling Christians to resist countervailing tendencies in the communities where they reside, but at least equally important are the narratives that give these practices theological meaning and import. Identity-forming practices for God's people did not begin with Christ, but with Israel. What Christ proclaims and practices is in continuity with Israel's story, albeit with Israel as it was meant to have been. Yet the theopolitical implications of this for the church today are largely absent from Hauerwas's account. Thus, when such narratives are appropriated by other entities with agendas antithetical to the church's, Hauerwas's theology

¹²⁵ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 102.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

cannot evaluate that move until it sees the ethical results. As stated in the previous section, this neglects some of the root problems facing ecclesial identity today.

William T. Cavanaugh

William Cavanaugh's work involves reading the stories of modern political development and theory against the Christian stories of creation, fall, and redemption. In so doing, he finds that modern politics tends to present itself as an alternative soteriology to that of Christianity. The Christian story begins with the "natural unity of the human race," a unity rooted in the *imago dei* and the source of catholic unity. This unity is disrupted by humanity's sin in the form of a "usurpation of God's position." The initial effect of this sin is the breaking up of the whole of humanity throughout the world, the "very creation of individuals as such, that is, the creation of an ontological distinction between individual and group." Redemption from sin in the person of Jesus Christ is thus the restoration of that primal unity.¹²⁹

Key to God's redemptive activity in the world is the people of God called into political community. Both Israel and the Church are clearly political entities in that they "give order through law and ritual to the social life and everyday practices of a distinctive community of people."¹³⁰ Cavanaugh argues for the church, in continuity with Israel, as a counter-model to the surrounding polities, embodying an alternative politics so the world may see and be transformed. This mission is accomplished first through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, which "now become the center of the ritual fulfillment of the Law, enacting a liturgical drama that recalls the confrontation of Christ with the powers and calls the participants into the body of Christ."¹³¹

Cavanaugh brings biblical Israel into his theopolitical work at several points. It is through covenant, liturgy, and law that Israel embodies the drama of sin and salvation, and all

¹²⁹ Cavanaugh, "The City," 183-184.

¹³⁰ Cavanaugh, "Church," 394.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 396.

three are distinctly political in nature. As he quotes Walter Brueggemann, covenant is the “radical and systemic alternative to the politics of autonomy, the economics of exploitation, and the theology of self-indulgence” from which Israel had been delivered in the exodus. Liturgy, moreover, “is the enacted drama of the different kind of power and the different kind of political order that YHWH wills over against the oppressors of Israel.” Indeed, “this distinctive community is invited to affirm that the world constructed in liturgy is more reliable and more credible than the world “out there.””¹³² Liturgy is definitive for politics in proclaiming Yahweh’s sovereignty in the face of competing claims to lordship by worldly powers and in constructing an alternative way of life. It proclaims a particular salvation history, one that necessarily entails particular political outworkings.

Elsewhere, Cavanaugh explicitly addresses Israel’s covenant identity and mission as normative for the church.¹³³ He takes up the role of the Decalogue in Jewish and Christian theology and uses it to evaluate arguments by proponents of American empire. Focusing on the language of election (Exod 19:5-6), he challenges notions of American exceptionalism that appropriate the language of salvation for the American nation-state as the eschatological fulfillment of Israel rather than the church, the latter being the proper communal locus of salvation.¹³⁴ He then takes the initial commandments of the Decalogue (Exod 20:2-6) to point out the inherent idolatry of placing the national god at the center of the salvation narrative, thereby effecting a system of self-worship. Finally, he addresses the commandment against killing (Exod 20:13) to note the inherent incompatibility of imperial expansion via military force with the biblical tradition of the People of God. He also touches on the Israelites’ failure to rely on Yahweh in situations of threat, and their subsequent prophetic indictments for turning to the tools

¹³² Ibid., 395. Brueggemann quotations taken from “Always in the Shadow of Empire,” *The Church as Counterculture*, Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow, eds. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 48, 43.

¹³³ Cavanaugh, “The Empire of the Empty Shrine: American Imperialism and the Church,” *Cultural Encounters* 2 no. 2 (Summer 2006): 7-19.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 13-14.

of statecraft for deliverance. While relatively brief, Cavanaugh's discussion here points directly to key elements of the biblical narrative and of Israel's politics that are essential for understanding the theopolitics of the church, and he does so, to his credit, much more explicitly than other theopolitical scholars. Nevertheless, such a discussion could and should be elaborated upon in order to more fully understand the significant appropriation of Israel's theopolitics for the church in the New Testament.

Elaboration could include a discussion of biblical Israel's theopolitical development at several key points. In another article, Cavanaugh helpfully points out that Israel's period of statehood—so often taken as normative for contemporary politics by certain Christian theologians—was not by itself definitive for Israel's political experience: "Israel's prior existence as a tribal confederation, and subsequent experience as a temple community and as a federation of synagogues, show that the nation-state is not by any means the most determinative analogue for Israel." As he rightly notes, "Israel is a people, one that stands in a unique relation to all the nations of the earth, because of its covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."¹³⁵ However, it would be a mistake to read the biblical narrative, as Cavanaugh seems to here, as presenting merely a linear progression of political forms for Israel. Rather, what is dramatized in the narrative is a contested theopolitics, a conflict between concurrent and opposed views of Israel's politics and its relation to Yahweh. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, what the careful reader notes throughout Israel's experience, and especially as attested to by the prophets, is a struggle between a politics rooted in Israel's identity and mission given in election and covenant at Sinai, and a statist politics located in a misconstrual of the Davidic covenant. And it is this contested politics, not merely the multiplicity of political forms, that best foreshadows and informs the situation the church faces as its identity and mission are challenged by nationalism.

¹³⁵ Cavanaugh, "Messianic Nation," 276.

Scott Bader-Saye

One scholar of theopolitics who has directly and comprehensively treated the Old Testament narrative is Scott Bader-Saye. Bader-Saye argues that the church has a “common covenant and common calling” with Israel, its identity and mission rooted in Israel’s election. The church is thus “carrying forward Israel’s covenantal politics.”¹³⁶ The church has become depoliticized in modernity, having lost its politics through an inadequate understanding of election, “which sought to leave the Jews and their materiality behind.”¹³⁷ The communal understanding of election in biblical Israel has, in many quarters, been replaced with an individualized conception of election focusing on the predestination of the individual soul. This, he argues, is a misconstrual of Israel’s politics of election. Personal election, he argues, can only be understood as a corollary of communal election.¹³⁸

While some of Bader-Saye’s most important insights will be incorporated into my own discussion of Old Testament theopolitics in Chapter 4, it is worth highlighting several key points for the sake of comparison with the preceding theologians. To begin with, Bader-Saye thinks the “polis” language of Hauerwas has helped to challenge the problem of liberalism in the church, but it unnecessarily relies on “a political and moral discourse from outside the church’s biblical idiom.”¹³⁹ He believes that Hauerwas’s emphasis on the polis also overlooks the tendency of that ancient form of community to be defined by struggle, by conquest of oneself and others and by defense from external threat. Even where Hauerwas alludes to a direct ecclesial continuity with Israel, his argument tends to look overly individualized, wherein “ecclesial practices threaten to become instrumental to the larger goal of the formation of the individual person.”¹⁴⁰ Bader-Saye responds with the priority of the communal and political in the Old Testament narrative,

¹³⁶ Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

superseding any individual identity. Scripture emphasizes God's design for forming a covenant people, where the primary concern is the corporate obedience of the church. For Bader-Saye, the only feasible alternative to modern liberal individualism is not the classical polis, but "a return to Israel, into whose election the church has been graciously grafted."¹⁴¹

For Bader-Saye, Israel's election and its outworking in covenant are not attachments to Israel as a pre-existing political community, but actually constitute Israel as such.¹⁴² Israel becomes a people through its "relationship of mutuality" with Yahweh, in which it freely responds to Yahweh's initiative.¹⁴³ This he contrasts with modernity, which "posited a political sphere outside of the covenant and within which the covenant had to be made intelligible."¹⁴⁴ The church, having accommodated to the latter conception, must return to the prior one, seeing itself as a continuation or extension of the biblical covenant community, which was intended to be a polity in its own right, though of a very different form than the nations.

Torah is central to covenant, both for Israel and by extension, for the church. Including "both the stories of Israel and the practices that correspond to these stories," Torah is the condition of possibility for the people's existence as God's people. For this reason, he states, "Torah obedience is not in opposition to freedom (a point Christians have long misunderstood) but rather is the ground of freedom. Freedom is the result of being trained by the practices of Torah."¹⁴⁵ Thus, Israel's divergence from Torah holiness places the people in bondage, from which they must be redeemed. This is accomplished in Jesus Christ, in whom "redemption includes the ingathering of the Gentiles to share the blessings of the peaceable kingdom."¹⁴⁶ In

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴² Ibid., 35.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

this way, “the promised redemption of Israel and the inclusion of all creation in God’s reign of peace is the unseen political and historical horizon of God’s election.”¹⁴⁷

In this light, the “newness” of the “new covenant” in Jesus Christ is understood by Bader-Saye not in terms of a new people or new content, but rather that Torah will be definitively embodied. The church exists as part of the story of Israel, engrafted onto the same covenant beginning with Abraham, but in a different part of the story wherein the Kingdom of God has indeed arrived and the church lives within that reality.¹⁴⁸ This is the messianic age, wherein Jesus and his disciples “carry with them the visible presence of God’s reign.” The powers are disarmed by the forgiveness of sins on the cross (the precise opposite of their logic of retribution), and the people are released from bondage. Christ’s faithfulness in this endeavor transforms covenant expectations; Torah is not rendered obsolete but “Torah obedience is stamped by the cross of Christ, which becomes the definitive paradigm of faithfulness.”¹⁴⁹ Gentiles participate in the new covenant, but not by being gathered separately from Israel. Rather “after reconstituting a community of Israel that would embody the ways of redeemed life, the Spirit moves to draw the Gentiles into the elect community.”¹⁵⁰ Gentiles are thus gathered through Christ and in the Holy Spirit *into* Israel as “fellow heirs’...*alongside* the original heirs of the covenant.”¹⁵¹

In this manner, the church shares the same vocation as Israel to praise God through its formation as God’s people. It is in this social and political form that the church embodies the “politics of election,” which is understood not as a denial of freedom, but as its very ground: it is “freedom as the capacity to live faithfully,” requiring both “freedom from sin and self-determination and freedom for risky engagement with the reign of God.”¹⁵² For Bader-Saye, “freedom within the covenant means faithfulness to one’s identity before God.” Such freedom is

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 106-7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 108.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵² Ibid., 118.

not found abstracted from the particularities of relationship and communal life; liberation requires covenant, identity requires common life.¹⁵³ Hence the sacrament of baptism, a political practice affirming Christ's lordship and reorienting the identity of the one baptized into covenant community.¹⁵⁴ Or, for that matter, the Eucharist, which as a central act of covenant—a remembrance of Passover, a commitment to a life together in community, and enfleshing the new covenant via Jesus as the perfect embodiment of Torah—acts as the locus of Israel's extension to the Gentiles as well as “a place where the redeemed life of God's elect is recalled, embodied, and anticipated.”¹⁵⁵

I find Bader-Saye's treatment of biblical Israel compelling on many counts, particularly its central focus on covenant and Torah, as well as how covenant identity and mission carry forth into the church. I also appreciate his treatment of certain practices, such as baptism and Eucharist, as theopolitical in nature. For that reason, I appropriate a number of his insights in the biblical theopolitics discussions of Chapters 4 and 5, and will not rehearse them here. I do find certain of his points overstated or unclear, however, which I will address specifically in those later chapters. Suffice it here to say that I believe he overstates the unconditionality of covenant with Israel, overlooking certain key passages that suggest this *realization* of election was always contingent. That is to say, enduring election does not equal enduring covenant, and even an enduring covenant does not necessarily mean a continuously active one. As such, he regards arguments about God's rejection of Israel, however temporary it might be, as arguments against God's trustworthiness. He does not note the possibility that Israel can hypothetically be rejected from a conditional covenant without impinging upon God's credibility in any way. He also does not dwell on the significance of divergence from covenant. Situations of conquest, say by the Assyrians and Babylonians, are put in terms of “threat” rather than “judgment”¹⁵⁶; nothing is said

¹⁵³ Ibid., 124.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 139-141.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 138.

about how covenant is disrupted in such contexts, or about how judgments upon Israel by Yahweh are more often than not direct consequences of Israel's own covenant violations. Bader-Saye admits that “without Israel's decision to live in accordance with its election, however, God's work would remain de facto irrelevant in history despite being de jure a reality.”¹⁵⁷ However, most of his argument seems to revolve around the “de jure” dimension and not nearly enough around the “de facto” reality that in any given context of divergence from covenant, election is simply not being realized. Yet, this is one key place where the biblical narrative of Israel is particularly helpful to the church: it shows the church the all too typical ways in which theopolitical identity and mission are compromised and even rendered inactive by pursuing embodiments—social, political, economic—incongruent with the Kingdom of God.¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavored to examine selected works of theopolitical scholarship with attention to two important elements: (1) what they see as the key challenges facing ecclesial identity today; and (2) how the scholars conceived of Christian salvation history and its attendant political embodiment, especially in light of the biblical narrative. With the former, I was especially concerned with the distinct problem of nationalism, which I discerned to be largely absent within these works; this is excepting for Cavanaugh, who defines and addresses it in a problematic manner. As to the latter, I was particularly concerned about the importance of biblical Israel to ecclesial identity, attention to which I found in degrees ranging from nearly absent to centrally important. Yet even in those who consider it to be centrally important, certain key gaps remain. These findings suggest the necessity of direct and thorough engagement with the problem of nationalism, and particularly with its interweaving of the Christian tradition, as

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ I will not attend in this chapter to the specifics of Bader-Saye's conception of the challenges to ecclesial identity. It is, and I think this is neither disparaging nor an overstatement, almost identical to those of Hauerwas (Bader-Saye's teacher) and Cavanaugh, both of which will be addressed presently.

well as the need to more firmly and clearly root ecclesial identity in a robust biblical theopolitics with Israel's election and covenant as central.

The chapters to follow aim to account for just these considerations. Ordered according to the concerns of this first chapter, Chapter 2 takes up a survey of nationalism scholarship with attention to the theoretical moves relevant to this conversation, while Chapter 3 discusses the specific matter of the relationship between religion—specifically Christianity—and nationalism in the West. Chapters 4 and 5 then present a constructive account of biblical theopolitics in the Old and New Testaments respectively, focusing on Israel as the singular community elected to embody the reign of God on earth as a sign of salvation to the nations, Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's election and covenant, and the church as the theopolitical embodiment of that fulfillment. Chapters 6 and 7 then take up case studies in American Christian nationalism, covering respectively the nationalist narrative of the Christian Right and then that found within the political theologies of two representative theologians of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

CHAPTER 2: NATIONALISM THEORY

Introduction

I argued in the first chapter that Christian theology has not dealt adequately with nationalism as a phenomenon in its own right, and as a pronounced challenge to ecclesial identity. Nationalism is often viewed as a project by the state to create and maintain social cohesion under its control. Yet there is far less attention to the manner in which loyalty is cultivated in the people, much less how nationalism is formulated apart from the state, and particularly from within the church where it entails the syncretism of the biblical narrative with the national. This is a problem theopolitical scholarship needs to understand more deeply so that it may help the church more accurately discern the challenges facing ecclesial identity today, and better address those challenges.

To that end, I present in this chapter the theory and findings of a number of scholars of nationalism, mostly from the social sciences. I begin with key definitions and a fundamental typology, moving from there into an overview of representative approaches, which I then evaluate in order to identify my own. I argue along with certain scholars that nation and nationalism are phenomena distinct from that of the state, and that nationalism is often independently derived and driven. National identity is a mixture of constructed and inherited elements, but what is inherited has often been constructed in the past, and is in the present revamped for use by nationalists and for reception by the people. This is the central nationalist process of *authentication*, by which various symbols and narratives of traditions are culled and even reinterpreted to present a compelling picture of the nation's "true self." As the next chapter will make clear, religion is a central element in this regard, and by its selective appropriation of various elements from particular religious traditions, nationalism makes itself into an alternate theopolitical system, a simulacrum of the traditional religious faith upon which it draws. It is for

this reason that nationalism stands as a major challenge to ecclesial identity today, particularly when its alternate theopolitics is supported by, or emanates from within, the church itself.

Theoretical Frameworks

The study of nationalism, like most fields of study, is marked by a certain measure of ambiguity and confusion, exacerbated by the passion typically associated with its object. As nationalism is discussed in other contexts, such as the ecumenical documents noted in the first chapter, the ambiguity and confusion intensify. Therefore, delineating the parameters of its empirical study is not only appropriate for the present project but should be helpful for general consideration of nationalism within the discipline of theology. I begin with key definitions, from which I move on to discuss fundamental typologies and then the representative approaches in the literature. The section will close with my own evaluation and theoretical orientation.

Key Definitions

It can be difficult to be precise in one's terminology when approaching the topic of nationalism, especially as these terms often seem to be conflated even within nationalism scholarship itself.¹ While an assortment of terms could stand for clarification in this context, there are four that are important to consider here: nation, nationalism, state, and *ethnie*.

Ernest Renan famously described the nation as “a soul, a spiritual principle,” constituted by “possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances” and “actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common.” Indeed, “to have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation.”² For Ernest

¹ See Lowell W. Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 4 (December 1997): 712-16.

² Ernest Renan, “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” in *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

Gellner, nations require common culture and mutual recognition of belonging.³ Anthony Smith defines the *nation* as “a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws.”⁴ Lowell Barrington defines a nation as “a collective of people...united by shared cultural features (myths, values, etc.) and the belief in the right to territorial self-determination.”⁵ Barrington is qualified by Ronald Suny, who refers to nations as “collectives [who feel they are] united...groups of people [who believe they are] linked by unifying cultural characteristics.”⁶ Indeed, as Walker Connor asserts, “nation is a self-defined rather than other-defined grouping”; self-perception is what matters, “not *what is* but *what people believe is*.”⁷ As Barrington’s definition is contained within Smith’s, I take those to be normative for this study, with the caveat by Suny and Connor that self-perception is key.

What is particularly important for the nation, but is not often discussed explicitly, is its shared sense of purpose as a people, a common understanding of the nation’s *raison d’être*. Barrington identifies such a sense of purpose as “controlling the territory that the members of the territory believe to be theirs.”⁸ Yet, while this may be the foremost practical objective—and while it may constitute the ultimate objective for certain elites—within the various features of culture, such a sense of purpose typically entails something “higher,” even spiritual, and often in relation to the divine. If self-perception is key, then how the members of a particular nation view

³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 7.

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 19.

⁵ Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism,’” 712-713.

⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Nationalism, Nation Making, and the Postcolonial States of Asia, Africa, and Eurasia,” in *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, edited by Lowell W. Barrington (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 279. The first bracket is arguably redundant—if people “feel” they are united, they are in fact united—but the second offers an important qualification.

⁷ Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a...” in *Nationalism*, 36-37.

⁸ Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism,’” 713.

its role in the world, often in relation to the divine and almost always over against other nations, can be critical to understanding the nation in question.

As with nation, *nationalism* is a contested term. Smith defines it as “an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a population, some of whose members deem themselves to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation.’”⁹ Anthony Marx defines it as “a collective sentiment or identity, bounding and binding together those individuals who share a sense of large-scale political solidarity aimed at creating, legitimating, or challenging states,” or, in short, “a mass sentiment for or against state power.”¹⁰ For Barrington, it is a “process” of “creation of the unifying features of the nation, or the actions that result from the beliefs of the group”; further, it constitutes “the pursuit—through argument or other activity—of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation.”¹¹ Nationalism is necessarily ideological—it must be a movement rooted in ideas—but it is also a *movement*, i.e., a dynamic process of development and pursuit of goals. In fact, Barrington’s two comments here could be read to indicate that there are *multiple* processes involved. At the very least, there is a distinct process of discerning and defining identity, of cultivating and propagating it amongst the people, i.e., cultivating popular loyalty and thereby creating and perpetuating the nation as such. There is also the process of the pursuit of political power, up to and including territorial autonomy, usually in the form of a state. These processes are often concurrent and closely linked—even mutually influential—but they can be distinguished. Thus, nationalism is a multi-faceted movement. Moreover, it is a movement often, if not always, in contention: “Nationalism is a political movement by definition....the movement must be able to compete effectively against

⁹ Smith, “Culture, Community, and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism,” *International Affairs* 72, no. 3 (July 1996): 447.

¹⁰ Anthony W. Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6-7.

¹¹ Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism,’” 714.

alternative political groups.”¹² This is true both for its internal cultivation of identity and for its external pursuit of political power. It is also the case, because identity is relational—it defines and redefines “self” and “other”—that “nationalism does not simply ‘express’ a pre-existent identity: it ‘constitutes’ one.”¹³

According to Barrington, any nationalist movement must address two questions concerning the boundaries of the nation, namely territory and membership: “Who is the nation? And what territory does the nation have a right to control?”¹⁴ To these I would add a third, namely, “What is the meaning or purpose of the nation?” What is it that sets one’s own nation apart from others, not only in terms of people or geography, but in terms of its role in the world? It is quite conceivable that in certain situations, the question of the nation’s *raison d’être* might be highly contested, while the questions of membership and territory are considered fairly settled. A nationalist movement concentrating on cultural renewal of some sort would be a prime example.¹⁵

As the reader already will have noted, “nation” has been defined in contrast to “state.” A state is the “principal political unity in the international political system corresponding to a territory, a relatively permanent population, and a set of ruling institutions.”¹⁶ The state, in other words, is the institutional apparatus over a given, politically demarcated territory. Typically,

¹² Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), 48.

¹³ Michael Ignatieff, “Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Differences,” *Theorizing Nationalism*, edited by Ronald Beiner (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1999), 92.

¹⁴ Barrington, *After Independence*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Althena Leoussi and Steven Grosby argue that the notion of meaning is directly related to the nation’s stability. This is true for several reasons: (1) meaning emerges over time, involving the “philosophical problem of tradition and its reception,” and specifically historical consciousness; (2) meaning is therefore susceptible to change, given the various circumstances in the life of the nation; (3) meaning not only varies over time, but varies amongst the nation’s members, both individuals and groups; and (4) meaning is actually a “complex of heterogeneous meanings” that contains an inherent tension, often expressed as political controversy, and where one particular interpretation may be dominant over others at a particular point in time. Hence the inherently contested nature of national identity. See Althena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby, “Introduction,” *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, edited by Althena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁶ Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism,’” 713.

nationalist movements either undergird states, or they resist states, attempting to gain control over existing states or to achieve new states of their own; in any event, while the two are usually related, nations and states are distinct entities.¹⁷ Likewise, a distinction is made between “nationalism” and “patriotism,” the latter referring to a love or loyalty to the institutions of one’s state, rather than to one’s nation.¹⁸ Of course, in situations where a nation has successfully achieved state power in some form, or where particular state institutions are seen as manifestations of national identity or culture, this distinction might not be relevant.

One of the ways in which the distinction between state and nation (and to a lesser extent, nationalism and patriotism) is significant is in examining the sources or drivers of nationalism. Whereas most nationalist movements involve states as foils, goals, or both, not all nationalism is state driven. Certainly, nationalism can be fostered by state elites in the pursuit of particular objectives; this is a common occurrence. But it is also true that many nationalist movements are born and catalyzed apart from the state, led by a different set of elites quite apart from state operations, and driven by independently derived goals that are sometimes even a threat to the state establishment. As Josep Llobera writes, “An important characteristic of the modern development of nationalism is to realize that state nationalism is not always successful precisely because of the importance of nationalisms against the state.”¹⁹ In some contexts, the latter command a loyalty and allegiance—even instilling an identity—comparable or greater in power than the state itself, requiring that nationalism be treated as a distinct, and significant, phenomenon.²⁰ And this is not to mention those situations where control of the state is not the central issue, but is merely a means to the end of establishing national meaning.

¹⁷ The term “nation-state,” which technically refers to a correspondence between a people’s national boundaries and their state’s borders, is perhaps a situation where the distinction between state and nation is moot. Yet, to the degree that such correspondence is a less frequent occurrence anymore, the distinction between the terms is becoming increasingly salient.

¹⁸ Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism,’” 714.

¹⁹ Josep R. Llobera, *Foundations of National Identity*, 48.

²⁰ Hence the inadequacy of an almost exclusively state-focused theopolitical ecclesiology, as presented in Chapter 1.

Finally, at the heart of the nation is typically some sort of ethnic community, or *ethnie*. Anthony Smith defines *ethnie* as “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of shared culture, a link to a homeland, and a measure of solidarity, at least among elites.”²¹ This is as opposed to a nation, in which the people group is actively living in its designated homeland.²² *Ethnies* are a type of “collective cultural identity,”²³ in which ethnic ties and group identity derive from myriad factors: “ecological, social and especially cultural and symbolic, such as religion, language and the arts.”²⁴

Though the term *ethnie* is obviously a variant of “ethnic,” for Smith, both are “generally taken to refer to cultural rather than biological attributes...it is with cultural units wider than the family that individuals identify when they belong to, and feel solidarity with, ethnic communities.”²⁵ If this is the case, the idea of “common ancestry” need not entail a shared bloodline as much as a lineage of beliefs and practices. In relation to a given nation, the *ethnie* constitutes a “cultural core” that, over time, gives each nation its character, that to a very great extent defines its identity, and that drives its nationalist endeavors. This is an important point, for if a nationalist movement is often a movement in contention, it stands to reason that such contention could in some instances take the form of a struggle between various groups within or around the nation over the nature of the nation’s cultural core.

²¹ Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2000), 65.

²² Smith, *Cultural Foundations*, 31.

²³ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” in *Identity*, edited by Henry Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 130-131.

²⁴ Smith, “Culture, Community and Territory,” 448. Smith delineates three main types of *ethnies*: (1) ethno-linguistic, the most common type in which members “share a common vernacular code and literature, which defines its cultural characteristics”; (2) ethno-religious, in which members define themselves “primarily in terms of religious beliefs, practices, and symbols”; and (3) ethno-political, in which members define themselves according to “historical memories and political traditions,” anchoring cohesion in “a political myth of foundation and historical memories” (Smith, *The Formation of National Identity*, 133-134).

²⁵ Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 127.

Fundamental Typologies

While different scholars operate with somewhat different schemas in view, there are four basic typologies in nationalism studies: primordialism, constructivism, perennialism, and modernism. These typologies are not usually considered absolute, but rather act as ideal types of scholarship, so as to draw out the nuances of nationalist behavior for comparison and contrast.

Primordialism refers to the understanding that nations are “givens,” inherent to human existence and a natural or divinely endowed form of social life. They are not at their roots invented or constructed, but simply a manifestation of human existence, manifested in “emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate explanations for national mobilization.”²⁶ Primordial ties are seen to explain the “passion and self-sacrifice characteristic of nations and nationalism,”²⁷ and are typically located in shared characteristics like kinship—“extending to a wide population the belief that they descend from a common ancestor and the idea that this generates a sense of identity and of solidarity”²⁸—or language,²⁹ religion, or social practices.³⁰ Such ties, in Clifford Geertz’s words, “‘are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves.’”³¹

Constructivism, by contrast, refers to the perspective that nations are in no way given as facts of nature, but rather are created by humanity for human interests, specifically those of political community. Views vary regarding the agents of this construction (e.g., state vs. non-state leaders), but a cadre of elites is typically involved, crafting the nationalist message according to what will most effectively galvanize the people toward the ends of the nationalist agenda. A fundamental assumption of many constructivists is that nationalist elites are quite free,

²⁶ Daniele Conversi, “Mapping the Field: Theories of Nationalism and the Ethnosymbolic Approach,” *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism*, 15.

²⁷ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 223.

²⁸ Llobera, 185.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁰ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 152.

³¹ *Ibid.* Geertz’s notion of ineffability later came under criticism given that it seemed to exempt nationalistic activity from empirical analysis. Quote taken from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1973) 259-60.

if not completely autonomous, in choosing those elements which will constitute nationalist discourse and national identity, and that selection of such elements often can be fairly arbitrary. Synonymous in many circles with *instrumentalism*, this approach sees ethnicity as a “dependent variable, externally controlled according to its strategic utility for achieving more secular goods (formally in the name of the group, in fact solely to the elites’ advantage).”³² Constructivists tend to emphasize the role of “discursive networks of communication and of ritualized activities and symbolism” in the development of national identity and community,³³ and are suspicious of any argument for the longevity of ethnic/cultural symbols, or the fixity of nations.³⁴

While the primordialist-constructivist dichotomy is concerned largely with instigating factors, the closely tied perennialist-modernist dichotomy is concerned with the historical timing of those factors. *Perennialism* argues for the longevity of the nation as a form of human community, and more specifically, argues that many nations today have roots deep within history. This includes the notion of “continuous perennialism,” focusing on the longevity of particular nations over time, as well as “recurrent perennialism,” emphasizing the recurrence of a particular nation, or of the nation as a general phenomenon, throughout history.³⁵ National identity necessarily contains a number of cultural elements that stem from earlier eras, and these largely determine the shape of contemporary nations and contemporary nationalist movements. Thus, nationalist agents are not all that free in determining what elements to use within nationalist discourse, but are rather bound to those historical features of the nation in question—those memories and sentiments shared by the people—that preexist the nationalist movement itself.³⁶

On the other hand, *modernism* is the understanding that the nation is a specifically modern phenomenon, created under certain modern circumstances. Nations are not derived from

³² Conversi, “Mapping the Field,” 16.

³³ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 224. Smith is actually referring to modernism in this quote, but given that he does not distinguish between modernism and constructivism, I have taken the liberty of appropriating it for the latter, which is consistent with the literature.

³⁴ Conversi, “Mapping the Field,” 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20. See also Smith, *The Nation in History*, 63.

³⁶ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 159.

antiquity; rather, their elements are more or less arbitrarily selected, framed, or even invented by elites to galvanize their people toward national autonomy and political independence. What distinguishes modernism from constructivism—though the two clearly go hand-in-hand—is modernism’s emphasis on the nation as the direct result of historical forces in the modern era, forces usually involving economics, education, and technology for communication. Nations are therefore quite recent and novel, and it is erroneous to attempt to “read the elements of modern nations and nationalism back into earlier, pre-modern collectivities and sentiments.”³⁷

Representative Scholars

Perhaps the nationalism scholar most fundamentally associated with modernism is Ernest Gellner. In his landmark 1983 work, *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner argues that “nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unity should be congruent.” It is a “theory of political legitimacy,” requiring ethnic boundaries not to violate political ones, nor to separate the elite from the masses within a given state.³⁸ For Gellner, the nation is found neither in the nature of things, “nor in the pre-conditions of social life in general.” Rather, it is a phenomenon “inherent in a certain set of social conditions,” namely those of modernity.³⁹ Gellner does not provide a clear-cut definition of nation. However, he posits that persons can be considered of the same nation if “they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating”; yet they must *recognize each other* as belonging to the same nation, including mutually acknowledging rights and duties due each other by virtue of their shared nationhood.⁴⁰ It is this mutual recognition, and not merely the sharing of attributes, that is definitive.

³⁷ Ibid., 18.

³⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

³⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

Drawing on Max Weber, Gellner assumes the state as agent in a nationalism process driven and controlled by the interests of the state's elites. The state constitutes a particular manifestation of a social division of labor, namely that concentrating on "order maintenance,"⁴¹ and over time, it is the state's consolidation and universalization of education—according to the interests of the modern economy—that is definitive for the rise of national identity.⁴² Such education forms a "high culture" within a population, the imposition of which upon a lower culture constitutes nationalism.⁴³ Nationalism, therefore, is not a reawakening of "an old, latent, dormant force," but rather a "new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state."⁴⁴ As political authority is concentrated in the centralized state, each state oversees and is identified with "one kind of culture, one style of communication, which prevails within its borders and is dependent for its perpetuation on a centralized educational system supervised by and often actually run by the state in question," a rather "monolithic educational system" reflecting the economic interests of the modern state.⁴⁵ In this light, "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around."⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., 4. Since the state is necessary for nationalism, he notes, nationalism is therefore not an issue in stateless societies.

⁴² Ibid., 33-34. He argues human society has gone through three major phases: pre-agrarian, agrarian, and industrial. Mentorship and guilds mark the agrarian phase, wherein "clerks"—"those who can read and transmit literacy"—constitute a particular specialization. In the industrial age, however, everyone must be trained to be a clerk in order for society to function properly; this means a universal system of training by specialists in order for individuals "to be properly employable and enjoy full and effective moral citizenship"—hence, a "modern 'national' education system." Thus, for Gellner, "the monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence."

⁴³ Gellner therefore describes nationalism as "the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of social groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves" (Ibid., 57). He later refers to nationalism as a "species of patriotism" distinguished by, among other things, units "poorly endowed with rigid internal sub-groupings" but rather with populations that are "anonymous, fluid and mobile," and not least importantly, "unmediated; the individual belongs to them directly, in virtue of his cultural style, and not in virtue of membership of nested sub-groups" (138). Cf. Cavanaugh's arguments (via Nisbet) about the state subsuming local communities and its corresponding creation of the individual.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

Gellner therefore emphasizes the relatively arbitrary nature of any given national identity. Nationalist movements use “the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically.”⁴⁷ For Gellner, “the cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred and patch would have served as well.”⁴⁸ It is not the content of those pre-existing cultures that matters so much as the interests of the elites appropriating—and reinterpreting—them.

While Gellner is credited with crystallizing the modernist understanding of nationalism, his is certainly not the only modernist approach. Eric Hobsbawm has contributed significantly as well, particularly regarding the understanding of the nation as “invented tradition,” based upon “exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation.”⁴⁹ For Hobsbawm, “invented tradition” refers to “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁵⁰ Of course, any purported continuity with the historic past is “largely factitious”; rather, invented traditions are “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.”⁵¹ The key agent in this construction is the state, which fuses the various invented elements of tradition in a way ultimately decisive for the identity of its citizens.⁵²

⁴⁷ Gellner, 55.

⁴⁸ Gellner, 56.

⁴⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵² In France, Hobsbawm writes, this was accomplished in later modernity via state-run primary education, which he calls “the secular equivalent of the church.” It transformed people into citizens and made the state the main “framework of the citizens’ collective action, insofar as these were officially recognized.” See Hobsbawm, “The Nation as Invented Tradition,” *Nationalism*, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77. Other key inventions of tradition included public ceremonies (e.g., Bastille Day) and the “mass production of public monuments” (80). In contrast to the French attempt to present the nation as new and enlightened, German nationalism sought to present the

Another major representative of the modernist approach to nationalism studies is Benedict Anderson, with his intriguing notion of “imagined communities.” Anderson argues that the conditions of possibility for the nation are inherently modern,⁵³ primary among them the advent of “print-capitalism” and the proliferation of vernacular literatures. As he writes, “one of the earlier forms of capitalist enterprise, book-publishing felt all of capitalism’s restless search for markets,” which ultimately enabled increasing numbers of people to “think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.” Print-languages created a basis for national identity in three ways: (1) by creating “unified fields of exchange and communication” in between Latin and the spoken vernacular; (2) by imbuing a sort of “fixity” to language, thus attributing to it a semblance of longevity or even antiquity; and (3) by creating new “languages-of-power” that diverged from older administrative vernaculars.⁵⁴ Indeed, the spread of the use of vernacular languages was in many instances a spread in the use of *state* languages, clearly implicating the state in the rise of national identity.⁵⁵

Paul Brass offers an explicitly “instrumental” approach in his studies of nationalism, a sort of compromise between modernism and perennialism, but relying upon a robust constructivism. For Brass, ethnicity and nationalism are “social and political constructions” by elites, who “draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and

Second German Empire as a continuation of the First, necessitating a merger of Prussian and German history, including the challenge of incorporating the Holy Roman Empire into nineteenth-century nationalism (79-80). In point of fact, writes Hobsbawm, unification of the nation under Bismarck was “the *only* national historical experience which the citizens of the new Empire had in common” (81). The German nation was therefore marked by a common reception of the nationalist message rather than a common experience of historical longevity.

⁵³ Such conditions included three ancient “fundamental cultural conceptions” which “lost their axiomatic grip on men’s minds.” These three are (1) the notion that “a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth”; (2) the conviction that a given society was naturally hierarchical, revolving around a monarch set apart from the people and usually with a divine mandate; and (3) a perception of time wherein “cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical.” See Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities,” *Nationalism*, 89.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

economic advantage for their group as well as for themselves.” Elements of ethnic identity act as “political resources” for elites otherwise occupied with competition for their own aggrandizement. Such elements are used by elites to solidify political identity, and “can be shifted to adjust to political circumstances and the limitations imposed by state authorities.”⁵⁶ That process of appropriation tends to simplify ethnic identity to the point of distortion, choosing elements that are “politically useful rather than central to the belief systems of the people in question.” Yet, such authorities do not have infinite sway in their appropriation of ethnic elements; elites are constrained by those elements in terms of their discourse, their “appeals” to the masses.⁵⁷

In Brass’s instrumental conception of nationalism, ethnicity is “an alternative form of social organization and identification,” one that is “contingent and changeable” according to the requirements of a particular context. If an ethnic group succeeds in acquiring political rights, including territorial autonomy, it becomes a nation. A nation therefore can be understood as “an ethnic community politicized, with recognized group rights in the political system.” Central to that politicization is a process of identity formation revolving around cultivating the meanings of a variety of symbols in a given context, and attempting to achieve a measure of consensus on such meanings within a people.⁵⁸ Symbol selection involves competition among elites, as well as the likelihood of transforming a given ethnic identity from its initial form; and Brass adds that such “striving for multisymbol congruence is pursued by ethnic group leaders as much as by state-builders.”⁵⁹ Thus, nationalist elites need not be, and often are not, members of the state apparatus, nor is nationalism necessarily a monolithic, state-driven project. Yet, nationalism is by

⁵⁶ Brass, 15. It is interesting to note a limited divergence from Gellner and Anderson, where Brass states on this same page that “political mobilization of traditional rural communities can occur in modernizing societies in the absence of fully developed systems of mass communication, especially through traditional networks of religious communication.” Of course, this then begs the question to Gellner and Anderson, and perhaps even Brass himself, of the inherent modernity of the nation as such, given the lack of *necessity* of modern communication, whether in modern education or print-capitalism.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

definition a political movement, and must be able to compete against other political groups as well as, where relevant, state efforts to suppress it. To the degree that the movement can identify with, rather than merely represent, the community, it will be more effective against external political pressure.⁶⁰

John Armstrong argues for a more thoroughgoing perennialist approach. Focusing on the *longue durée*, Armstrong essentially reverses the modern conception of national development by perceiving modern nationalism as “part of a cycle of ethnic consciousness.” It is this broader story that is of interest to him, within which modern nationalism constitutes merely a recent period; moreover, it is precisely because ethnic consciousness is cyclical that he argues that “widespread intense ethnic identification” is *recurrent*, albeit manifested differently in various contexts.⁶¹

Armstrong seeks to shift the focus of examination from the group’s internal characteristics to its self-perceived boundaries. He draws on the work of Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth, who argues that group boundaries are rooted in group perceptions that concentrate on distinguishing its members from other groups; groups tend to define themselves by exclusion, “by comparison to ‘strangers.’”⁶² Such self-perception is key to understanding the emergence of nations and nationalism: “The primary characteristic of ethnic boundaries is attitudinal. In their origins and in their most fundamental effects, ethnic boundary mechanisms exist in the minds of their subjects rather than as lines on a map or norms in a rule book.” While the latter can act as symbols, i.e., indicators of boundaries, they are secondary effects.⁶³

Armstrong sees the interaction of symbols as a type of communication, the means by which the symbols become effective as boundary mechanisms. In some cases, the content of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶¹ John Armstrong, “Nations before Nationalism,” *Nationalism*, 141.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 144.

symbols can be established “generations or even centuries” before they are communicated as boundary markers. Hence the significance of the *longue durée*, communication “between the dead and the living”: for Armstrong, “the persistence of the symbol is more significant than its point of origin in the past.”⁶⁴ Over a long period of time, “the legitimizing power of individual mythic structures tends to be enhanced by fusion with other myths in a *mythomoteur* defining identity in relation to a specific polity.” Perhaps the most significant feature of myth is its ability, when recited, “to arouse an intense awareness among the group members of their ‘common fate,’” a pronounced “solidarity against an alien force.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Interestingly, Armstrong cites the category of “sacral symbols” persisting over long periods, specifically mentioning “formal definitions designed to preclude idiosyncratic usage in doctrinal matters” at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. As he writes, “such liturgical symbols, strictly regulated in both the Eastern Orthodox and the Latin Catholic churches, came to acquire strong implications for ethnic identity” (Ibid., 146).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 145. Considerably further along the spectrum is the primordialist work of Pierre van den Berghe, who opts for a “socio-biological” perspective on nations and nationalism. In this approach, the human animal is seen as seeking to maximize “inclusive fitness,” the broadest scope of kin selection that allows for mutually beneficial cooperation. See Pierre van den Berghe, “A Socio-Biological Perspective,” *Nationalism*, 96. In addition to kin selection, the main bases for human sociality are reciprocity—cooperation for mutual benefit—and coercion, or “the use of force for one-sided benefit.” All societies are organized around these three principles, though as society becomes more complex, reciprocity and coercion (with the emergence of the state) become more salient. Van den Berghe’s aim is to “reduce individual behavior, social structure and cultural superstructure to the competition for scarce resources between individual organisms, each one acting, consciously or unconsciously, to maximize its gains or minimize its losses.” His central thesis is that “both ethnicity and ‘race’ (in the social sense) are, in fact, extensions of the idiom of kinship, and that, therefore, ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection” (97).

Van den Berghe goes on to distinguish between two types of human collectivities: (1) smaller kinship-based groups operating according to the passions and sentiments referred to as “nationalism, tribalism, racism, and ethnocentrism” (98); and (2) larger and more complex state-organized societies, which are more recent developments. The latter “are more amenable to cool, rational calculations of interest, and they do not as readily unleash orgies of passion” (99). Within that context, coercion can arise in situations of competition over scarce resources; such coercion often attempts to legitimate itself, usually either through some guise of kin selection (which he considers largely “pre-industrial”) or through self-presentation as “reciprocity and exchange” (characteristic of more “democratic” frameworks in modernity, whether liberal or socialist) (102).

This dichotomy leads to a more pronounced sub-debate within nationalism literature, namely the distinction often made between *ethnic* and *civic* nation types. This distinction is effectively challenged in Bernard Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation,” *Theorizing Nationalism* (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press, 1999), 103-118. Often, notes Yack, nations such as Germany, Japan, and those in Eastern Europe are placed under the first category while France, Canada, and the United States are listed in the second. Yack argues this is largely a façade, “part of a larger effort by contemporary liberals to channel national sentiments in a direction—civic nationalism—that seems consistent with the commitments to individual rights and diversity that they associate with a decent political order” (104). In fact, he argues, the distinction itself is ethnocentric, exalting certain political identities (usually French or American) which are in fact just as culturally-based as “ethnic” ones. This is even inherent to liberal ideals, wherein notions

Anthony D. Smith and Ethnosymbolism

Influenced in part by Armstrong, Anthony Smith has challenged modernism on a number of counts. Smith argues that any adequate approach to understanding nations and nationalism must take into account their cultural roots, which often run long and deep in history. It is the actual *content* of these roots that matters as much as—if not more than—the interests of the elites who appropriate them or the historical conditions at hand. That said, for Smith, the effort to authenticate the nation’s “true self” and to galvanize the people toward its actualization is at the heart of the nationalist endeavor.

Contra Gellner (his former teacher), Smith asks whether it is the conditions and needs of industrialism that explains the new “high culture,” or whether it is actually a derivation of the elite high culture of a dominant *ethnie*, the old culture being more determinative of national development than nationalist selection.⁶⁶ Gellner sees nationalists as virtually unconstrained in their dissection, extraction, and appropriation of elements of a people’s cultural history, but Smith asks whether it can be “ransacked” in this manner. According to Smith:

Once unleashed, the emotions generated by such interpretation of the heroic past have deep and lasting consequences that bind instigators and followers into a framework and tradition not of their own making...They become subject to the continuities of tradition handed down by successive generations of a community, and by the understandings and emotions crystallized in those traditions in which they have been socialized. In other words, nationalists can sometimes use the ‘ethnic past’ for their own ends, but not in the long run: they soon find themselves locked into its framework and sequences, and the assumptions that underlie the interpretations of successive generations.⁶⁷

I note in this excerpt several key points indicative of Smith’s overall argument. First, modernism tends to underestimate if not ignore the power of the emotional ties of the masses to

of popular sovereignty necessarily require people to think of themselves as members of “pre-political communities...logically and historically prior to the communities created by their shared political institutions (109). But not only is this notion of “civil society” historically untenable, he argues, the ethnic identity of the prior society is as well, given that such identity is always evolving (110). Liberals fail to see that their ideas are tied to communities that propagate certain *cultural* identities, so while distinctions can be made regarding the relative inclusivity of one form versus another, we cannot simply construct “a freely chosen and purely civic form of national identity.” And after all, civic ideals can be just as intolerant as ethnic ones (115).

⁶⁶ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

their past. Such ties often strongly recommend particular methods of galvanization over others, thereby constraining nationalist elites in their activities. In their efforts to resist an earlier perennialism amongst nationalism scholars who too often shared the ideologies of the movements they studied, modernists have forgotten this key question: Just what makes some elements of a people's "ethno-history" more evocative and effective than others?

This leads to the second point, that both "instigators" and "followers" alike are bound by the cultural history of their people. Not only are the people responsive to particular messages that correspond to how their understandings have already been framed, thus constraining elites in their appropriation of the people's culture and history, but those elites themselves are usually formed by that history. The modernist conception of rational elites calculating what elements of culture are most effective toward mobilizing the populace ignores the fact that those very elites are often themselves products of the same, and will perceive and select among the available options according to that prior formation.

The third point is by implication, namely that in Smith's understanding, nationalists essentially join into something much larger than themselves. What they are able to do innovatively is usually limited and temporary; what matters more is that which they have joined, namely the cultural and/or political development of a people through an often extensive period of time. Hence the importance of attention to the *longue durée*: nationalists not only appropriate it, they are part of it.

Of course, as Smith asserts, there is often not just one continuous and unchanging "ethnic past" for a given community. Rather, as the dynamics of the group change over time, "new interpretations of the past are generated and, after a time, become part of a more complex overall image and understanding of 'our ethnic pasts.'" That said, potential change is limited by existing continuities and previous interpretations, resulting in "a complex interplay between the needs and interests of modern generations and elites, the patterns and continuities of older cultures, and the

mediating interpretations of ‘our’ ethnic pasts.”⁶⁸ Such mediating interpretations indicate a critical lacuna in the modernist theories advocated by Gellner and others, namely “the modern desire to *authenticate* the past, to select from all that has gone before that which is distinctive, unique and ‘truly ours,’ and thereby to mark out a unique shared destiny.” Gellner clearly sees this activity as central to the nationalist agenda, but does not explain why such “authentication” would be necessary if there was not already some sort of tradition both requiring and providing the criteria for authentication.⁶⁹ And this is not to mention another point of frequent neglect by modernists, namely the importance of reception of the nationalist message by the people. Both of these will be explored further in short order.

Smith critiques the argument that nationalism is necessarily state-derived. Not only does the argument overlook the fact that not all nationalisms have actually sought independent statehood; the state-centered argument also precludes consideration of the nation as community, i.e., “how the ‘nation’ has become so important to vast numbers of people across the globe, and why millions have been prepared to lay down their lives for an apparently abstract community of strangers.” Certainly, state-centered approaches acknowledge the importance of ideology and ethnic symbolism in political formation, “yet the concept of the nation embraces far more than the idea of a political community or vehicle for state power, even one with fixed borders: it refers also to a distinctive culture community, a ‘people’ in their ‘homeland,’ a historic society and a moral community.”⁷⁰ Therefore, nation must be understood not only in Rogers Brubaker’s terms

⁶⁸ Hence Smith’s definition of national identity as “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage.” Smith, *Cultural Foundations*, 19.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

of “category of practice,” “institutionalized cultural and political form,” and “contingent event,”⁷¹ but also as a “felt and lived community, one which has very real and powerful consequences.”⁷²

As an alternative to modernist approaches, Smith offers an *ethnosymbolic* account of nations and nationalism that “seeks to link modern nations and nationalism with earlier collective cultural identities and sentiments.”⁷³ This centers on the notion of cultural nationalism, the role of the *ethnie*, and the pursuit of a cohesive national identity within a given group.

Ethnosymbolism considers the central elements of *ethnies* and nations to be “socio-cultural and symbolic, rather than demographic or political.”⁷⁴ From these cultural features, a “living past” can be “rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias” and “modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷² Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 77. For Smith, nationalism is not simply about demarcating boundaries or the pursuit of state power: “It is not just in the shape, but in the content of what lies within, that we need to seek an explanation. It is the relationship, emotional as well as political, between land and people, history and territory, that provides one of the main motive forces for national mobilization and subsequent claims to title-deeds” (83). Nationalism is the pursuit of identity, “a sense of a distinctive cultural heritage and ‘personality’ for a given named population,” which often takes the form of “movements for cultural renewal and moral regeneration,” (90) movements which can quite easily occur within the context of stable, uncontested states. The meaning of the nation, its reason for being and its destiny: these lie at the heart of many nationalist movements, and an exclusive focus on state action is inadequate for understanding their formulation and reformulation.

While I am in agreement with Smith’s rebuttal against an exclusive state focus, I would question to what degree such a “felt and lived community” is significant—or even intelligible—outside the context of practice. Practice both cultivates and issues from emotion and from a sense of solidarity, so it would seem a rather central element in any understanding of the nation and nationalism. Indeed, as Smith discusses the process of authenticity, one sees practices at the very heart of national life. They are constitutive of that life, even according to his own schema, so it is difficult to see precisely what lies outside the realm of practice—robustly defined—that is significant.

⁷³ Smith, *The Nation in History*, 62.

⁷⁴ This is a dichotomy oft-repeated by Smith, occurring elsewhere in his writings as one between “cultural” and “political” nationalisms. I consider it a rather strange one, since it is impossible for the political not to be cultural and symbolic, or vice versa. Here, it no doubt points to his attempt to distinguish between those elements that are inherited and those that are engineered. However, it does not seem open to the possibility that those elements inherited from previous generations were actually engineered in those generations. Smith might respond that such a point is not relevant, considering the question is what is occurring in the nationalist scenario at present, regardless of a tradition’s roots. But disregarding the tradition’s roots, of course, would contradict the heart of his argument.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 9.

Within this approach, Smith delineates five general stages of national formation, which often become “components of ethnic myths,” elements of the nationalist narrative about a given nation. The process begins with “ethnic origins, the coalescence of clans and tribes, settlements and villages, into wider cultural and political networks.” This period is linked especially with “foundation myths,” which tell the community about its emergence and source of existence. The second stage is “ethnic consolidation,” a blossoming of culture, military feats, and the activity of “sages, saints, and heroes” who embody virtue and valor. This is the period remembered by later generations as the “golden age” of their history. The third is “development and division, often seen as decline.”⁷⁶ Here, the golden age has given way to a period of social decay: “The myth of decline tells us how the community lost its anchor in a living tradition, how the old values became ossified and meaningless, and how, as a result, common sentiments and beliefs faded to give way to rampant individualism and the triumph of partisan interests over collective ideals and communal solidarity.”⁷⁷ In the fourth stage, nationalism emerges as a “desire to ‘reawaken’ and ‘regenerate’ the community.” This occurs typically through a selective “recasting” of the past, singling out a particular version of the community’s founding and flowering periods and revising or omitting detrimental aspects, providing inspiration to recapture the golden age of yore. Finally, the fifth stage is the period of the new nation, entailing political and economic institutionalization.⁷⁸

The past is especially decisive for present nationalism in light of the “tendency of later generations, especially of nationalists, to rediscover, authenticate and appropriate aspects of what they assume is ‘their’ ethnic past.”⁷⁹ This process, which Smith elsewhere simply calls *authentication*, constitutes an essential component of nationalism, enabling nationalists to provide

⁷⁶ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” 141-142; see also *Myths and Memories*, 62-67.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 67.

⁷⁸ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” 142-143; see also *Myths and Memories*, 67-70.

⁷⁹ Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 63-64.

a compelling account of their nation to both their fellow nationals and to outsiders.⁸⁰ Indeed, “the presence or absence of a ‘core *ethnie*’ ...is relevant only if there is also a vivid sense of ethno-history which has been nourished in the popular consciousness, and which forms part of a popular heritage and collective memory.”⁸¹ Such “‘ethno-history’ denotes, not the disinterested enquiries of professional historians into ethnic pasts, but the highly selective myths and memories of the members of a given ethnic community or nation.”

Here, argues Smith, the nationalist acts as archaeologist, actively intervening in national construction via a three step process.⁸² The nationalist first rediscovers the people’s ethnic past (“ethno-history”), especially that of a golden age, which in reconstructed form becomes the standard of evaluation for the present community and the inspiration for its correction,⁸³ the “canon of authenticity and creativity for latter-day nationalists.”⁸⁴ This then requires authentication of that past, a determination of what is both “distinctive” and “indigenous” regarding the community’s origins and achievements. Finally, the past is reappropriated: “the people must be encouraged to take possession of their authentic vernacular heritage and their genuine ethno-history.”⁸⁵ This process leads to the “purification of culture,” characterized as “seeking to purge the communal culture of foreign elements...[and] cleansing the community itself of everything alien and extraneous.”⁸⁶

Evaluation

Each of these scholars has legitimate elements to contribute to an adequate understanding of nationalism, though the modernist conception is far less convincing than a more perennialist-

⁸⁰ Smith, *Myths and Memories*, 64.

⁸¹ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” 138.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸³ Smith, “Culture, Community and Territory,” 450.

⁸⁴ Smith, *The Nation in History*, 67.

⁸⁵ Smith, “Culture, Community and Territory,” 451. “Genuine” refers here not so much to objective historicity as to what a given community can consider as truly “their own.”

⁸⁶ Smith, “The Formation of National Identity,” 149.

constructivist approach such as Smith, perhaps combined with Brass's key insight into symbol competition. For his part, I agree with Gellner's idea about the political principle of nationalism—that national identity and political borders should coincide—but he is mistaken to assume this is only a modern development. As we will see in the next chapter on religion and nationalism, notions of homogeneity within a particular political context were widespread well before the French Revolution. This places into doubt Gellner's primary assertion, that nations are exclusively the result of modern historical conditions. Smith points out that for Gellner's theory to work, there had to be a pre-existing sense of cohesion along national lines; Gellner describes the rise of the nation far too narrowly.⁸⁷

Moreover, Gellner's assertion of the fabrication and interchangeability of a group's cultural and historical elements is overstated. Certainly, nationalists are selective and often distortive in their appropriation, but they are not able to choose from an infinite store of elements; what is available is rather limited, not only by the cultural circumstances and characteristics, but by the elites' own predispositions. Smith is also correct to point out Gellner's failure to explain the nationalist desire to authenticate certain elements over others, or to account for the reception of nationalist propaganda by the people. Finally, there is a paradox in Gellner's approach, in that he refers to nation and nationalism as inherent within industrialization, as structural requirements for industrial development. However, with regard to the category of nation, this amounts to a type of primordialist argument: the nation as a category of social body is a given of modernity, an inevitable product necessitated by industrial development, a phenomenon that could not help but

⁸⁷ Specifically, Smith questions Gellner's notion of peasants coming to differentiate between a "co-national, one understanding and sympathizing with their culture, and someone hostile to it." According to Gellner, "this very concrete experience taught them to be aware of their culture, and to love it (or, indeed, to wish to be rid of it) without any conscious calculation of advantages and prospects of social mobility (Gellner, 61). But Smith points out this reasoning contains a contradiction for Gellner, because such cultural awareness is, in Gellner's own schema, awareness of the "low culture" preceding industrialization, not the industrial high culture. Therefore, "this in turn suggests that the nation and nationalism pre-exist the transition to industrialism, that the particular new high culture has not yet been created, at least, not by understanding co-nationals, and that the actual distance between low and high cultures may not be as great as the theory assumes." Ultimately, Smith argues, it is this low culture that unifies the peasantry and prompts hostility toward the bureaucrats outside it (Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 41).

occur under modern circumstances. Modernist scholarship thus requires both constructivist and primordialist elements, which indicates a paradoxical if not self-contradictory line of argument. After all, if nations could not help but have developed under modern circumstances, then how is it that a given national identity can be assumed to be utterly fabricated? Would a historical determinism not be involved in individual cases, too? If not, then modernism must provide an account of how the general phenomenon can be so determined, but not its historical instances.

Hobsbawm's approach is somewhat more convincing, especially his notion of ongoing, repeated practices inculcating values, and arguably constituting identity, within a people. However, the novelty of such an activity is rather suspect, considering one can find the same general phenomenon in different contexts throughout history.⁸⁸ Also, while in the sense of unbroken tradition, continuity with the past can often be fictitious, the past is still quite significant to the present in providing the fields of available options to the crafters of the nationalist message. Additionally, Smith rightly criticizes Hobsbawm's portrayal of the people as essentially passive, merely acted upon by the state with little or no agency of its own to create, propagate, receive, or reject nationalist discourse. Hobsbawm suggests the nationalist message must be on a "wavelength" to which the people can tune in, but as Smith points out, Hobsbawm does not explain how a particular wavelength pertains to a particular people.⁸⁹

I find Paul Brass's conception quite helpful in its concentration on the processes of construction and competition over symbol selection, the latter which is overlooked in most modernist studies. I believe such competition to be significant to nationalist debates as they arise

⁸⁸ This is where a study such as Grosby's is helpful. Grosby investigates to what extent such constitutive beliefs and practices of national identity can be found in ancient Israel, and finds that they were indeed present to a qualitative degree comparable to modernity. See Steven Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

⁸⁹ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 129. Benedict Anderson is helpful in pointing to the role of the collective imagination in the creation of the nation. However, his concentration on print-capitalism overlooks a number of earlier forms of knowledge transmission and identity formation, say the Roman imperial cult or networks of religious instruction. As Adrian Hastings will point out in the next section, Anderson inexplicably neglects the role of the Bible in premodern eras, both in terms of the diffusion of vernacular literatures and in terms of fostering cohesive identities.

in the context of cultural renewal. I agree with his citation of the tendency of nationalist efforts to oversimplify and distort the elements and traditions upon which they draw;⁹⁰ I will argue in the next chapter that this is a point Smith does not take adequately into account. I also appreciate Brass's moderating of nationalist autonomy, pointing out the ways in which elites are actually constrained in their activities. Moreover, his notion of ethnicity as a form of "contingent and changeable" social organization is helpful, so long as that is likewise moderated; there would logically be points of continuity and discontinuity over time within a group's traditions and between those traditions and their appropriation by nationalists.

That said, I would question two points in Brass: the politicization of ethnic communities and elite instrumentalism. I question the former because it suggests earlier communities are non-political; undoubtedly, there was social organization in place already, so the most that could be said is that they are either re-politicized or more intensely politicized, and even the latter is debatable.⁹¹ I question the point on instrumentalism only in the sense that we should avoid assuming elites are detached, rational actors operating for their own aggrandizement; many are true believers in their national identity, having been formed in many ways by that identity or elements thereof prior to undertaking their respective movements. Not only are they often predisposed to certain elements and manners of appropriation, but they exist in more continuity with the people than Brass's approach might imply.

In conjunction with Brass's constructivism, I find Smith's approach the most interesting and convincing.⁹² While much of nationalism scholarship occupies itself with the question of

⁹⁰ A point made as well by Gellner (Gellner, 55).

⁹¹ This reflects a bias within the field as a whole that appears in several different forms: religion versus politics, political versus cultural, ethnic versus political, etc. It will become more apparent in the next chapter on religion and nationalism, where I will address it in that context.

⁹² Armstrong argues well the "attitudinal" nature of ethnic boundaries, as well as the importance of definition over against others, though I am hesitant to cite the latter as the essence of nationalism or even always as a core element. I believe there are instances where group identity is valued in and of itself; while its definition may be prompted or intensified by comparison to another, particularly a threatening "other," such occasioning does not always constitute essence. I do agree with him, though, regarding the importance of mythic structures arousing awareness of common fate and solidarity in the face of threat.

how nationalism comes about, Smith—by my reading—does more than any other to address the question of the *content* of nationalism. Specifically, I believe he more adequately than the others (1) delineates the ways in which nationalism can be formulated and driven apart from state elites; (2) takes into account the various constraints upon nationalist elites, which are not always external factors; (3) considers the role of the people, particularly to their reception of the nationalist message, but also to their potential role in the crafting thereof; and (4) delineates a detailed manner in which nationalism usually requires an intensive project of authentication.

While the reader may wonder at my affinity for Smith considering my own proclivity for constructivism, I believe he is actually more constructivist than he tends to admit. Certainly, Smith is influenced by Armstrong in his emphasis on the *longue durée*, and he is at pains to note the significance of tradition and the many ways it constrains nationalist elites. However, the center of his schema is the notion of *authentication* and the nationalists' efforts to select and reinterpret what they perceive as key elements of their tradition; this is a process of construction, not merely of inheritance or reception from earlier generations. And where he is explicitly critical of constructivism, I think Smith sometimes underplays the extent to which elites in various situations are willing and able to act “constructively” in crafting their discourse and in shaping the nation's meaning for its people. For instance, while he rightly notes Hobsbawm's failure to explain how a particular “wavelength” obtains in a certain context, Smith fails to account for situations in which elites are able to artificially (if even temporarily) expand the people's wavelength via framing of circumstances, especially notions of threat.⁹³ That said, I am in agreement contra Gellner that nationalists cannot completely or even mostly fabricate elements

I am far less convinced by Van den Berghe. Animalistic instinct falls far short of explaining the scale of passion and imagination necessary for nationalism to exist, not to mention the centrality of symbols and discourse in the nationalist endeavor and, frankly, in national life. His approach is admittedly reductionistic, but it is also atomistic and naturalistic, sacrificing what I believe are a number of key considerations in understanding nations. While he denies it, it is difficult to see how his approach is not yet another form of social Darwinism.

⁹³ One thinks of recent efforts in the United States to unify the public politically and galvanize them behind certain military policies via a discourse portraying terrorists as hating the American way of life and liberty, when such terrorist organizations are typically operating out of rather narrow geopolitical concerns.

with which to galvanize the people, nor are such elements interchangeable; nor do I believe that nationalists for the most part act arbitrarily, free from constraint upon their circumstances or upon themselves. Rather, elites and people alike are formed—their alternate orientations to the national project having much more to do with their relative positions of power than with any respective differences in formation and constraint.

In short, I find a sort of perennialist-constructivist approach most helpful for understanding the emergence and the characteristics of most nations, as well as how and why nationalist movements operate as they do. I am less concerned in my studies to develop general or generalizable theories of nationalism than I am for understanding particular cases in depth, but I do believe that a tempered constructivism, with attention to the content of tradition as much as the interests and activities of nationalists, is most helpful as general theoretical orientations go.⁹⁴

Conclusion

In response to what I argued in the first chapter were inadequate treatments of the phenomenon of nationalism in theopolitical scholarship, I have presented in this chapter a general overview of major scholarship on the phenomenon, sorting that scholarship according to general typologies and representative theoretical approaches. My purpose in doing so is not only to delineate the parameters of current studies, but to begin to point out where I believe certain theopolitical scholarship has misappropriated nationalism literature in favor of a modernist

⁹⁴ For this reason, I am intrigued by Philip Gorski's "postmodern" approach to nationalism studies, wherein he seeks to take cases of nations and nationalism on their own terms (literally). See Philip S. Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism" *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (March 2000): 1428-68. This approach, avoiding what Gorski perceives as the essentialist claims of modernists and others, focuses instead on differences in the intensity and scope of mobilization between different cases of nationalism. He also proposes concentrating on the "surface characteristics" of nationalist discourse, employing textile metaphors (fabric, threads, fibers, raw materials) to examine the unity and coherence of that discourse. Within that schema, he aims to "describe and explain the results of this process, to show how and why a particular fabric, thread, or fiber looks the way that it does." The goal is basically a taxonomy of nationalist discourses and an explanation as to why they operate the way they do, with an eye toward internal coherence. In view of the frequent social-science tendency to sacrifice depth of case understanding for generalizability and breadth of explanatory power, I appreciate Gorski's orientation.

approach that emphasizes the virtual fabrication of state-crafted national identities, to the neglect of certain key insights by other approaches more attuned to the enduring effects of certain traditions over time, even as those traditions are deliberately reinterpreted and reappropriated for nationalist elites for more contemporary agendas. This is the process of authentication, which modernism and its theological appropriators overlook, but which must be considered in any adequate theological treatment of nationalism as a challenge to ecclesial identity.

The next chapter reinforces the emphasis on authentication by discussing nationalism more specifically in terms of its relationship to faith traditions, and in particular Christianity. Surveying the arguments of several scholars of the subject, it points out where their work illuminates the use of elements of the Christian tradition and biblical narrative by nationalist elites, but also where these scholars themselves overlook the deeper theological content and implications of those nationalist appropriations. This is where the theopolitical scholarship of the first chapter can act as a theoretical check on nationalism scholarship even as it learns from and is improved by that scholarship.

CHAPTER 3--NATIONALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

The previous chapter surveyed the various theoretical approaches representative of current scholarship in nationalism studies. This is part of the larger project at hand, namely identifying and understanding nationalism as a challenge to ecclesial identity, a situation that the first chapter portrayed as inadequately understood in contemporary theopolitical scholarship. The current chapter delves deeper in order to examine the relationship of nationalism to religious traditions, and in particular, Christianity.

Within nationalism scholarship, the virtual neglect of religion by modernists has constituted one of the more robust lines of critique against their conception of nations and nationalism. In addition, it points to the central importance of meaning in the nation's sense of self, its *raison d'être*, particularly when that is located in some sort of divine sanction or mandate. This move involves appropriating elements of pre-existing religious traditions in order to galvanize the public into action. In the case of Christian nationalisms, this is done not only by appropriating various Christian symbols but also and especially the narrative of the Christian scriptures. For this reason, theopolitical scholarship must recognize where and how the biblical narrative is being used to redefine the identities of Christians according to an altered theopolitical narrative, one which fuses an incomplete and therefore distorted version of the Christian salvation history with a national narrative proposed by nationalist elites.

In this chapter I look at several different approaches to the study of religion and nationalism, all of which bring out vital issues for consideration by the scholarly communities of both nationalism and theology. As I present them, each successive scholar improves upon the work of the foregoing one in terms of delineating what is going on with the nationalist use of religious elements. Yet, I will show how their lack of adequate attention to the theological nuances of the religious elements they bring to light ultimately brings their explanations up short.

Anthony Marx: Selective Exclusion and the Consolidation of Loyalties

While sharing modernism's state-centered focus, Anthony Marx argues the modernist chronology falls short in failing to recognize considerably earlier attempts to consolidate public support either behind or against particular states.¹ Moreover, it neglects the central element of religion—as opposed to economic factors, for instance—as a means by which elites and commoners alike could mobilize for or against a given regime. Marx argues this is to miss the key element in the rise of nationalism, an element which actually locates that rise in early modern Europe, at least two hundred years before the French Revolution.

Marx rejects any assumption of preexisting national cohesion.² Rather, as early modern rulers attempted to consolidate centralized rule, establishing the loyalty of their subjects became a key concern, especially when the masses mobilized against such centralization. Both state and popular leaders attempted to garner public support by means of “selective domestic exclusion.” State or anti-state elites would choose those who would be included and exhorted toward loyalty, and would “thereby identify and bind the core constituency of and as the nation, selecting, aggravating, and playing off established antagonisms against some other group thereby excluded.”³ Marx argues that these political actors would give in to the prejudices of a particular constituency and aim exclusionary policies at that constituency's adversaries; by so doing, elites would win the former's support, often unifying it in the face of other divisive challenges. Thus, “by maintaining legal boundaries and excluding an internal ‘other’ as a common enemy, state and other leaders encourage the cohesion and support of those included, focusing tangible benefits and reinforced by symbolic manipulations. This process is at the heart of politics.”⁴

The convergence of political conflict resulting from state-building and emerging religious strife in the wake of the Reformation provided the context for selective exclusion during this

¹ Marx, 9.

² Ibid., 22.

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Ibid., 23.

period. Examining the cases of early modern Spain, France, and England, Marx notes that faith was the most prevalent form of identity among the people, and as such provided both a “template for popular engagement, which state rulers or their opponents sought to emulate in the secular realm” as well as the only feasible grounds for such engagement.⁵ In this manner, “faith became politicized and increasingly relevant to state- and nation-building,”⁶ an effective course according to Marx, since “the passion unleashed by doctrinal conflict was precisely the sort of strong identity that states sought to bolster for their own ends.”⁷ Elites took advantage of such passions by “encoding” exclusionary laws in favor of their chosen constituency—particularly by branding the latter’s adversaries as “heretics”—and thus binding together their supporters.⁸

Marx notes that this was not a purely rational-choice operation, where calculating elites selected allies and adversaries according to a simple and unfettered cost-benefit ratio. Rather, “historically informed ideology or prejudice, or the ‘embeddedness’ of identities, pose a constraint on viable coalitions.” Contemporary circumstances influence the “strategic perception

⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ According to Marx’s historical survey, exclusionary politics on the Iberian Peninsula began as far back as anti-Semitic policies in the early thirteenth century. However, it was especially marked by the Spanish Inquisition, instituted by Ferdinand and Isabella in the fifteenth as a means to bolster the monarchical state in the face of anarchy and civil war. The Inquisition’s function was nationalistic according to Marx: “Popular sentiment would have to be turned toward greater loyalty to the center, and the religious aspects of Inquisition provided a potential basis for this process” (Ibid., 84-85).

In France, the primary target would be the Huguenots (86-94). While Charles IX, likely influenced by Catherine de Medici, formulated the plan as a limited strike against Huguenot nobility, it quickly inflamed the populace, as reflected in the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, “the day in which the infant nation of France was born, bound in blood” (89). Violence spread, and within weeks, at least 20,000 Huguenots had been killed. Civil war erupted, despite elite attempts at containment; while attempts were made to assuage the Protestants, ultimately the crown found that the most effective *realpolitik* was a consolidated Catholicism (94).

In England, on the other hand, it was Protestantism that helped crystallize national identity (94-107). English “religious nationalism” was rooted in the Reformation, with national self-determination asserted against the papacy. While this did not initially include the Catholic populace, over time, moves were made by various monarchs that would constitute an anti-Catholic trajectory in conjunction with the conception of the divine right of kings. As the monarch became head of the national church, alternative traditions were perceived as foreign allegiances and ultimately treason (97). In the mid-seventeenth century, religious nationalism came to a head with a pro-Catholic king versus a staunchly Protestant, and markedly Puritan, Parliament, leading eventually to civil war.

of elites or commoners” about what is indeed rational in a given situation.⁹ Stated differently, “culture produces preferences that are then acted upon via rational calculation, or identities make some outcomes more likely. Choice is conceived and interpreted according to past history.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, asserts Marx, while elites both share and are limited by popular belief, “they simplify, distort, and select such beliefs to serve the purpose of unifying a core group.”¹¹ More specifically, “religious sentiments are inherited from the past but then may change or be used selectively, with both elites and masses combining cultural vehemence with strategic action.”¹²

In sum, Marx argues that state rulers sought a “passionate loyalty to their own authority” and identified religion as the most promising avenue to that end. As state leaders—and then their opponents—discovered, “while serving their own interests the surest way to enflame religious passion and redirect it was to attack heretics within as evident and present threats to religious homogeneity.”¹³ While religious passion cohered “cultural identities,” political leaders on either side sought a more “secular” form of unity. These forces came together at the common point of identity, and “what began as religious fanaticism aggravated by elite conflicts was gradually transformed into more explicitly political identities reflecting the interconnection between issues of faith and power.”¹⁴ Hence, nationalism and national identity.

Evaluation

Marx presents a very interesting argument, one that effectively undermines the modernist timeline and rightly raises questions about the importance of religion in the rise of nationalism. I appreciate his attention to the constraints upon nationalist elites—both externally by what faith traditions might have most sway with the populace, and internally in the way those elites were

⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Ibid., 76. As we will soon see, Smith does not take this point sufficiently into account.

¹² Ibid., 77.

¹³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁴ Ibid., 93-4.

themselves formed in faith—but also his delineation of instances and manners in which state or anti-state elites exploited religious belief for their own interests and objectives, as well as the extent to which church leaders acquiesced. His argument corresponds in part to Cavanaugh's, though I believe Cavanaugh would undoubtedly and rightly resist the notion that such initial passion could be so commonly inflamed merely on the basis of doctrinal differences, without those differences being somehow framed in terms of political threat, usually to the very survival of the people as such.¹⁵ This begs the question of how and why such purposes were framed along those lines.

To address that question, I begin by noting a significant and unresolved tension in Marx that cuts to the heart of his theoretical commitments. On the one hand, political leaders deliberately select those groups whom they seek to unify and galvanize for the purposes of the leaders' own nationalist aims, either to undergird or undermine the current state. This is arguably the center of the action in Marx's model. On the other hand, preexisting identities and historical circumstances condition the "strategic" perspective of elites, their field of options and choices between them constrained, even defined, by "culture." This point begs several questions.

First, precisely how free are elites to select and maneuver vis-à-vis particular religious groups? Not only are the strategies of elites externally constrained, but Marx suggests the elites themselves have been in some ways formed by prior identity and culture. So to what extent do these influences shape their strategic view, and if religion is particularly determinative in some cases, to what extent in those instances is the factor of elite selection even salient? Marx seems to want to acknowledge both aspects, but it is unclear why elite rational choice, however limited, should be so generalizable and central to his schema if its parameters could be so predefined. And if they are not significantly predefined, then how important is this qualification? Second, if

¹⁵ Cavanaugh would, however, appreciate Marx's trenchant historical analysis delineating how liberal democracy is, in fact, grounded on decidedly "illiberal" practices of exclusion and oppression. See Marx, 197-200 for a synopsis of this argument.

both elites and masses are so profoundly formed religiously, why would they even seek “more secular forms of unity and support”? Why not simply pursue a religiously defined nation-state?

More directly, framing doctrinal differences according to political allegiance and survival requires certain *theological* moves, which Marx does not really address. Let us be clear: the prevalence of “religion” in the cases Marx takes up means the prevalence of Christianity. This in turn means the prevalence of the church or churches, whose theological instruction of both elites and masses is implied at the heart of this matter. Yet Marx does not deal with this essential factor, neither in the matter of the framing of heresies and adversaries, nor even in the basic question of why “religious homogeneity” in a political, social, cultural, or territorial context would be of such importance to the faithful; it is merely assumed. But what are the theological assumptions at work amongst the people that would end up making religion so indispensable to the nationalist elites? How are they formulated and propagated, and are they so from within the churches or from without, or in combination? If from within, what theological rationale is developed to create such passion—often resulting in violence—and further, how is such passion theologically tied ultimately to the state, either in support or in resistance? Conversely, if the elites are themselves formed by religion, then what accounts theologically for their undertaking a nationalist course of action? What prompts them theologically to consolidate power in the first place and to choose particular methods over others? Relatedly, if religion is merely a means to an end, then what accounts theologically for their instrumental use of it, given they are operating from within it?¹⁶ In short, Marx neglects the theological content of “religious nationalism,” and in so doing, he arguably leaves incomplete any explanation necessary to precisely address his research question. To begin addressing these theological questions and implications, both for elites and the people, we turn to the work of Adrian Hastings.

¹⁶ Of course, this begs the question of the reverse: What if in some circumstances consolidating power is rather a means toward achieving religious homogeneity for its own sake? Is the state so central in those cases, or is it instrumental? What might this do to Marx’s overwhelming emphasis on “state governance, the central component of our definition of nationalism” (Ibid., 193)?

Adrian Hastings: Nationalism in the Vernacular, and the Biblical Model of Israel

Hastings, a former priest and professor of religious studies, devoted a great deal of attention to the study of nationalism, focusing particularly on the biblical model of Israel as appropriated by nations beginning in the late Middle Ages. He criticizes modernism, both for its timeline and for its neglect of “the impact of religion in general and of the Bible in particular.” Among his primary theses is the priority of vernacular literature in fostering national self-consciousness. Particularly central is the Bible, which was for so long “Europe’s primary textbook” and “provided, for the Christian world at least, the original model of the nation.”¹⁷

Contra the modernist timeline, writes Hastings, the word “nation” was already in use by the fourteenth century (at least referring to distinct language groups), derived in major part from biblical and Vulgate roots. Additionally, the Bible “presented in Israel itself a developed model of what it means to be a nation—a unity of people, language, religion, territory and government.” As such, Israel acted as an “all too obvious exemplar for Bible readers of what every other nation too might be, a mirror for national self-imagining.”¹⁸ Hastings concentrates on England, which he considers to be the “prototype” Western nation, surveying English history from the time of Bede in the early 700s into early modernity to illustrate the myriad ways ideas of nation and national identity emerged, and particularly around the themes of divine favor and election.¹⁹ He

¹⁷ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12. Here, Hastings specifically challenges Benedict Anderson, whom he says makes no reference to the impact of the profusion of biblical texts nor to the Bible as “the prime lens through which the nation is imagined by biblically literate people.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2. Hastings refers to Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (c. 730) as the earliest discussion of English unity and identity, and at least implicitly, the notion of a nation under God like Israel (38). Later writers expressed similar notions more explicitly. By the eleventh century, numerous allusions were made to biblical texts as applicable to England, such that England is “a nation to be defended as the Israel of the Old Testament was defended.” By this time, “one feels aware of the sense of a people, kingdom and land, something regularly called ‘England’ though sometimes more grandly ‘Britain,’ holding together local loyalties...” For that reason, using the criteria of Anthony Smith (who only places the emergence of English national identity in the fifteenth century), Hastings reckons England as a nation at least by 1066 (42). Later instances of “Christian nationalism” include John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563), which placed events “within a national Christian history, a sort of English Book of Maccabees”; much emphasis was put upon Queen Mary being the wife of Philip of Spain, the dedication

also cites English translations of the Bible and associated catechetical materials as integral in inculcating in the Bible's hearers and readers notions of nationhood and specifically English national self-awareness.²⁰ Later, as disillusioned English settlers reached America, they aimed to create a "true Israel of God," over against the deteriorating society at home. These New Englanders considered themselves "God's peculiar people,"²¹ led into the wilderness, and for whom it soon "became a matter of providence that the discovery of America had coincided with the Reformation and the expansion of England, God's Israel."²² In both cases, the written vernacular of the biblical text, and the model of nation interpreted from it, provided a remarkable and powerful force for national identity and cohesion.

Hastings considers both nation and nationalism to be "characteristically Christian" developments. To begin with, Christianity has helped to shape and "canonize" national origins, either "canonizing" dynastic lines—wherein national identity formed in the "imaginative space" around kings, "precisely through the closeness of the church's identification with royal power"²³—or via the context of religious conflict and contested frontiers, wherein political conflict takes on religious overtones (including crusade) when a people feels threatened by a

compared Elizabeth to Constantine, and "the book as a whole became for generations of ordinary Englishmen their national history *par excellence*, an explanation as to why they were indeed a 'peculiar' people set apart for divine purposes" (58-59). During the seventeenth century, nationalistic celebration was common to both sides of the civil wars. By the eighteenth century, union with Scotland prompted a transition to a broader "British" identity, and in 1719, Isaac Watts put forth a translation of the Psalms wherein "the word 'Israel' was regularly and ludicrously replaced by 'Great Britain'" (62).

²⁰ By way of rebuking Benedict Anderson's neglect of the Bible, Hastings writes that a complete English translation of the Bible existed as early as the fourteenth century, though it was not printed before 1535. During the Elizabethan period, however, there was a proliferation of English printed Bibles, including multiple editions of the Bishops Bible and Genevan Bible between 1570 and the publication of King James' translation in 1611. Together with various catechisms—"The ABC with the Catechisme was already 'a huge best-seller' by the 1580s"—the English Bible reinforced the common language, "actually shaping the English of all classes into an awareness of their own nationhood" (24).

²¹ Hastings, 74.

²² Ibid., 78. Hastings considers more briefly continental European nationalism (Ibid., Chapter 4), and also mentions in passing Ethiopian nationalism (going back at least to the sixth century), revolving around a central narrative wherein Menelik I, son of Solomon, carries the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia to "constitute their nation as the new Israel." In such a context, "the whole Hebraic model of land, people, monarchy and religion could here be reproduced" (150).

²³ Ibid., 189.

group committed to another religion. Here, national and religious identity become fused.²⁴

Integral to such conflict is the “mythologization of threats” to national identity, wherein “national salvation is, or seems to be, at stake.” Hastings argues that it is not the events themselves that are so decisive, but rather that meaning has been read back onto them, “simplistically symbolized in public memory.” The purpose of mythologization is to ensure that each generation is “socialized into a certain us/them view of the world, a view at once nationalist and religious.” And it is the religious connotation that lends credibility to otherwise “quite secular events.”²⁵

There is also the social role of the lower clergy, who in their local residence and relationships acted “to mediate identity between rulers and ruled.” Living in parishes throughout Europe, poor but well educated—and therefore in touch with both peasantry and gentry—they helped cultivate a sense of common identity across communities and provinces, as well as across socio-economic divides. Hastings suggests that the proliferation of such clerical activity “far more than anything specifically political, stabilized the main national identities, as societies separated by their literatures.”²⁶ This leads to another decisive influence of Christianity, namely the encouragement of literature in the vernacular. Christianity, Hastings maintains, is a “religion of translation” rooted in Pentecost, and never hesitating to appropriate the local vernacular for the propagation of its message, thereby lending itself to social cohesion at the linguistic level.²⁷

The other highly significant factor, rooted in the diffusion of vernacular copies of the Bible, is what Hastings calls the biblical model of the Christian nation as found in Old Testament Israel. This is a model which arises despite a certain inherent tension:

In central New Testament terms nations might be encouraged but there could be no place for a single chosen nation. It is the church itself which is the New Israel. Nevertheless the Old Testament provided a detailed picture of what a

²⁴ Ibid., 190.

²⁵ Ibid., 190-1.

²⁶ Ibid., 191-3. Hastings cites the clergy in this capacity as a distinct class, which he argues effectively challenges binary class division like that of Eric Hobsbawm.

²⁷ Ibid., 193-194. Hastings suggests this view of Christianity places into question Benedict Anderson’s argument that the rise of nations corresponds to a decline in “sacred languages.” Christianity never really had one to begin with. Even the Vulgate, states Hastings, was an exception rather than the rule.

God-centered nation would look like and of the way God would treat it if it was faithless. Why would God behave differently now? Why should one's own, New Testament-sanctioned nation not be vouchsafed an Old Testament style providential role?²⁸

Theologically, Hastings suggests, appropriating such a distinct status for a particular people might be considered suspect. However, "the more the Old Testament was translated into the vernacular and accessible to a theologically untrained laity, the greater the likelihood of claiming for one's own nation a divine election, so powerful was the Old Testament example working on the political imagination of a Christian people."²⁹ Autocephalous state churches catalyzed this tendency; such ecclesiastical autonomy in a national church is a major factor encouraging nationalism in that it "vastly stimulates the urge to tie all that is strongest in God's Old Testament predilection for one nation and New Testament predilection for one church contemporaneously to one's own church and people."³⁰

Perhaps the most pronounced influence of the model of Israel upon national formation is the notion of the election and special destiny of a given nation. The more these other factors are operative, the easier it is to go all the way and claim status as a chosen people with a special divine mission to accomplish. And this is readily done, theology notwithstanding:

The Bible is so easily indigenized. By its very nature and the church's retention of such lengthy Israelite histories it hints at a continuity of more than a theological kind between it and us. The whole concept of a 'Holy People,' divinely chosen but enduring all the ups and downs of a confusing history, seems very applicable to life nearer home. Of course for the early Christian and for the universal church's permanent theological vision that concept is realized in a universal community of faith and by no means in any one nation, but for ordinary Christians, lay and clerical, that can seem too remote, too unpolitical.³¹

Due to a "lack of evident political concern in the New Testament" or the early church, states Hastings, Christianity did not begin "with any clear political model of its own."³² Thus, two alternatives emerged: empire and nation-state. Empire corresponded both geographically and

²⁸ Ibid., 195.

²⁹ Ibid., 195-6.

³⁰ Ibid., 196.

³¹ Ibid., 197.

³² Ibid., 198.

politically to the “religious society” Christians perceived themselves to be, and Providence was seen to be at work in Rome. Even when that empire collapsed, the *idea* of empire did not, and would be revived again and again in European experience. However, fragmentation of the church eventually corresponded to that of empire, and ecclesiastical structures began to be tied to emerging national identities, particularly after the Reformation. Notions of election and destiny were transferred accordingly. In the West, Hastings describes Catholic Christianity as “both incarnationalist and universalist,” both identifying closely with particular communities, cultures, and nations, and also insisting upon a transcendent community. “It oscillated,” he writes, “between Old and New Testament sources of inspiration.” Protestantism, on the other hand, generally tended to lend greater weight to the Old Testament, finding precedents therein (especially in the historical books) for its own contemporary political situations.

Such nationalism is not merely an early modern phenomenon. Hastings writes of several instances of twentieth-century nationalisms in various Christian contexts, including Afrikaner (Reformed), Ulster (Catholic), and Serbian Orthodox, as well as instances in post-colonial Africa and Asia.³³ Many of these instances have direct ties to Christian missionary activity. However, Hastings identifies Christian nationalism in the United States as “the gravest nationalist threat to Christianity” of our times.³⁴ “The dual temptation of late-twentieth-century America,” he writes, “basking in a prosperity and imperial power beyond anything hitherto known, has been to see itself in terms of God’s preferred people and to see the American brand of universalism ‘as simply universalism itself.’” And such is particularly true of the Christian Right.³⁵

³³ Hastings, “The Clash of Nationalism and Universalism within Twentieth-Century Missionary Christianity,” *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, Brian Stanley, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 15-33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32. Hastings alludes here to a conversation he overheard between American Catholic Archbishop Fulton Sheen and an African bishop: “Sheen represented American Catholic nationalism at its most earnestly international...His commitment to the missionary cause was immense, but so was his belief in the American way of life as supreme expression of Christianity. The future he held out to the African bishop, a century or two ahead, to my shocked amusement, was that of becoming like America.”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33. In depth examination of American nationalism, with particular attention to the Christian Right, will be the subject of the next chapter.

Evaluation

Hastings does what Marx does not, namely delineate the outlines of the theological content of Christian nationalism. In this sense, he is able to go further than Marx in explaining why nationalist discourse took hold amongst the people, how it was that popular loyalties were reoriented behind nationalist agendas. With the proliferation of the Bible in local vernaculars, nationalists were able to find therein a model of nation to inspire and construct their own. Biblical narratives, particularly of Israel in the Old Testament, were interpreted and appropriated to formulate and reinforce nationalist discourse, and this, in league with the profusion of vernacular translations, contributed decisively to the solidification of national identities throughout Europe. Considering themselves extensions of Israel, these nations cultivated within their respective societal contexts—political, cultural, territorial—a commitment to religious homogeneity rooted in a theologically informed identity.³⁶

However, I believe Hastings's treatment of the nationalists' theological moves falls short with regard to the notion of Israel as the biblical model of the nation. I refer to two dichotomies Hastings assumes in his treatment, dichotomies that need not at all be taken for granted, and that contain and imply a number of problematic elements. The first is his dichotomy between Old and New Testament visions of the People of God. The Old Testament narratives about Israel present for him a model of the nation, which he interprets as a political community revolving around a centralized (monarchical) state apparatus. The New Testament seems to be for Hastings a decisive break from the Old in this regard, a wholly different discussion about the shape and function of the People of God. This dichotomy is problematic on several levels. To begin with, the Old Testament is not so monolithic as Hastings suggests. Rather, there are competing views of Israel as a political community in the Old Testament, and much of the narrative there is concerned—rather dramatically at points—with the conflict concerning whether national identity

³⁶ This again points to the importance of engaging in an account of Old Testament theopolitics, as I will do in the next chapter.

did in fact revolve around the monarchy or rather around an earlier covenantal conception rooted in Torah. Therefore, one must ask what prompted the later nationalist appropriation of one of these views over against the other. Moreover, it is questionable to what extent Old Testament Israel should even be abstracted as a model for other political communities, versus viewing it as a singular historical undertaking; Hastings seems to assume the former, with Israel as universal prototype rather than “peculiar people,” but that is not at all necessitated by the biblical texts.³⁷

Within this dichotomy, there is the idea that the Old Testament is political while the New Testament is decidedly apolitical. Hence, for instance, his comment about a lack of political concern in the New Testament or about Catholic oscillation “between Old and New Testament sources of inspiration,” or his assertion that empire corresponded *politically* to the early Christian *religious* society. Such an apolitical view of the New Testament (and particularly the gospels) is a myth John Howard Yoder and others have effectively debunked, but Hastings assumes it at multiple points, which allows him to likewise assume “the church’s identification with royal power” instead of questioning it,³⁸ and precludes him from inquiry into other points of theological incompatibility with nationalism, historical and contemporary alike.

This is related to Hastings’s second problematic dichotomy, that of formal theology versus a more popular understanding of the Bible. He argues that the former, rooted primarily in an understanding of the New Testament, would naturally preclude notions of national chosenness: the church is the New Israel, there is no room for any other chosen nation. Yet, he indicates that this understanding is almost irrelevant to the experience of the common people, the “theologically untrained laity,” for whom such an ecclesiology would have been “too remote, too unpolitical.” But how is it then that the Old Testament conception he portrays became so dominant, for that

³⁷ These points will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

³⁸ As with the portrayal of Israel in the Old Testament, this is a question of monolithic description. The fact that there arose reactionary movements such as monasticism over against the theology of empire in the fourth century, or the Anabaptists beginning in the sixteenth over against ecclesiastical and nation-state hierarchies, indicates that such accommodation did not occur without critique, and therefore that alternative conceptions may well have been available.

conception is to no less a degree theological. Hastings seems to assume the people's understanding as a matter of happenstance or natural proclivity, but there must have been an active theology at work.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of New Testament politics, Hastings's assumption does not make sense if the clergy operated in the social role he described. As educators of the populace, he argues the *well educated* lower clergy acted as essential links for relations between rulers and ruled, aiding significantly in the solidification of national identity throughout Europe. In short, theological education was active across the board. Therefore, one must conclude that nationalism arose, not in the absence of theological teaching among the masses, but fully in the presence, and perhaps even in consequence of such teaching. Certain theological moves must have been at work, but Hastings does not inquire into them. He does not, for instance, ask the question of why the clergy did not instead contribute to a transnational ecclesial identity. Could it be that they shared in and propagated nationalist reinterpretations of the Old Testament, despite any New Testament sensibilities? If so, then it is not a question of the presence or lack of theology, but rather the content. These questions are crucial, for as Hastings reminds us, such religious nationalisms occur even in late- and post-modernity, and their formulations and propagations often occur along the same lines as early or even premodern nationalist discourses. To understand what is occurring theologically in these developments brings us closer to an adequate understanding of the roots and motivations of nationalism, and it also allows us to see how nation and nationalism are particularly important considerations for ecclesial identity.

Anthony D. Smith: Nationalism as “Political Religion”

Anthony Smith's work contributes to a fuller understanding of the theological moves being made within nationalist movements with regards to religion. For Smith, only religion could

inspire the passionate commitments people make to their national identities; and nationalism, which he describes as the “religion of the people,” has arisen as a fusion of national mythology with more traditional faiths. He therefore examines what he calls the “sacred foundations” of nation and nationalism. The objects of this sacredness are fourfold: (1) the community, particularly as the “chosen people”; (2) the holy land in which the people dwell; (3) the glorious past of the people, and particularly their “golden age” that preceded their current decline (prompting the nationalist reaction); and finally, (4) the people’s sacrifice and sacred destiny. All of these revolve in some way around the “cult of authenticity” which lies at the heart of nationalism.

Modifying Rousseau, Smith conceives of such nationalism as a “political religion,” wherein the nation is “the object of a secular mythology and religion, at whose center the cult of the sinless and seamless nation made any opposition to the regime a crime against the national state.” In this model, the nationalist movement is itself a “church,” its rites of celebration and commemoration taking the place of traditional religious ceremonies. Yet, nationalism is not simply an adjusted or secularized continuation of traditional religion. Many modern nationalisms appropriate elements and themes from traditional religion, but also reject many of their beliefs and practices, particularly any conception of salvation located in a “cosmic, other-worldly source.”³⁹

This “religion of the people” is not such because it has arisen *from* the masses, but because “the people alone constitute the object of this new religion...all the people of every class and region...but also the people of a specific culture community in its homeland.” It is not

³⁹ Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17. This is, in his view, why nationalist movements would not derive from millenarianism: “Nationalism is a distinctly this-worldly movement and culture. Unlike millennialism, which expects imminent supernatural intervention to abolish the existing order, nationalists preach the necessity of human autoemancipation to realize the true spirit and destiny of the nation” (15). As he writes elsewhere, “Nationalists are not seeking to abolish this world and establish the kingdom of God on earth. They are relatively optimistic about this world, but profoundly unhappy about their place in it, or rather their lack of it” (*Nationalism and Modernism*, 110). It is a persuasive point, but it overlooks within the Christian Right, for instance, the many Christians espousing millenarian eschatologies alongside nationalism, subordinating their eschatological concerns to the more immediate matters of nation and national identity.

individuals who are sacred so much as the community as a whole, “or rather the image of an authentic (pure, pristine, natural, uncorrupted, and unique) nation in its own landscape.”

Significantly, this religion of the people “parallels and competes with traditional religions,” as the “nationalist belief-system draws much of its content from key elements of traditional religions, duly sifted and reinterpreted.”⁴⁰ Not only is this last process a—or perhaps *the*—core feature of many nationalisms, it has significant theological implications which I will explore later.

Within the theme of “sacred foundations,” Smith considers the importance of the nation “conceived as a form of communion that binds its members through ritual and symbolic practices....Here [nationalism] is best seen as a form of culture and a type of belief-system whose object is the nation conceived as a sacred communion.”⁴¹ Nations synthesize certain elements of faith and ethnic communities in such a way that they are “invested with sacred qualities.”⁴² National identity thus becomes “the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern.”⁴³

At the analytical level of “sacred foundations,” we find the elements of community, territory, history, and destiny. Community, which in this context becomes “sacred communion,” involves a fusion of ethnic (shared memories and common descent), cultic (unity as a single and holy moral community), and moral-legal (a moral community of equals with common rights and duties—“the people”) conceptions of human community.⁴⁴ Historically, this fusion has meant that “‘the people’ were not just the prime worshippers (and objects) of the popular nation; they constituted in themselves a holy congregation, for God spoke through the people and the popular will.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

Such a conception is often the result of the self-appropriation of the biblical model of election and covenant.⁴⁶ As we have noted, the nation here views itself as designated for a special purpose in service to the divine, thereby standing in special relationship to that deity. The nation is required to stand apart and follow a special course that is a function of divine promise, and to thereby play a singular role in “the moral economy of global salvation.” The people accept this unique identity voluntarily, in Smith’s understanding, and in so doing, “become God’s elect, saved and privileged through their obedience to His will and their identification with His plan.”⁴⁷ As applied to “historic culture-communities,” this constitutes the “*myth of ethnic election*, where myth refers not to a simple fiction, but to a widely believed tale that legitimates present needs and concerns by reference to a heroic collective past that inspires emulation.”⁴⁸

Covenant entails notions of sacred law, collective sanctification, and a privileged status as witness to the acts of God. But covenant is not focused on the elect nation alone; rather, its fulfillment is integral to global salvation: “The chosen people act as a model or *exemplum* of what it means to be holy, and hence like God. And to be like God is to be free of sin and death, and thereby to be eternally saved.” Since the ultimate end of the singular covenant is global salvation, “the doctrine of divine election harnesses universalism to particularism, and makes the salvation of all hinge on the conduct of a special few.”⁴⁹ Such a covenant makes separation inherent to the nation’s “special status as servant of the Lord,” and requires a stringent system of evaluation and

⁴⁶ Smith here briefly discusses the examples of early Dutch and English nationalism. He refers to the work of Liah Greenfield, whose study of early modern English nationalism identified Christianity as the “‘lubricator’ of English national consciousness,” wherein the faith “had lost its role as the source of social values and had now to adapt to secular social and national ideals.” Thus, “it was natural that religious creed... would be pushed aside when national identity became established as fundamental and the need for justification diminished.” In this context of election, we should note Greenfield’s finding that the earliest known use of the term “nationalism” in the English language was in the mid-nineteenth century, referring to the “doctrine of the divine election of a nation” (Ibid., 47). See Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁷ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 48.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 49. Smith also discusses this in his earlier *Myths and Memories*, 266-268.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 51.

judgment. This understanding of holiness is what marks out the covenant people, from Sinai to now, for “to be holy is to be like God; and *imitatio Dei* is the fundamental aim of humanity.”⁵⁰

At the heart of the sacred communion is the “cult of authenticity,” which pursues the “quest for the true self.” Here again is the central nationalist process of *authentication*, now conceived in theological terms. According to Smith, authenticity is the nationalist equivalent of holiness: “the distinction between the authentic and the false or inauthentic carries much the same emotional freight as the division between the sacred and the profane.”⁵¹ The authentic is the “irreplaceable and fundamental,” that which is essential to the nation, separating “us” from “them” and making one’s own nation singular and irreplaceable. It is the center of the “binding, ritually repetitive, and collectively enthusing” religion of the people, and its pursuit “provides the essential means to an innerworldly salvation. Rediscovering one’s roots and cultivating one’s true self are central to the salvation drama of nationalism.”⁵² This is exemplified by various national heroes and messiahs, persons seen as particularly authentic—“pure, true, pristine, originary”—who “provide models of conduct...worthy of emulation in each generation.”⁵³

Of course, the exemplar of this model is biblical Israel, in which Smith finds the quintessential formulation of divine election and covenant.⁵⁴ Smith insists on the essentially voluntary nature of covenant as a corollary to its conditionality: “it is not an act of imposition by and submission to God, but rather one of offer and acceptance,” such that “the whole community’s observance of their part of the covenant is the critical factor in its making and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

⁵² Ibid., 40.

⁵³ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁴ Smith objects to the notion that such a covenant is simply a bargain between the deity and the people, equating that conception with ancient Near East covenant treaties, which “recent scholars” have denied: “Close inspection reveals that the form of the covenant differs greatly from these vassal treaties, and, as for its content, the message of intimacy, justice, and truth that it contains bears no relationship to the obligations heaped on vassals by their overlords” (Ibid., 55). Smith’s easy dismissal of the Hittite treaty model here is rather one-sided, and not representative of the biblical studies guild as a whole, nor is it really a proper understanding of that model. For instance, he cites no reference to the inherent obligations of the suzerain nor to the notion of covenant as a personal relationship between the attendant parties, both of which would have alleviated his stated concerns here.

unmaking, and hence in the fate of the people.” The people “consented to be chosen, and to submit themselves to the law of goodness and justice.”⁵⁵ This “active consent” is, for Smith, the key ingredient, since “this means taking on responsibility and becoming ‘a people in the strong sense, capable of sustaining a moral and political history,’ rather than just a people in so far as they share tribal memories and the experience of oppression.”⁵⁶

Appropriated elsewhere, this conditional obligation and destiny inspired and empowered other peoples who felt they had been given divine favor; and it has also provided the stimulus and reasoning for moral renewal among those who see themselves as chosen. Within Christian doctrine, Smith notes, chosenness is “transferred from a particular ethnic community to the universal Church of believers.” However, we often find historically a certain tension between this universalism and the profession and practice of Christianity in particular communities. This characterizes most covenant-style Christian nationalisms,⁵⁷ such as those of the Gregorian Armenians, seventeenth-century Dutch and English, and the Puritan settlers of Ireland and, significantly for this study, North America.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 57. David Novak, whom Smith appropriates here and at multiple points in this discussion, argues that Israel’s choice is really only to confirm what God has already done, and that rejection would be unacceptable; but Smith prefers later rabbinical interpretations that tended to emphasize Israel’s voluntary acceptance.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 61. The internal quotation is from Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, Basic Books, 1985), 76.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 95. Smith distinguishes between “covenant” and “missionary” models of ethnic election. Covenant peoples are internally oriented, focused on maintaining purity and obedience, while missionary peoples, equally dedicated to their understanding of the “true faith,” aim to “expand into and transform the world, by example, persuasion, or force, or a combination of these.” In their engagement with the world, the nature of these communities is revealed, “for the sacred task entrusted to them by the deity is both in and of this world, their goal being nothing less than the submission of the profane world to the deity and its sanctification through the salvation of souls.” The difference between covenant and missionary orientations is merely one of degree, and more often than not, a given nation vacillates between them. However, according to Smith, the covenant model is generally characterized by separation and exclusion, the missionary model by expansion and inclusion. I believe Smith too sharply dichotomizes these models, missing the prospect of the covenant conception in service to the missionary, particularly in models of transformation by example. Moreover it misses the many historical instances where covenant peoples themselves undertake policies of expansion.

⁵⁸ Here it is worth mentioning Philip Gorski’s fascinating examination of sixteenth-century Dutch nationalism within his proposal for a postmodern approach to nationalism studies. The Dutch conceived themselves in part very much as Hastings and Smith have described, a chosen people with a sacred covenant; Gorski refers to this as “Hebraic nationalism” (Gorski, 1435). Hebraic nationalism arose initially upon the Dutch victory over Spain in 1577, and especially around William of Orange, credited with

The second major sacred foundation of nationalism is that of territory and the notion of the “homeland.” For modernists, it is the state which, via census-taking and map-making, creates the body of the nation and makes such an abstraction imaginable.⁵⁹ However, while the state certainly undertakes these activities, such an explanation alone overlooks a deeper, more profound process at work. Here, Smith refers to the “territorialization of memory,” the “process by which particular places evoke a series of memories, handed down through the generations.” It refers to the “tendency to root memories of persons and events in particular places and through them create a field or zone of powerful and particular attachments.”⁶⁰ This process is twofold, referring on the one hand to the “historicization of nature,” by which various features of the land become essential to the community’s evolution and history; and on the other, to the “naturalization of history,” by which the people’s history is shaped by land—where the terrain

unifying and liberating the Dutch people. One vivid example included a series of floats parading along the river through Brussels, presenting a series of biblical scenes with Dutch symbols incorporated into key biblical moments. These included David’s defeat of Goliath (William versus Philip II of Spain), Moses and Israel escaping Egypt (William as liberator), and Joseph’s rectifying of his family’s internal discord and deprivation by means of superior wisdom (William’s victory via national unification). These formed an allegory of the Dutch revolt up to this point, “an effect, it should be noted, that was achieved only by reversing the narrative order of the biblical events” (1437). Dutch Hebraic nationalism continued in the limited minting of commemorative coins, but even more so in the much more prevalent *biddagsbrieven*, official proclamations issued by civil authorities and read on days of public prayer in order to ‘ward off worldly dangers and secure divine protection’ (1439-42). This nationalist thread came to be interwoven with another slightly later one, that of Batavian ancestry (a myth established at least as early as Grotius’ *Treatise* in 1610) (1444).

Gorski’s study is especially helpful in that he provides an insight lacking in these other scholars, namely a glimpse into the theological teaching of the churches of the time. In the 1620s, Willem Teellinck—who founded the “Further Reformation,” an attempt to bring about Calvin’s vision of a “Godly commonwealth”—“upbraided” the Dutch for their sins against God, warning that God would bring about new judgments upon the Netherlands if they did not repent. Teellinck’s followers were more forceful, demanding increased state centralization and militarization, as well as a hereditary stadtholderate for the House of Orange, all within the context of their divine covenant. Non-Calvinists came to be seen as “internal enemies,” and Teellinck’s own son, Maximilliaen, “lumped ‘Evil-Doers, Papists, Remonstrants and other Sectarians’ together with one another, calling them ‘enemies of Religion and State,’ and accusing them all of betraying ‘Israel,’ their ‘Fatherland’” (1446). In such discourse, “all ‘good patriots’ were good Calvinists, and all non-Calvinists were potential ‘traitors.’” With the rise of European imperialism, Dutch colonialism became a religious obligation. While in the 1650s, the House of Orange was considered God’s special instrument (1447), by the 1670s, this notion had come to be applied to “the People”; pamphleteers began to assert that the People “had shed their blood to win freedom from the Spanish, [and] that ‘sovereignty’ therefore belongs to ‘the People’” (1448). The reader will note the interesting resemblance there to the characterization of Christ’s passion and exaltation in Colossians 1:15-20 and 2:15.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 131.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

provides the setting for key events as well as resting places for ancestors, and where historical monuments become naturalized, i.e., come to be treated as part of the natural setting. This sacred foundation also includes notions of “promised lands” and “ancestral homelands.”⁶¹ Smith concludes that this conception of the meaning of territory differs importantly from that of modernists, emphasizing the role of values, symbols, and traditions of sacred lands over long periods of time within the discourse of nationalists, who subsequently politicize them.⁶²

The third sacred foundation is “ethnohistory” and the golden age.⁶³ For many peoples, *ethnies* and nations alike, there can be found a recurring pattern of myth-and-memory formation, corresponding to Smith’s aforementioned stages of national formation. The golden age is the center of this narrative, acting as a model and source of inspiration. It is not limited to the exploits of a particular hero, but rather represents a period of the entire community’s life together that is characterized by a “burst of collective activity” in political, military, economic, artistic, intellectual and religious arenas. It is this golden age that “represents the ‘authentic’ spirit of the community and its moral core.” Because it lies at the heart of a people’s ethnohistory—because it provides a picture of the people’s “true self”—the golden age is integral to the grounding and energizing of national identity; it is considered “canonical and sacred,” central to the cult of authenticity.⁶⁴

Within nationalism, golden ages act as “frameworks of interpretation” for the nation. First, they function to provide a sense of continuity between the present and the past, as perceived through the nationalist lens. Earlier ages limit later ones in terms of hermeneutics for contemporary circumstances. Moreover, golden ages suggest an enduring identity underlying the ebb and flow of historical development. Second, golden ages also assist the “recurrent quest for

⁶¹ Ibid., 135-6.

⁶² Ibid., 165.

⁶³ The reader will recall that “ethnohistory” refers not to professional and disinterested historiography, but rather “the selective, shared memories of successive generations of the members of the communities, and the ways in which the generations represent and hand down the tales of the community’s past to each other.” Ibid., 169; “The Formation of National Identity,” 177.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 171-172.

collective dignity” over against opposition. While they do not themselves effect unity or cohesion, they are vital to the nation locating itself within a wider, international context.⁶⁵

Finally, golden ages provide “expression, and sanction, to the quest for *authentication*.” It is in the process of selecting and describing golden ages that the cult of authenticity comes into sharp focus, for these eras are “models of the nation’s ‘true self,’ uncontaminated by later accretions and unimpaired by corruption and decline.” To this end, the nationalist must rediscover the nation’s inherent goodness, and then mobilize the people “to ‘realize themselves’ by discovering and emulating the virtues of the nation.” In this manner, the golden age acts as a blueprint for national actualization and collective regeneration.⁶⁶

The final significant sacred foundation is that of sacrifice and destiny, and particularly their memorialization and retelling. National celebration and mourning are inherent in these processes:

The self-sacrificing citizen, the fallen patriot-hero or heroine, the genius who contributed his or her work (and even life) to the nation, the mass sacrifice of the people, the glory of patriotic valor, the everlasting youth of the fallen, the overcoming of death through fame—these are the stock in trade of nationalist values, myth, and imagery. They have become standard actors and motifs in the national salvation drama, the agents and vehicles of the nation’s deliverance and subsequent triumph.⁶⁷

Elements of this “salvation drama” can be found in multiple eras preceding modernity, and nationalism has used them “to weave the fabric of its own salvation myth, in its own very special manner.”⁶⁸ This is particularly clear in the celebration of the “glorious dead,” of self-sacrificing heroism, both individual and collective. As the notion of nation as sacred communion developed over time, there arose in these celebrations “a very public imagery of national communion,” containing themes such as national unity and autonomy, identity, authenticity and the homeland. This imagery was “designed to encourage reflection and emulation,” to provide a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 212-215.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 215.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 219.

ritual—and by implication an entry into the overall nationalist endeavor—with which “the citizen could identify and in which they could, eventually, participate.”⁶⁹ Subsequent emulation therefore achieves the nation’s glorious destiny. In short, the nation remains “true to itself” by “assiduously cultivating” these cultural resources that “act as ‘foundations’ or ‘pillars’ of national identity, and by continuing to regard them as canonical and holy.”⁷⁰

Evaluation

Smith provides an extensive and extremely helpful treatment of the role of religion in nationalism, as appropriated by nationalists and as received by the people. Presenting nationalism in theological terms as its own sort of religion, and particularly emphasizing the process of authentication—perpetuated by the “cult of authenticity”—as the standard of “holiness” in explicitly religious nationalism, helps immeasurably in understanding nationalism as a theopolitical project, the purveyor of a particular salvation narrative that becomes embodied in a particular politics. As such, Smith’s account is arguably one of, if not *the*, most helpful in nationalism scholarship for the theopolitical concerns discussed in the first chapter of this study.

Yet there remain in his schema some discrepancies or contradictions; it is not clear whether these are Smith’s own, or are rather embedded in the nationalist patterns he describes—in either case, there are important implications. To begin with, he states initially that the “sacred communion” of the nation—as imagined in an authentic sense—is the object of the “religion of the people,” and that the nationalist movement is its church. But he later describes the people as a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 223. The French had their share of these types of celebrations, often focusing on the cult of genius allied to that of the people. German commemorations were particularly evocative of religious themes, typically modeled on the Lutheran liturgy. Smith tells of one festival at Wartburg Castle in 1802 where “the students, carrying oak leaves, marched up to the castle by torchlight, lit pillars of fire, sang Protestant hymns around the fires, burned supposedly ‘un-German’ books, listened to a sermon, made speeches about justice and the cult of the *Volk*, and, to the tolling of the bells of the church in nearby Eisenach, joined hands and swore to uphold their *Bund*, concluding the proceedings with a (Protestant) church service.” The story is excerpted from George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 77-79.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 258.

“holy congregation,” and the nation, within a covenant context, as chosen by the divine. There seems to be some confusion regarding the role of the nation or the precise identity of the deity in question, though it seems the latter conception of nation-as-elect (rather than divine) ultimately wins out. Of course, one might resolve the ambiguity in the direction of the nation’s worship of self, but he does not yet do that.

Second, there are discrepancies having to do with his description of the nationalist model as derived from biblical Israel. According to Smith, within the context of the “myth of ethnic election,” a nation is singled out for special purposes by the divine, required to be separate from the other nations for the sake of its role in global salvation; in so doing, the people “become God’s elect, saved and privileged through their obedience to His will and their identification with His plan.”⁷¹ However, logically, one does not *become* divinely elect by agreeing to be chosen and adhering to the attendant responsibilities: by definition, one is elect at the initial point of the divine act of choosing. This also means that one cannot “agree” to be elected; there is no human agency involved in activating it. Rather, one can only respond to it after the fact.⁷² Perhaps more importantly, Israel’s adherence to covenant was not the means by which it was elected or saved. Rather, according to the Exodus narrative, the covenant was established *subsequent to* Israel’s salvation—its deliverance from Egypt—and was justified by Yahweh *on the basis of* that salvific act. Salvation, in that context, was a means to Israel’s covenant identity and mission, not vice versa.⁷³ However, it would be correct to say that Israel’s identity and mission were a means toward global salvation. These narrative elements will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 48-49.

⁷² Participation in covenant, the actualization or fulfillment of election versus merely its effecting, is a different matter.

⁷³ Smith may want to argue from the historical-critical perspective he appropriates that the proper context is rather the exile, since (his sources would argue) that is where the concept of covenant originated, and salvation therefore refers to something yet to come. However, it is not the historical-critical conception of covenant and salvation being appropriated by nationalists; rather, it is the story of Israel as told in the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament, which raises the question of narrative sequence.

Third, there is the theme of voluntarism in Smith's interpretation of covenant and sacred communion. Not only is human agency the key effecter of covenant—a rather debatable theological and exegetical point—but salvation is achieved by means of emulating the holy. To reiterate one of his central claims, “The chosen people act as a model or *exemplum* of what it means to be holy, and hence like God. And to be like God is to be free of sin and death, and thereby to be eternally saved.”⁷⁴ That is in the context of global salvation, where the nation fulfills its singular vocation before the world. Internally, emulation is the impetus behind the cult of authenticity and its careful delineation of the nation's golden age, and also celebrations of heroic individual and especially collective self-sacrifice. It is interesting to note the rather Pelagian character of this soteriology, emphasizing the centrality of human agency over against the initiation of the divine—particularly salvation by moral emulation—and therefore providing no real sense whatsoever of how the divine actually enables the salvation of the nation beyond merely providing the opportunity. If nations are appropriating theological models within the context of Christendom, what is the significance of reformulating them according to one of the most notable of early Christian heresies?⁷⁵

There are at least two explanations for these apparent discrepancies: either Smith has himself misconstrued the theological understandings that play such an important role in his model, or he is describing nationalist mis- or reinterpretation of those theological tenets. If the former, then although Smith clearly establishes the fact that nationalisms quite often appropriate key elements of the religious traditions shared by their people, serious questions must be raised about whether or not he has adequately grasped the extent and manner in which they do so.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 51. Smith's assertion here also seems logically suspect. In most theological understandings, to be holy *is* the equivalent of being free from sin, and particularly here where “sin” would be conceived as inauthenticity to the national ideal; that equation is therefore redundant. The other equation, between holiness and freedom from death, is a non sequitur as he presents it. The latter is not necessitated by the former, without some intervening explanation of how lack of holiness causes or equals death. Merely being “like God” is insufficient, since it would obviously be possible to be like God in one respect and not another.

⁷⁵ Of course, to the extent they do, this has the virtue of reinforcing Smith's general emphasis on cultural sources over the *longue durée*.

There are obvious similarities between particular nationalisms and the faith traditions they appropriate, as his work reveals, but there are often important differences, too. Is Smith therefore adequately accounting for nationalist behavior if he is not properly attentive to the theological moves inherent to it? This question is intensified when noting his dearth of Christian theological sources, despite the fact that most instances of nationalism mentioned in his work occur within Christendom.

If these discrepancies are rather internal to the nationalist moves Smith describes, then he is surely correct to say that nationalism has historically “sought to challenge or co-opt” religion,⁷⁶ and often “parallels and competes with traditional religions,” constituting itself in great part “from key elements of traditional religions, *duly sifted and reinterpreted.*”⁷⁷ But this then raises the question of his rather astonishing claims that nationalism “heightened and sharpened” elements of traditional religion, politicized them, reinforced and revived religion in particular communities, and “did not generally disrupt, or abolish, pre-existing beliefs, sentiments, and symbols.”⁷⁸ Or more specifically, that the cult of authenticity—in drawing upon the “spiritual power” of the conviction of the community’s eminent descent—“complements, [and] does not supplant, the old ideas of the sacred in religious traditions.”⁷⁹ How can what Smith conceives as a pseudo-religion not in fact seek to supplant traditional religion, particularly when it advances its own conceptions of deity, soteriology, and ecclesiology? How can the national community not thereby supplant the faith community? As I have shown just with snippets of Smith’s own explanation, there are necessarily incompatible elements at issue, and these merely scratch the surface. Thus, the duplication of religious categories for ulterior motives suggests not complementarity, but parody. Yet at no point does he explicitly address to what extent a particular nationalist message is congruent with the religious traditions from which it derives its

⁷⁶ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 255.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. As with Hastings, one must ask whether nationalism is a case of the politicization of religious traditions, or rather a *re*-politicization of existing theopolitical frameworks.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

form and substance, or where there might in fact be considerable and important divergences, and what the significance of those divergences might be.

While these questions obviously have significant implications for a theological study such as mine, they also have implications for Smith's own conception of nationalism. For if nationalism is in fact supplanting religious traditions, and actually contributing to alterations in those traditions over time, then any simply linear conception of traditions shaping nationalism and nationalist methods is put into question. If, over the *longue durée*, what we actually have is a cycle of nationalist (or proto-nationalist) appropriation of religious traditions such that later nationalist movements are actually appropriating earlier nationalized elements, then it is the reinterpretation—or perhaps, “reconstruction”—of those elements that is the definitive factor in the form and content of later nationalism. This then begs the question of whether the primary agents in nationalism are cultural traditions or the nationalists themselves, or at least whether they are much more equally and reciprocally involved than Smith suggests.

Conclusion

The work of these scholars rightly brings forth the importance of religious elements and themes to nationalism and national identity, challenging not only modernism's narrow timeline and tendency to dismiss early modern or even premodern manifestations of nationhood, but especially the modernist neglect of religion as the chief galvanizing element of many nationalist movements. This is particularly true of Smith, whose ethnosymbolic approach specifically demonstrates the significance of communal models rooted in religious traditions for nationalist development, and in so doing, he goes much further than most of the field in explaining the significance and the inner workings of the relationship between religion and nationalism. Smith does this by presenting nationalism as a sort of theological construct, with marked similarities to Christianity—some obvious, some not. Nationalism is itself a type of revivalist religion, driven

by a particular “cult of authenticity”—a sort of prophetic movement seeking the holiness (authenticity) of the nation—toward enacting a particular “salvation drama” involving the nation as the divinely elected people of God, with whom God has instituted a unique covenant toward the end of global salvation (according to a particular conception). Members of the nation are bound together by various rites and symbols, exhorted toward the faithful emulation of various heroic exemplars, most importantly, the community itself at its historic best. Moreover, the exemplary form of the nation is marked by self-sacrifice leading to triumph and exaltation, a process which is not only recalled for emulation but is encapsulated in celebrations of “national communion” by which later generations may participate in that process. In this manner, the nation is actualized and regenerated.

It is here that we see significant implications for approaches like those of Bell and Cavanaugh as discussed in Chapter 1, for Smith’s work suggests that nationalism is, at the very least, a necessary intervening variable or link in the state’s reordering and unification of society. Without this link, generalizing their schemas requires an inordinate leap to understand how the state is so successful at disassociating the people from each other via local communities and connecting them directly to the state apparatus. It is also possible, however, that nationalism presents a more significant challenge to these theologians, namely an alternative explanation for the breakdown of ecclesial identity in modernity alongside those of state and market, and one that potentially broadens the scope of the problem back beyond merely the modern era. If in most cases, it is nationalism that so directly parodies the symbols and practices of the church, and if nationalism must be distinguished—even separated in some cases—from state behavior, then a singular focus on state behavior is misplaced, and a deconstruction of such will only be partially successful at identifying reasons for historical and current challenges to ecclesial identity. This is especially true where nationalism is supported by or emanates from within the church itself.

Having said that, the work of these theopolitical scholars brings up a significant question regarding the treatments of religion and nationalism in this chapter, namely the dichotomy

between politics and faith, often repeated in these works and in many forms. This is a false dichotomy. On the nationalism side, the politics espoused and practiced by elites and commoners alike are always concerned with ultimate matters of human existence, or there would be no need for an appropriation of religious elements. If Smith is correct regarding nationalism as an alternate religious system, and I believe he is, then one must recognize the inherent theological moves at work, even by those who are little concerned with religious faith and practice. On the other hand, within a Christian context, there is very much a politics at work in faith and practice, given the various Christian understandings of divine sovereignty, ecclesial social order, and mission vis-à-vis the political, economic, and cultural systems in the world. In either case, theology and politics are intertwined, and in very many elemental instances, one and the same. Scholars such as Marx, Hastings, and Smith are therefore missing the point if they perceive nationalism as the co-opting and politicization of previously apolitical elements of faith and practice.

As I will demonstrate in the next two chapters, given the political elements of Christianity, for instance—elements that are no less political than those of nations and states, but rather are alternatively political—Christianity cannot merely be considered a religious phenomenon, but must be considered a fully fledged, though alternative, social body. Nationalism scholarship does not yet appreciate the significance of this.⁸⁰ Nationalism is not merely appropriating the elements of a religious phenomenon—an “-ism” as it were; it is appropriating the features of an alternative political community. Nationalism is the fusion of narrative elements from different *peoples*. I believe misunderstanding this fact is what allows nationalism scholars who are rightly concerned about the role of religion in nationalism to misunderstand its inherent political and social forms and subsume it under the umbrella of “culture.”

⁸⁰ Smith’s *Chosen Peoples*, for instance, provides no complete index entry for “Church,” but redirects the reader to “Christianity, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism” (320).

Therefore, notions of politicizing a heretofore apolitical faith tradition—such as Marx’s, where “faith became politicized and increasingly relevant to state- and nation-building”—are erroneous. Rather, nationalism must be seen as a *re*-politicization of the faith community away from a previous politics. Indeed, as nationalism is inevitably theologized, it constitutes an alternative *theopolitical* system to that of the Christian ecclesia, which suggests points of significant tension where those two systems are made to co-exist. Chapters 4 and 5 take up the question of ecclesial theopolitics by looking at the stories of Israel and the church in the biblical narratives. There I examine what Israel was really meant to be, whether understandings and appropriations of it in typical modern political contexts are fitting or not, and what the implications are for the church—especially in relation to the nations—as it is engrafted onto Israel’s identity and mission.

CHAPTER 4: OLD TESTAMENT THEOPOLITICS

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I laid out those theopolitical schemas that have been most formative in my own development, and with which I approach this project. At the same time, I delineated two significant gaps in their treatments. The first is their inadequate attention to the problem of nationalism as distinct from state and market, often emanating from within the church itself. Chapters 2 and 3 portrayed nationalism as a phenomenon entailing among other things a process of authentication, that quest by nationalists to craft an image and narrative of the “true nation” in order to galvanize the public behind them. Insofar as nationalism involves the reinterpretation and appropriation of various Christian symbols and particularly the interweaving of the biblical narrative with the national, it becomes a “political religion”—an alternative theopolitics and salvation history—that alters ecclesial identity and practice, often from within. However, I also noted in those chapters that nationalism scholarship tends to suffer from a lack of attention to the theology involved in nationalist discourse and its propagation.

The second oversight I identified in theopolitical scholarship relates directly to the nationalist project of authentication, namely attention to the significance of Israel’s theopolitics for the church as expressed in the biblical narrative. In order to evaluate nationalist discourse, particularly that emanating from within the church, it is essential to establish theological criteria of assessment that evaluates nationalist discourse at this central point. That is the purpose of this chapter and the next, in which I trace within the biblical narrative a comprehensive theopolitical understanding of the People of God in Israel and the church. These two chapters are the theological core of this study, delineating my chief norm of understanding both for theopolitical identity in the church and for evaluating the important challenge of nationalism.

Story is central to identity, and discerning the ways in which the Christian salvation narrative is syncretized with the national story toward a new narrative of theopolitical identity is

critical for discerning where and when the church mistakenly subscribes to a theopolitics not properly its own. Biblical theopolitics is located in the stories of Israel and the church. Israel is given a particular mission in the world, a singular identity that is remarkably alternative to the ways of the nations surrounding it. Later, the church is engrafted onto Israel's identity and mission through Jesus Christ. This understanding is critical to my larger project since, juxtaposed with nationalist discourse—particularly that emanating from within the church, which interweaves biblical and national narratives—it draws out those elements of the theology and the story of the People of God that have been misappropriated for the nationalist agenda, thus distorting the understanding of those elements and fundamentally altering the theopolitical understanding and identity of a significant portion of the church.

Furthermore, this chapter reinforces the essential unity of the theological and political in a proper understanding of the People of God. In some scholarship, both theological and social-scientific, these phenomena may be understood to affect each other, but in the end they operate in autonomous realms and can be separated for analysis. This is true even in biblical scholarship. I argue, on the other hand, that for Israel as the covenant community of Yahweh, politics and cultic life (“religion” or “theology” included) cannot be treated separately, as they typically operate not only in tandem, but as *one* entity. This is not only evident in Israel's establishment in covenant, but in the prophetic critiques as well. One can therefore conclude that the church, engrafted onto covenant through Jesus Christ, exists in a similar *theopolitical* framework.

Also, part of the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that for the People of God in Israel and the church, practice and identity are correlated. The locus of the people's self-understanding is in election by God, and in the mission inherent in that election. Practicing that mission, i.e., covenant faithfulness, is therefore constitutive of its identity. If that mission is not in practice, if covenant is not being actively kept, it is not sufficient to say that the people is not acting according to its identity; rather, it is *altering* its identity. It is *being* other than what it is called to be, though not without the possibility of repentance and return.

With these thoughts in mind, this chapter proceeds to relate a theopolitical understanding of the People of God, beginning with centrality of election and covenant in Israel's national identity, with the aim of Israel being a visible sign of salvation to the nations. It moves from there to narrate the ways in which Israel gradually abandoned that identity for the theopolitical practices of its neighbors, resulting in an adulterated outworking of Yahweh's plan of redemption. It delineates key prophetic indictments of Israel's practices, and then ends with the prophetic promise that will set the stage for the next chapter on the church's identity in Jesus Christ.

In addition to direct engagement with the biblical texts, I draw upon the work of other theologians and exegetes to construct a reading of Israel and the church's story such that the theopolitical nature of their identity can be most clearly seen. Each biblical text is read primarily as received in its final form,¹ and furthermore in canonical relationship to each other—looking both at the canonical ordering of the texts and at their intertextuality, i.e., their appropriation of each other—and is understood in this form and relationship to be theologically authoritative. I make no claim to *the* definitive interpretation, yet I assert that there are more or less correct ways of reading the story, and these judgments are normative for our understanding of both ecclesial identity and the ways in which that identity is being altered within and by nationalism.

Election and Covenant in Israel

According to the biblical narrative, the theopolitics of biblical Israel is rooted in election and covenant, initiated by Yahweh, that constitute Israel as a singular people, a nation established

¹ By “primarily,” I mean to take note of important insights from historical-critical sources while maintaining the theological cohesiveness of the text. The original circumstances and intent of the human author, for instance, inform our understanding and are taken into account, but they do not trump theological understandings derived from the text in its final form and in canonical relationship to the other texts of Scripture.

to be a visible manifestation to the world of the reign of God on earth, and of what human community looks like under that reign. Election is the divine action by which Israel is given identity and purpose, its mission in the world. Covenant—revolving around Torah—is the outgrowth of election, the social, economic, and political framework by which Israel’s communal life is ordered. Election and covenant are therefore inherently political, and given that they originate from Yahweh and are bound up in Yahweh’s actions in the world, are inherently *theopolitical*. This section spells out the theopolitics of election and covenant in Israel, how that theopolitics was an alternative to that of the surrounding kingdoms and empires, and how Israel abandoned its theopolitical commitments as it attempted to be conformed to the ways of its neighbors.

Exodus and Election

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”²

In the first few chapters of Genesis, the reader finds the story of God’s creation and ordering of the known world, particularly the place of humanity as caretaker. Humanity subsequently sins, obstructing the original divine intent and beginning a history of chronic rebellion against the Creator. In Genesis 12, however, the reader encounters a man, heretofore unknown except by genealogy, elected by Yahweh and called out from among his neighbors for particular service. That man is told he will become a great nation, a blessing to the world. The language used here is important for our understanding of the covenant people. The word *am*, or “people,” is usually used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to Israel. However, in this passage, the word *goy*, or “nation” is used, a term normally referring to the rest of the world outside of

² Genesis 12:1-2. Unless otherwise noted, or unless comprising a quotation in a secondary source, all biblical citations are New Revised Standard Version.

Israel, and usually used negatively when applied to Israel. Here, however, the term indicates the universal significance of Israel's calling. W. J. Dumbrell posits that these verses actually contain a "theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world." Not only the "fact" of redemption is found herein, but the purpose as well: "the restoration of kingdom of God rule, divine dominion established once again over the world in which [humanity] functions once more as the completely recovered divine image."³

This promise is passed on through subsequent generations, until some 450 years later, as the Exodus narrative relates, the reader finds Abraham's descendents held in slavery by the Egyptian empire. This is not merely an unfortunate turn of events, but the prelude to a major theopolitical conflict. Nations throughout the ancient Near East adopted any number of gods representing their material world, "earthly forces and powers that represented ultimate realities for human beings; their perceptions did not extend beyond these elemental realities to which they had subjected themselves." Not only were these powers of nature but "ultimately also the powers that shape history and society: knowledge, domination, violence, money rivalry, war, life, death..."⁴ While political communities of the ancient Near East saw their gods as creators of nature, if only indirectly (e.g., through theomachy, battle between the gods), these gods and their activities were nation-specific. There was little thought that one nation's deity(ies) could lay claim to any other nation, except perhaps where one kingdom conquered another. Yet that is precisely what Yahweh claims in the face of Egypt, and it is precisely to substantiate that claim that he delivers Israel from the empire's midst and into a new theopolitical order.

So we find in the first chapters of Exodus, as Jon Levenson writes, that "two masters, two lords, are in contention for the service of Israel." One master embodies human pride and imperial hubris, smug in a sense of security natural to "an ancient and settled regime which has lasted for

³ W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation; A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*, (United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1984), 65.

⁴ Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church: Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 1-2.

millennia.”⁵ Within this regime, “society, state, culture, nature, cosmos, religion, rule, wholeness, and salvation were melded...into a grandiose unity, and the unity of all these areas was visible in the person of the Pharaoh.”⁶ Pharaoh, in turn, is backed by an imperial pantheon, “immovable lords of order. They call for, sanction and legitimate a society of order, which is precisely what Egypt had.” In this order “there were only the necessary political and economic arrangements to provide order, ‘naturally,’ the order of Pharaoh.”⁷ Thus, the pharaoh is presented as overseeing a “totalizing system” of politics and economics that, by its very nature, necessitates absolute allegiance, and in this case, oppression.⁸

The other lord is the “unpredictable deity himself,” whose own authority and power transcend those of the ruler of Egypt, “reminding the Pharaoh of the limits of his power, which he and his subjects regard as infinite and, in fact, divine.”⁹ In the midst of the turmoil of this contest, God commissions Moses as his human representative in the famous burning bush scene in Exodus 3, and it is here that we witness an “apocalyptic” moment, in the term’s proper sense of revealing a heretofore hidden reality: God gives the Israelites his name. He is “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE,” which is to say, Yahweh (YHWH), the self-existent One, the God who defies all definition, all categorization, all human attempts at order. This Yahweh is the God who comes from no other source, requires no other legitimation than God’s very self. He is “the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality, and is captive to no social perception but acts from his own person toward his own purposes.”¹⁰ Yahweh sets himself over against the pretender Pharaoh and his counterfeit pantheon. Pharaoh represents the world’s zero-sum game of resource competition, while Yahweh

⁵ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai & Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1985), 22.

⁶ Lohfink, 68.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 17.

⁸ Brueggemann, “Scripture: Old Testament,” *The Blackwell Companion*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 10-12.

⁹ Levenson, 22.

¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 16.

provides a non-zero-sum paradigm by virtue of his infinite provision and power of initiation.¹¹ Thus, the reader is given a “Yahweh vs. Pharaoh” dichotomy, which Brueggemann characterizes as a contest between the “alternative religion of the freedom of God” and its “politics of justice and compassion” on the one hand, and the “religion of static triumphalism” with its “politics of oppression and exploitation” on the other.¹² Within such an order, there was no rest, no “breaks for freedom.”¹³ Hence the impossibility of even a “leave of absence” to worship in the wilderness and the necessity to impose further constraints (Exod. 5:1-9). Not only can the Pharaoh’s economic system not handle any halt in productivity, but there can be no consideration of alternate ways of being or communal life. Such would constitute a clear and present danger to the empire. Note that with each of these contending entities, theology and politics are inseparable; this is a contest of theopolitical paradigms.

In the end, Yahweh delivers his people through mighty works that Pharaoh’s court is ultimately unable to counterfeit (Exod. 7-12), and the “mythical legitimacy of Pharaoh’s social

¹¹ Given this logic, the irony of the story of Joseph’s rule several hundred years earlier is noteworthy. In Genesis 41, Joseph, son of Jacob, is made ruler of Egypt second to Pharaoh alone as the result of interpreting Pharaoh’s dream. The dream foretells seven years of famine, preceded by seven years of abundance. Joseph is put in charge of the empire’s preparations for this impending crisis, and his first policy is to store up in the cities all the grain produced by outlying farms. In one sense, this seems a prudent policy of planning for an expected future event known only through trust in Yahweh’s word, but it should not be lost upon the reader that the cities were also the centers of Pharaoh’s power and control throughout the empire. Such an abundance is brought in, “like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure” (Gen 41:49). The language suggests that Yahweh has proved faithful by providing seemingly unlimited provision in advance of the crisis. By Genesis 47:13, however, the famine has hit, and Joseph proceeds to take the overabundant produce of the people of Egypt (Yahweh’s limitless provision) and *sell* it back to them. Quite soon, the people’s money runs out (v. 15), and Joseph then takes their livestock in return for grain (vv. 16-17). Likewise, the livestock dissipates, and the people return in hunger with nothing but their land and their bodies (vv. 18-19). Joseph takes both, absorbing their lands into the increasingly engorged imperial estate, and then selling the Egyptians into debt-slavery (vv. 20-21). The theopolitical irony of the story cannot be overstated: the great-grandson of Abraham, heir to the promise of world redemption by Yahweh, takes a non-zero-sum situation of Yahweh’s infinite provision and makes it into a zero-sum situation of scarce resource competition. The move was neither necessary nor beyond Joseph’s control; rather, in creating this artificial politico-economic system, the financial and political position of the Pharaoh is secured. Joseph has learned empire well. The narrative irony is compounded in that within a very short span of the canonical narrative, the descendents of Abraham find themselves ensnared in a very similar system of exploitation.

¹² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 16-17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

world is destroyed.”¹⁴ The exodus is “nothing less than the dismantling of the empire both in its social practices and in its mythic pretensions.”¹⁵ It is Yahweh now, not Pharaoh, who “stands front and center in the political process and is the defining factor and force around which all other political matters revolve...” Yahweh has decisively demonstrated sovereignty over the natural order, over empire, and over Israel’s own fate. The story of Yahweh’s people, both during and following the exodus, is thus a “*theological politics* in which the defining presence of Yahweh, the God of Israel, impinges upon every facet of the political; or conversely, Israel’s self-presentation is inescapably a *political theology* in which Yahweh...is intensely engaged with questions of power...”¹⁶ Both the political and theological are intertwined, even melded together, as Yahweh concerns himself directly with Israel’s destiny, and with its very identity.

In Exodus 19 the reader finds Israel safely delivered from the Pharaoh, encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, where, like Abraham before it, it is elected for a particular purpose: “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6). This declaration is critically important for several reasons. First, the nature of Yahweh’s statement is key, as it is not merely a promise of blessing but an *assertion about Israel’s identity*. As Jo Bailey Wells explains, the Exodus 19 pericope constitutes a “new description of Israel’s function and character.” The call to obey Yahweh, i.e., holiness, is directed at embodying Israel’s new identity, and “it is not the call to obedience, but the identity which it creates that receives the emphasis.”¹⁷

Second, Israel’s identity is a *conditional endeavor*. Key to this understanding is a distinction between election as an act of Yahweh, and the realization of that election in the covenant life of Israel, both of which are required for Israel to realize its identity. As to the

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, “Scripture: Old Testament,” 9.

¹⁷ Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 305 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 211.

former, Yahweh has acted in his own sovereign grace to liberate Israel from its previous condition of bondage, and into a new freedom to be other than it was in Egypt; Israel is incapable of accomplishing this. Likewise, Yahweh makes a claim of his own initiative upon Israel at Sinai, freely electing the people for a singular role in history. Only Yahweh is capable of providing such a condition of possibility; Yahweh's act of election is the free act of a sovereign and autonomous God.

However, it is not sufficient in a theopolitical context to speak of identity from the standpoint of Yahweh's act alone; the question of the *realization* of Israel's election is equally integral. Notice that Wells refers to obedience as identity-creating: it is not Yahweh's act of election alone that constitutes Israel's identity, but also Israel's practices. Its ongoing life as the chosen people is therefore a cooperative endeavor: while it is impossible without the call of the sovereign God, it is realized only insofar as the people's practices are in sync with that call. In this sense, Israel is *actualized* as Yahweh's treasured possession—with all that entails in regards to fulfillment of its specific purpose—only insofar as it is faithful to covenant. To be clear, this is not to say that election is canceled out by a failure of covenant obedience, as though Yahweh's free action is subject to undoing by human behavior; it is rather to point out that election cannot be fully realized in the absence of covenant faithfulness.

Certainly this assertion could be contested. For instance, Scott Bader-Saye argues that Israel's election—which he equates with “Israel's status before God”—is “eternal and unconditional” and its covenant “enduring,” in no way dependent upon Israel's faithfulness for its continuation. In passages such as Leviticus 26, where it seems that covenant is made conditional, Bader-Saye argues that the promises of judgment for disobedience actually operate within the stipulations component of a surviving covenant framework. If Israel is faithful, it will be blessed; if not, it will be cursed. Even where the passage predicates the promise “I will walk among you, and will be your God and you shall be my people” (v. 12) upon the previous statement, “if you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully” (v. 3), it does not

make election conditional, for God never threatens to reject Israel as his people. Rather, God promises, “I will remember in their favor the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, to be their God: I am the Lord” (v. 45).¹⁸

Recalling the aforementioned distinction between election and covenant, I affirm Bader-Saye’s reading of election, but Israel’s identity in covenant—which I would argue is at least equally indicative of its existential status before Yahweh as its election—is clearly conditional in the biblical text. For instance, in the above example, Bader-Saye neglects the most fundamental assertion of Israel’s identity in Exodus 19:5-6, where the status of Israel as treasured possession is clearly conditioned upon obedience to the soon-to-be-disclosed covenant. And his reading of the almost identical assertion in Leviticus 26 is rather strange. After all, if “I will be your God and you shall be my people” is qualified by “if you follow my statutes,” etc., does that not essentially condition Israel’s identity as Yahweh’s people upon its obedience? It is not clear what else it would mean. Moreover, in his mention of Yahweh maintaining covenant even in the midst of judgment (v. 45), Bader-Saye inexplicably neglects verses 40-41, where Yahweh remembers covenant “if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors...if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity...” According to that caveat, Israel’s status and covenant remain active only in the context of repentance and reparation. In short, Israel’s fulfillment of its calling—its realized identity as the chosen people—which is equally correlated to its “status before God” as is Yahweh’s act of electing, is neither enduring nor unconditional, but is rather contingent upon its orientation toward covenant, whether in obedience or repentance. While Yahweh’s act of electing Israel as his people is itself a free act of grace unconditioned by anything Israel does in any way, and while that call may be held open for Israel in an “eternal and enduring” manner, election is not actually brought to fruition without obedience on Israel’s part. This is a crucial point, for if Israel’s theopolitics is pertinent to the

¹⁸ Bader-Saye, 33-34. Again, despite disagreement on this point, I am overall quite appreciative of Bader-Saye’s book, which proves quite helpful to this study.

church, then the church must recognize when it is no longer *being* church and is acting in some other communal form, a divergence nationalism cannot help but cause.

Third, all three descriptors for Israel—“my treasured possession,” “priestly kingdom,” “holy nation”—indicate a sort of *separateness* from the rest of the world. The Hebrew word for “possession” is derived from an Akkadian reference to “what is owned personally or what has been carefully put aside for personal use.”¹⁹ Yahweh has called Israel out of all of his creation to be his special possession for a particular purpose, and “confers upon Israel the status of royalty” if it is faithful to the covenant. In this call to covenant, “the suzerain establishes the vassal as the royal figure in a larger community which is itself under the great king’s suzerainty.”²⁰

The term “priestly kingdom” or “kingdom of priests” can also be understood as “a kingdom, namely priests” who will exist to mediate God’s grace. Interestingly, the word *goy*, previously seen in Yahweh’s promise to Abram, appears once again in “holy nation,” prompting the following conclusion from Dumbrell: “Sinai in a very obvious sense marks an advance in the Abrahamic promises but now particularizes them to operate through Israel.” Israel’s distinctive role as a nation is to “provide, under the direct divine rule which the covenant contemplates, the paradigm of the theocratic rule which is to be the biblical aim for the whole world.”²¹ Notice that as opposed to the empire from which Israel is delivered, as well as the kingdoms among whom it is brought to reside, Yahweh’s act of election moves well beyond the ancient Near East notion of national gods. Rather, this is a God who is sovereign over the world order, and who in Israel chooses a people to manifest that sovereignty before the nations.

Furthermore, Israel’s election is not for its own sake. Consider Lohfink’s insight:

[It] is part of the biblical concept of election that it is always combined with a mandate. God’s choice fell on Israel for the sake of the nations. God needs a witness in the world, a people in which God’s salvation can be made visible. That is why the burden of election rests on the chosen people. Israel’s being

¹⁹ Dumbrell, 85.

²⁰ Levenson, 31.

²¹ Dumbrell, 87.

chosen is not a privilege or a preference *over others*, but existence *for others*, and hence the heaviest burden in history.²²

Election does not elevate Israel above all other nations toward the end of Israel's self-actualization or aggrandizement, but rather "crystallizes Israel's knowledge that God desires to liberate and change the entire world but for that purpose needs a beginning in the midst of the world, a visible place and living witnesses."²³ The election of Israel, and therefore Israel's identity, is a means to the end of liberating the rest of the world to come under the creation-restoring reign of Yahweh. Israel will "embody a politics of blessing," demonstrating that election, covenant, and redemption "are related such that election founds the covenant community in God's choice and redemption extends the covenant community to include all the world."²⁴ Its separateness is necessary to the degree that it must faithfully and continually embody that politics of blessing amidst the surrounding kingdoms.

It is worth pausing here to note the character of God's activity. As Lohfink observes, part of the uniqueness of Yahweh's project is that, although certainly a revolution, it is not the rapid, violent upheaval so often witnessed throughout human history. God is far more subtle—and patient. God is free and creates human beings who can freely be in relation to God. How can God transform the world while protecting this freedom? According to Lohfink, "it can only be that God begins in a small way, at one single place in the world. There must be a place, visible, tangible, where the salvation of the world can begin: that is, where the world becomes what it is supposed to be according to God's plan."²⁵ Thus, the story of the People of God begins with one man in one place at one moment and will unfold in that people, not as a series of responses to the exigencies of the moment, but as the manifestation of human freedom enlivened by and in response to Yahweh's patient sovereignty.

²² Lohfink, 37.

²³ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁴ Bader-Saye, 31.

²⁵ Lohfink, 27.

Fourth, Yahweh's sovereign *power of initiation* is manifest in Israel's election, for prior to Sinai, the Israelites, as indicated by their name, could perhaps be considered at most an ethnic group, related biologically with some rather low-lying shared cultural traits. However, through election, this loosely associated people-group is given form and purpose:

In and by this election God *constitutes* the Jews as a people. Israel did not arise out of a collection of autonomous individuals who agreed that their self-interest would be furthered by entering into a political alliance. Nor did the people qua people exist as a prior political entity which God then elected as God's own. Rather, Israel became a people by God's action...Chosenness *calls forth* existence."²⁶

This is indicative of the decisive break with world empire that Yahweh achieves. With this newly chosen people, we witness the unprecedented: "the appearance of a new social reality" created "ex nihilo."²⁷ As O'Donovan writes, "The power which God gave to Israel did not have to be taken from Egypt...first. The gift of power was not a zero-sum operation. God could generate new power by doing new things in Israel's midst."²⁸ Indeed, it is worth noting that Yahweh does not give the covenant to Egypt, even a chastened one, as though by means of its superior culture or military and economic might it could effectively propagate Yahweh's reign. Israel is not called to transform Egypt from within for the sake of Yahweh's reign, nor does Yahweh need Israel to access or commandeer Egypt's power in order to fulfill its vocation. Rather, Yahweh removes Israel from the empire's midst and gives Israel, by his own power, a different identity and vocation, which can only be corrupted by Israel's return to the old.

In short, as Dumbrell reminds us, "the biblical plan of redemption does not finally focus upon a saved people so much as it does upon a governed world."²⁹ Toward this end, Yahweh liberates and elects a people to embody Yahweh's reign on earth, to act as the decisive alternative

²⁶ Bader-Saye, 35. Emphasis in the original. The author's use of "Jews" here could be considered anachronistic, as that designation was not used until the exile. However, he wants to emphasize that "Israel from which Christians can and must hear a witness is not reducible to any one particular historical embodiment of Jewish polity" (30).

²⁷ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 16.

²⁸ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95.

²⁹ Dumbrell, 66.

to the ways of empire and domination, in whatever form. Israel's redemption and election are never intended for Israel's own sake, but are really about restoring worldwide submission to the reign of the Creator God, which results in creation's own fulfillment. To understand what such an embodiment of Yahweh's reign looks like, i.e., Israel's prescribed theopolitics, the discussion turns to covenant.

Israel as Covenant Community

Covenant, according to Bader-Saye, is the “correlate of election that, through Torah and the land, determines the material and political shape of Israel's free and holy life in mutual relation to God.”³⁰ In other words, the Sinaitic covenant is the form of Israel's fulfillment of election. This covenant proceeds directly from Yahweh's sovereignty as Yahweh founds a society to embody his reign in the world. While this treaty form has precedents in the ancient Near East,³¹ it is Yahweh's sovereign initiative that lends to the Sinaitic covenant its utter uniqueness. For one thing, as Israel's election calls forth a people into existence, the Sinaitic covenant actually *establishes a political community*. Yahweh does not enter into covenant with a

³⁰ Bader-Saye, 37.

³¹ Scholarship has recognized for some time that various passages in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy reflect a covenant framework particular to the late second millennium, with echoes of earlier Hittite treaty formulae. A brief review of that format is worthwhile here. We find in the biblical texts various covenant elements such as a preamble or title—“I am the Lord your God”—which introduces the superior “suzerain” party (Exod 20:2a; Deut 5:6a), as well as an historical prologue—“who brought you out of the land of Egypt”—which provides the warrant for the inferior “vassal” party to enter into covenant as a binding obligation (Exod 20:2b; Deut 1-3, 5:6b). We find listings of various stipulations and obligations, such as the Decalogue, which are binding on the parties if covenant is to be maintained (Exod 20:3-17; Deut 5:7-21; 12:1-26:19). There is provision for the deposition of the document for safekeeping (Exod 25:21; 40:20; Deut 10:5) as well as for period reading of the covenant to the people (Exod 24:7; Deut 27:2-8; 31:11-12). Also included is a list of witnesses to the covenant, wherein Yahweh calls upon creation to witness this historic and salvific enactment (Deut 4:26; 30:19-20; 31:28), as well as the blessings and curses associated with covenant faithfulness or violation, respectively (Deut 28). Finally, the covenant is sealed with an oath and a ratification ceremony marked by sacrifice (Exod 24: 3-8; cf. Deut 26:17-19), indicating the vassal's pledge to abide by the terms. See Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the OT* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1963), 3, 28-29; Meredith Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963); Moshe Weinfield, ברית *TDOT* 2: 253-79; G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition” *BAR* 21, no. 2 (1995): 48-57, 88; and Levenson, 26-36.

pre-existing political community, i.e., a political community that already has an identity previously derived from within the normal political life and experience of ancient Near East kingdoms. Rather, a new and unprecedented political community is founded, whose politics consists of those disciplines, practices, needs, and distribution of powers ordering life together as derived from its essential purpose of embodying the international and even cosmological reign of Yahweh on earth.

A necessary corollary of Yahweh's sovereignty is the totalizing exclusivity of Israel's allegiance. The exodus and Sinai were God's self-revelation to the whole of Israel, not as an end unto itself, but a means to "a new kind of relationship, one in which the vassal will show fidelity in the future by acknowledgement of the suzerain's grace toward him in the past."³² Deliverance from Egypt adequately justifies Israel's entering into covenant with Yahweh, and as such forms the historical prologue of the Sinai covenant (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6b). While this prologue is important, Levenson argues, what is crucial in this covenant is "the observance of the stipulations in the present and the sort of life that such observance brings about."³³ Of all the aspects of the suzerain-vassal covenant model, exclusive faithfulness by the vassal to the suzerain is paramount: "although a suzerain may have many vassals, a given vassal must recognize only one suzerain."³⁴ If the vassal were allowed to submit to other suzerains, the first suzerain's claim would be compromised, the covenant undermined.

What Yahweh does through the covenant at Sinai is to consecrate for special service not just Israel's cult, but its entire national life, including its internal political organization and its relations with other nations. O'Donovan writes that for Israel to declare that "Yahweh reigns" is to assert three aspects of Yahweh's sovereignty: (1) Yahweh ensures the stability of the natural order; (2) Yahweh is in control of international politics, "the restless turbulence of the nations and their tutelary deities and could safeguard his people"; and (3) Yahweh orders Israel domestically

³² Levenson, 43.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 28.

as a political community.³⁵ As the first of these is established in the exodus, let us look in particular at the second and third of these elements.

Regarding Israel and ancient Near East international politics, a central feature of covenant is the suzerain's pledge to care for and protect the vassal in return for exclusive faithfulness. As such, "[Yahweh's] suzerainty does place a limitation upon the potential for a human counterpart. If there can only be one suzerain, how can Israel enter a covenant with any other lord? Hence, we find, especially in those books in which the covenant idea is prominent, an unqualified rejection of *Realpolitik*, since all (human) alliances are equated with apostasy."³⁶ In the historical prologue, Yahweh's claim to suzerainty is that he has delivered Israel from bondage. By relying on other suzerains to deliver Israel from various threats, Israel disgraces that claim. Thus, according to Levenson, the Sinai covenant is given as an "alternative to conventional political relations." Israel must make a choice, "for the divine suzerain will not tolerate a human competitor any more than he will a divine one."³⁷ And this is not merely a matter of one suzerain over another, but of one *politics* versus another, i.e., a particular way of being in the world as a human community.

Israel, as a nation, is to mediate Yahweh's grace to the world, which requires it to be holy—consecrated and set apart for its singular purpose. Hence Dumbrell's crucial insight: "Israel is thus withdrawn from the sphere of common international contact and finds her point of contact as a nation in her relationship to Yahweh."³⁸ As Levenson states, "this proscribing of international politics is thus the political equivalent of covenantal monotheism. In each case,

³⁵ O'Donovan, 32. I appropriate this important description from O'Donovan, but take it in a very different direction than he does, concentrating on how Yahweh's kingship precludes human kingship in a proper Torah society. While O'Donovan finds the explicit enthronement formula of "Yahweh reigns" in the Psalms in a monarchical context, he still notes that the sentiment would likely have been understood in pre-monarchical Israel, a position I take much more strongly than he. I find O'Donovan's account theologically and exegetically profound, but I take issue with him in this chapter on specific points regarding key elements of Israel's theopolitics.

³⁶ Levenson, 72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 87.

Israel's special identity demands a radical separation from the ways of the nations."³⁹ Israel's political identity is not derived in the typical political fashion as yet another player in the international political system, a competitor for scarce resources and relative power, only with its own divine sanction. Rather, its identity is theopolitical, derived directly from its election by and mission from Yahweh, and is radically alternative to conventional international politics.

As to Israel's internal political and social order, Lohfink correctly reminds us that in light of the narrative, "the fact that all around Israel there were reigning monarchs while Israel itself for two hundred years had no king must be taken seriously in theological terms."⁴⁰ Israel's tribal configuration and lack of a human king, he argues, was not merely preliminary or a "precursor to the state," but was a "deliberate counter-model" to the surrounding kingdoms.⁴¹ Indeed, Exodus 19:6 introduces "the concept of Israel as the domain over which God rules. The theology of the kingship of God is here prominently displayed. But kingship and covenant are...co-ordinates since the presupposition of covenant is divine rule, while covenant in and through Israel is the implementation of divine kingship in national polity."⁴² With Yahweh's kingship a clear corollary to covenant, Israel existed initially as a tribal league without a centralized government. Society revolved around the clan, but even between clans there was strong community. Compared with the social hierarchies found in neighboring nations, the tribal confederation was "passionately egalitarian" in both political and socio-economic terms, a political community of a decidedly new form.⁴³

³⁹ Levenson, 72.

⁴⁰ Lohfink, 107.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴² Dumbrell, 90.

⁴³ Lohfink, 57-8. Discussion of Israel as a counter-model brings up the question of conquest and settlement as narrated in the books of Joshua and Judges. There is not space to adequately treat this important question here, but it is worth noting the very particular circumstances under which Israel is called to war against the tribes in Canaan. Beginning in Genesis 15, there is allusion to the residents of Canaan who are guilty of some "wickedness" to which the reader is not made privy; for this reason, Abraham's descendents will not be allowed to occupy the land until that wickedness has run its course, which according to the pericope will be at the point of their leaving some future situation of oppression (Gen 15:16). By Leviticus, the reader knows that situation is four centuries of slavery in Egypt, and upon the exodus and the giving of the law, the Israelites are directed to Canaan, where Yahweh is going to drive out the present residents for

This form is located in what Lohfink calls the “social project” of Torah. “Torah” denotes not only the law of this new people, but names Israel’s new social order, the product of Yahweh’s sovereign power of initiation. As the narrative is presented, “Israel’s being led out of Egypt and immediately afterward being given the Torah shows that God alone is the founder of the new society. By human strength alone this new thing could not be accomplished.”⁴⁴ According to Bader-Saye, “Torah is at the heart of the covenant because it names the ways in which Israel is to be set apart in its life of holiness...Torah names the kind of people God is forming.”⁴⁵ The objective of the covenant for Israel is that it becomes “a holy people, a people who live Torah-shaped lives...for only such a people can be capable of dwelling with God in joy.”⁴⁶

At the heart of the Torah is the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, the first two of which demand unequivocal and exclusive worship of God alone and in proper manner (Exod 20:3-17; Deut 5:7-21). They form “the crystallizing core and focus of meaning of all the layers of the Pentateuch.”⁴⁷ If the Torah is about the embodiment of the reign of God, these commandments locate the sovereignty of God at the heart of Israel’s identity, for they constitute a claim of absolute authority requiring absolute allegiance. Moreover, they also require total formation: “Having Yahweh alone as Lord and serving only Yahweh also means orienting every aspect of life to Yahweh.”⁴⁸ The many ordinances put forth spell out the ways the Israelites are to

practices of such wickedness that Israel is not to emulate them at any cost (Lev 20:23). In Deuteronomy 9, the Israelites are further warned that it is not their righteousness that has in some way earned occupation of the land, but rather the wickedness of its current residents has rendered the land forfeit at the very point in time when Israel required settlement (Deut 9:4-6). This suggests a particular convergence of events: (1) a story of Yahweh’s dealings with other nations that Yahweh does not share with Israel, including an extended period of wickedness that has warranted dispossession of the land by those nations; (2) an exodus and migration of a people who, according to the narrative, were elected by God and promised in the form of their ancestors a land to dwell, which is even now being stipulated as a specific covenantal blessing; (3) and Yahweh’s personal direction of the campaign (including personal engagement with its human instruments), as noted in all three of these passages and elsewhere. The narrative strongly suggests this was an historically singular convergence, having to do with the nations being dispossessed, for reasons not made known, than with any practice of violence that Israel was to retain as part of its covenant identity.

⁴⁴ Lohfink, 73.

⁴⁵ Bader-Saye, 42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁷ Lohfink, 78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

appear toward and interact with each other and with the world. Offices are formed, a priesthood established, a tabernacle designed, all to provide an appropriate setting for Yahweh to dwell with his people. And in a sense, even these are a means to an end. In the Torah, “the people of Israel are called to imitate God’s relationship with the world both in terms of *tsedaqah*—God’s transcendent graciousness toward creation—and *mishpat*—God’s immanent ordering of the cosmos, conformity to which is justice.”⁴⁹ Yahweh dwells with Israel so that Israel might mediate Yahweh’s grace and justice to the world, so that the world may in turn dwell with Yahweh.

According to Lohfink, the rule of God over Israel is developed in three aspects of the Torah: (1) concern not only for the “inner side” of the human being, but the “external side” as well—the material aspects of human interaction with each other and with other elements of creation; (2) concern not only with space but with time—rhythms of time, festivals, centralization of worship at the temple in Jerusalem—feasts became pilgrimage festivals, the Sabbath central; (3) the cultivation not merely of righteous individuals, but of a righteous society—hence meticulous systems of laws “meant to prevent the existence of classes of poor and enslaved people in Israel,” a situation that would cause deep dissension within the People of God.⁵⁰ Indeed, O’Donovan notes, “as Israel is situated among the nations, so are the poor and defenseless situated within Israel. He who cared for the welfare of a servile nation in Egypt cares for the welfare of a servile class in Israel.”⁵¹

All this, writes Lohfink, is connected with the exclusive worship of Yahweh. If there is oppression and exploitation occurring within Israel, Yahweh is not being properly worshipped, a violation of the second commandment: “For all worship only brings to expression in words and concentrates in symbols what is to be done constantly throughout Israel: being a just society in

⁴⁹ Bader-Saye, 37.

⁵⁰ Lohfink, 79-83.

⁵¹ O’Donovan, 33.

the world, to the honor of God.”⁵² For this reason, “not only must the human heart be holy, so must the conditions of life, the social structures and the forms of environment in which the person lives and into which he or she is constantly moving.”⁵³ The life of the People of God, in all its manifestations, must reflect the reign of Yahweh. To the degree that Israel is faithful in this, it is shaped by, and finds its identity in, the Creator God, an identity that ultimately extends beyond itself:

Israel’s faith is always about “the world.” Its desire is to bring more and more of the world under the rule of God. Its wish is to transform the world entrusted to it by living the Torah, God’s social order, so that it will be clear to everyone how the will of God intends the world to be.”⁵⁴

This is the heart of Israel’s theopolitical identity, to be formed as a unique theopolitical community with its theological vocation determinative of its politics, and to universalize that community by means of a compelling and transformative social order. Theirs was not to decide whether to accept the covenant as one choice among others for social embodiment; rather, they had to decide whether to be faithful to their divine calling, whether to submit to Yahweh’s sovereignty and be formed by the Torah. Thus, Israel’s identity as a political community is born in Yahweh’s gracious action and realized in Israel’s acknowledgement of Yahweh’s reign and in its submission to his social order of Torah, so that in the covenant and its faithful implementation, the created order of Gen 1-2 would begin to be restored.

Prophetic Critique and Prophetic Promise

Having established the norm of Israel’s identity, it is necessary to examine the ways in which Israel gradually abandoned that identity. In particular, it is necessary to examine prophetic discourse in the biblical narrative so as to determine what in Israel’s behavior was being indicted and judged. In short, the covenant nation of Israel came to adopt institutions of power politics in

⁵² Lohfink, 84.

⁵³ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 106.

order to secure itself among the surrounding kingdoms, as a viable counterpart to those kingdoms. This required the gradual adoption of a theopolitics antithetical to covenant with Yahweh, and in so doing, Israel altered its singular identity and mission given at Sinai. Subsequently, its new identity became something requiring security through the same coercive politics of its neighbors, resulting in a spiral of anti-covenantal theopolitics that would divide the nation and end up in destruction and exile.

Insofar as the church is engrafted onto Israel's identity—a subject of the next chapter—prophetic critique provides crucial insights into the problem of nationalism for the church, in that it points out the inherent dangers of theopolitical syncretism, the interweaving of one theopolitical identity with another such that a new form is created in the process. Recall that nationalism involves on the one hand the formulation and inculcation of a particular national identity in a given people group, and on the other a pursuit of power in order to institutionalize that identity either in the existing state or in a new one. To the degree Christians residing in various nations seek to (1) identify themselves according to a syncretized theopolitical narrative of identity, and (2) secure that national identity through the political ways of the powers, they participate in a form of Israel's own error, directly altering their identity in the church of Jesus Christ.

In order to draw out the theopolitical issues at contention in Israel, I have chosen to focus on two prophetic books in particular: Hosea and Jeremiah. Hosea son of Beerī prophesied in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Jereboam II in the mid-to-late decades of the eighth century. Jeremiah son of Hilkiah prophesied in the Southern Kingdom from some time during the reign of Josiah (640-609) through the next four kings, ultimately witnessing the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians in 587/586. In this chapter, the book of Hosea is appropriated for its examination and evaluation of Israel's practices of *realpolitik*, the conventional politics of the surrounding kingdoms, which Yahweh finds abhorrent and antithetical to Israel's election. Jeremiah is appropriated as an insight into Israelite civil religion (specifically that operating in the Southern Kingdom of Judah), which misinterpreted the Davidic promise to underwrite the

monarchical state that the southern Israelites considered central to their collective identity, constituting an alternative and ultimately erroneous and unfaithful theopolitics. Before discussing the prophets, however, it is important to note the political developments in Israel over the course of its history as narrated in the Old Testament.

Covenant Gives Way to State

With 1 Samuel 8, we have the first major institutional departure from covenant, as the elders of Israel appear before the prophet Samuel and demand a human king. The previous chapters indicate a combination of factors contributing to this move, not least the corrupt leadership of Samuel's sons as judges and increasing pressure by the Philistines nearby. Even though Yahweh continues to prove faithful to his covenant promises (demonstrated in the previous chapter, though apparently some years before as indicated by the narrative), the elders of the various tribes gather together and demand that Samuel set a human king over them. Samuel is displeased and goes to Yahweh with their petition. Yahweh's immediate response is key: the elders' demand is to be met, as a function of the freedom Yahweh extends, but such a development is to be unequivocally understood as a rejection of Yahweh as king over Israel. Indeed, Yahweh sets their demand within the context of idolatry, a problem that has plagued Israel since the exodus from Egypt.

Yet, the demand is not to be met without qualification; Samuel is to "solemnly warn" the elders of the consequences of usurping Yahweh's role in this fashion (8:6-9). This Samuel does, predicting royal conformity to the norms of empire and the surrounding kingdoms: the seizing of person and property for the royal estate and for military security, the tithing of the people's produce for the royal court and retainers, even the enslavement of the people (8:11-17). If their demand is met, Samuel warns, "you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (8:18). The obligations of the covenant

upon the suzerain will no longer be binding because in replacing Yahweh with a human counterpart, covenant has been nullified. The elders reject the warning, responding, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam 8:19-20). Whether the threat to Israel’s security would be exacerbated by *realpolitik* and a centralized state, or even manufactured by the monarchy for self-aggrandizement, goes unconsidered by the elders. Thus Samuel, at Yahweh’s concession, anoints Saul as king.

However, Saul is from early on a failure as king, and Yahweh directs Samuel to replace him with David.⁵⁵ Power is eventually centralized under David into state form, and a “sacral kingship” is established under Solomon, who takes on the role of high priest for the kingdom. With the expansion of empire and its attendant utilization of foreign alliances, slavery, and a standing army, *realpolitik* becomes institutionalized in the state, and Israel becomes that from which it had been delivered in the exodus.

As the kingdom breaks apart, dynasties are established and overthrown, kings are assassinated, and political maneuvering further undermines the covenant people. As Blenkinsopp explains, “by the eighth century B.C.E., the two kingdoms were moving inexorably toward a situation in which the coercive power of the state, supported by a class of nouveaux riches parasitical on the monarchy and court, legitimated by state cults exercising their own forms of hierocratic coercion, and resting on a broad basis of peasant serfdom and slavery, was reaching out into every sphere of social life.”⁵⁶ This mention of state cults is especially noteworthy, for as the monarchy assumed greater sacerdotal authority, “YHWH became a state god” inevitably legitimizing *realpolitik*, rather than Lord of the nations, of whose reign Israel was to be a manifestation. “For the first time there appeared and established itself within the people of God

⁵⁵ The Davidic Covenant, along with the erroneous understandings thereof that become institutionalized in the divided kingdom, will be discussed below.

⁵⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 150.

what later Europeans called the ‘union of throne and altar.’ Israel now resembled the Near eastern systems of government.”⁵⁷ This last sentence is key, for here we have the reversal of the original covenant orientation described by Dumbrell:⁵⁸ now Israel is effectively withdrawn from its proper relationship to Yahweh and instead locates its identity in the “sphere of common international contact.”

Covenant and Identity in the Prophets: Hosea and Realpolitik

The Book of Hosea is a trenchant critique of Israel’s corrupted embodiment of Torah. In graphic language, we find statement after statement of condemnation for practices antithetical to Israel’s election, practices that themselves constitute, not religious *and* political sin, as though these were separate realms of behavior, but *theopolitical* sin, namely, the abandonment of *hesed*, or covenant faithfulness. Of particular interest are Hosea’s treatments of human kingship and foreign alliances. Both are corollaries of state centralization, the cornerstone of *realpolitik*, and each works to secure the other.

Hosea targets human kingship in Ephraim at two significant points.⁵⁹ First, in 8:4, Yahweh protests that Israel has “made kings, but not through me; they set up princes but without my knowledge. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.” Clearly, there is at minimum a willful neglect of seeking Yahweh’s will, of relying upon his provision of leadership. As Hans Walter Wolff states, Yahweh’s intent was not considered, nor did he select

⁵⁷ Lohfink, 110.

⁵⁸ To reiterate, “Israel is thus withdrawn from the sphere of common international contact and finds her point of contact as a nation in her relationship to Yahweh” (Dumbrell, 87).

⁵⁹ Within this chapter, I use “Ephraim” to refer specifically to the Northern Kingdom and its state apparatus, “Judah” for the Southern. This is to distinguish from references to the whole people of Israel as established in covenant.

or approve the kings; rather, “lies and treachery” mark the enthronements.⁶⁰ Dumbrell characterizes this as Yahweh’s “condemnation of political intrigue.”⁶¹

At this point, Wolff argues that Hosea does not reject the monarchy per se, nor even the northern kingship, but simply the manner of establishing kings. By 13:9-11, however, the magnitude of the indictment is clear. Yahweh declares, “I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? Where now is your king, that he may save you? Where in all your cities are your rulers, of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and rulers’? I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.” In v. 10, “it becomes quite plain that the roots of Hosea’s criticisms of kingship go deeper than the present grievances. Almost like the Baal cult...kingship from the outset was in opposition to Yahweh’s lordship.” Indeed, the imperfect verbs used in v. 11 “refer to all the kings from Saul to Hoshea ben Elah, whom Yahweh in his wrath has just stripped of his royal office.”⁶²

Peter Machinist, also, inquires as to the scope of Hosea’s critique of kingship. The critique is somewhat ambiguous, with precedents throughout the Old Testament for either a specific critique of the northern practice, or a fundamental critique of the institution itself.⁶³ That said, the latter seems more fitting. Hosea 9:15—“every evil of theirs began at Gilgal”—is arguably a reference to 1 Samuel 11:14-15, where Saul is publicly made Israel’s first king at Gilgal,⁶⁴ and this on the heels of 1 Samuel 8:7b, where Yahweh observes his rejection at the hands of the elders. Moreover, Hosea 8:4a reiterates the sentiment running through 1 Samuel 8-12, such that “we have the same problem framed in the same way, about the people’s demand for a new political form, kingship, against the intention of Yahweh, and the reaction to their

⁶⁰ Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, Gary Stansell, trans., Paul D. Hanson, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 139.

⁶¹ Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 178.

⁶² Wolff, 227.

⁶³ Peter Machinist, “Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel,” *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.*, John T. Strong and Steven D. Tuell eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 167.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

demand.”⁶⁵ Hosea also echoes 1 Samuel 8 in linking the demand for a human king with the worship of other gods. Machinist therefore concludes, “Hosea 8:4a looks as if it may well be calling up the problems of the very introduction of kingship...in order to make sense of the kings and cult of Hosea’s period.” Hosea 13:9-11 reinforces this conclusion, in that Yahweh acquiesced in anger, then became doubly disgusted at the evil kings that followed.⁶⁶ Regardless, “it is not only individual kings of the North who are going to be punished by Yahweh; it is the entire monarchy, and so the state, that Yahweh is to end because of its crimes.”⁶⁷

It therefore seems that the internal political process of state centralization, located chiefly in the institution of human kingship, lies at the root of Israel’s covenant failure. In seeking to be like the neighboring kingdoms, Israel has forsaken its covenant calling. State centralization necessarily undermines the openness to other nations that is required for mediating Yahweh’s grace. Instead, it defines the other as potential threat or active enemy, and in the name of security, closes Israel off. Israel thus becomes a threat to the other, and its own military conquest then becomes a real possibility.

Of course, this conclusion contrasts with that of other theologians and biblical scholars, who see in the biblical texts rather considerable support for the monarchy. One such scholar is O’Donovan, who presents an affirmative though considerably nuanced view of the institution in his effort to derive “true political principles” from Scripture that might prove useful to reversing the listlessness of post-Christendom Western politics.⁶⁸ O’Donovan asserts that “David’s dynasty was the form in which earthly political authority had been given most decisively to Israel.”⁶⁹ O’Donovan sees this monarchical role as an essential component of the biblical narrative, a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 174.

⁶⁸ O’Donovan, 15. It should be noted that O’Donovan conceives of the monarchical role to be in conjunction with the prophetic office in Israel, the latter being the more significant (62). However, he nevertheless considers the human monarchy to be inherent to Israel’s founding identity, a view that is resisted at key points in the biblical narrative.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24.

narrative by and large supportive of the institution: “Those who argued against monarchy that where Yhwh was king there was no place for any other (1 Samuel 8:7; Judges 8:23) did not, of course, challenge the idea of human mediation of divine kingship. They challenged the erection of an image of Yhwh, one whose mediation held all Yhwh’s kingly functions together, so that he, too, was a king.”⁷⁰ In other words, it was the concentration of all these aspects that was actually problematic. Elsewhere, he argues, one can see entire story-cycles with leanings in either direction regarding the institution: the narrative of David’s decline is quite critical of “the monarch’s incapacity to control events,” but earlier stories show how David came to replace Saul, ultimately in a way that legitimates the Davidic throne. Even the prophetic movement he reads to acquiesce, leading him to conclude, “in the end nobody opposed the monarchy.”⁷¹ Indeed, O’Donovan claims, “there are no anti-monarchist voices among the scriptural witnesses.” Hosea, for instance, is responding to the corrupt practice of the institution in his day, and “even the narrative of 1 Samuel 8 is in fact an apologia for the monarchy addressed to its natural antagonists; it intends to leave no doubt that the monarchy came to existence by Yhwh’s decision. The principle, therefore, that the monarch could provide unitary representation of Yhwh’s rule was an accepted one.”⁷²

According to O’Donovan, the key function of the monarch as Yahweh’s representative was the exercise of judicial functions. While this had more or less been the purview of the judges in pre-monarchical times, “it was a crucial element in the case for a monarchy that they had failed to provide not only the security necessary for Israel’s identity but even a consistent standard of justice itself.” The monarchy offered the “function of continuity” to Israel, “ensuring an unbroken tradition in the occupation of the territory and the perpetuation of the national identity.” The monarchy was not a substitute for the law as the principle of continuity, but reinforced the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁷¹ Ibid., 53.

⁷² Ibid., 61. O’Donovan states on the next page that within the Deuteronomic perspective, the monarch could not replace Yhwh but only act as a safeguard. Nevertheless, the central theopolitical *necessity* of the monarchy is clear in O’Donovan’s schema.

law in that capacity: “It afforded the prospect that the statutes and law which Yhwh had commanded would no longer be flouted in future generations as they had in the past. Yhwh’s ‘covenant’ with David...provided a defense against the instability of the covenant with Israel.” In this way, the monarch acted as a double representative, representing Yahweh’s rule to the people and ensuring their obedience, and representing the people to Yahweh, ensuring his favor.⁷³

The arguments by Lohfink and Dumbrell arguably refute O’Donovan’s claims regarding the monarchy as the most decisive form of political authority for Israel, and the exposition above addresses in a general way his understanding of Hosea, which is in the end inadequate. Others of his claims warrant more direct challenge here. First, in his mention of contending story-cycles, he misconstrues the narrative of David’s decline as critiquing “the monarch’s incapacity to control events.” In fact, the narrative criticizes David’s incapacity to control himself! What is key in that incapacity is its relation to human kingship itself: his tendencies toward excess and abuse were inherent in his monarchical power and in the power politics by which he secured his throne, which provided the context for his particular sins. Moreover, one must consider the narrative sequence. Even if the story of David’s replacement of Saul reads in such a way as to legitimate the Davidic throne, the fact that it is followed in the chronology by a narrative of David’s decline means the overarching narrative should likely be considered, contra O’Donovan, as a theological indictment of kingship—not an endorsement—even a potential reconsideration of the foregoing “legitimation.”

Additionally, O’Donovan’s reading of an “apologia” for the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8 is inexplicable. Certainly, the story leaves no doubt that the institution was allowed by Yahweh, who set stringent terms upon it that, if followed (which they were not), would ironically rob it of most of what the elders sought. That said, Yahweh’s statement that “they have rejected me from being king over them” is much more the central and definitive assertion of the pericope, but goes

⁷³ Ibid., 61.

practically unaddressed in O'Donovan's account.⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 8:7 is an unequivocal assertion that human kingship is contrary to Yahweh's original intent for Israel and a fundamental alteration of Israel's theopolitics.

O'Donovan also seems to miss the point when he argues that the monarchy as an institution defended against the "instability of covenant." While he qualifies this by saying that it reinforced the law rather than replaced it, he fails to recognize that the very institution itself tended toward the covenant's nullification in that it established an alternative sovereign. Moreover, and as Lohfink would likely respond, to suggest that centralized institutions of power are necessary to secure Yahweh's word goes directly against the very essence of Israel's election and its calling to be a counter-model to the nations. Recalling Dumbrell, Israel's national identity was located in its relationship to Yahweh, rather than the conventional politics of the day. That must include political institutions, and the notion of a "circumcised" (or in our day, "baptized") worldly power was simply not in the picture.

Conservation of the law goes hand-in-hand with the maintenance of Israel's national identity, which, for O'Donovan, requires "security" provided by the monarchy. Indeed, the monarchy's role was to safeguard the continuation and perpetuation of that identity. Yet, as I will shortly demonstrate with Jeremiah, the question at hand is precisely *which* national identity is being secured. In fact, multiple identity discourses are at work at various points in Israel's national experience, and what the prophets help bring out is that those perpetuated by the monarchy were often quite contrary to those of the covenant.⁷⁵ The monarchy, rather than defending Israel's covenant identity, more often worked to undermine it.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ It is mentioned in passing on pp. 35, 52.

⁷⁵ This points to the possible relevance of certain understandings of nationalism—e.g., contested narratives and symbol competition—even back into antiquity. See Steven Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

⁷⁶ Indeed, it may be that the most compelling objection to O'Donovan's schema regarding the monarchy as mediator of divine rule is that it simply did not work.

Israel's internal political order is not the only problem for the prophets, however. The proliferation of foreign alliances in the Old Testament, i.e., covenants with suzerains alternative to Yahweh, is a major theme of general prophetic critique in Israel, and Hosea indicts the northern kingdom for this practice at multiple points. In the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite War, Hosea condemns Ephraim for going to Assyria, even though "he is not able to cure you or heal your wound" (5:13; cf. 2 Kings 16:3). Lind links the war itself to "power politics" on the parts of both Israel and Judah, but also their behavior afterwards: "To heal their wounds, they did not repent of their act of warfare...but extended their violence by appealing to an international politics quite foreign to Yahwism. Each against the other appealed for help from the king of Assyria."⁷⁷ This critique continues in 7:11, where Hosea says of Israel's strategic vacillation, "Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria." To put it in other words, "Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence; they make a treaty with Assyria and oil is carried to Egypt" (12:1). In 8:8-9, he observes Israel's abandonment of purpose and loyalty: "Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild ass wandering alone; Ephraim has bargained for lovers." As Wolff remarks, "Israel's surrender to the enemy makes it despicable among the nations....Israel is a precious, desirable, notable people among the nations only as her God's free covenant people."⁷⁸

Yahweh's judgments are unequivocal: "Though they bargain with the nations, I will now gather them up. They shall soon writhe under the burden of kings and princes" (8:10). This last phrase, "kings and princes," can be read as "king of kings," which is to say, "suzerain," i.e., the king of Assyria.⁷⁹ Ephraim has traded covenant for alliance, so "they shall not remain in the land of the Lord; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food" (9:3). And again, "They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they

⁷⁷ Millard C. Lind, "Hosea 5:8-6:6," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 400.

⁷⁸ Wolff, 142.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 144. See also Machinist, 159.

have refused to return to me” (11:5). Note that Yahweh’s judgments—conquest by Assyria and deportation there or to Egypt—are not arbitrary or unrelated to Israel’s transgressions; rather, they are the theopolitical extensions of Israel’s own actions, Israel’s particular acts of unfaithfulness carried to their logical conclusion.

What are the theopolitical implications of Israel’s *realpolitik*? Among the biblical scholars discussed here, Machinist puts the question best: “Is it, for example, a public renunciation of YHWH in favor of foreign deities, or a pursuit of a foreign policy that Hosea believes YHWH regards as mistaken, even if the perpetrators try to invoke YHWH’s support?”⁸⁰ Perhaps the answer cannot be bound to either on its own, not because it is simply both, but because in this case of *realpolitik*, they are one and the same. This becomes especially clear if we conceive of Yahweh’s covenant project in terms not just of Israel’s religion and/or politics, but in terms of Israel’s very identity. Again, the themes of (1) inseparability of the religious and political for Israel, and (2) identity as constituted by practice, return to the fore.

The theopolitical emphasis of this study, if correct, must bring into question the differentiation made by some scholars between Israel’s religious and political practices. In the matter of kingship, for instance, Dumbrell argues that the covenant breach addressed in 8:4-6 was evident at the “political level” in that the people had established their own form of kingship, usurping Yahweh’s authority to install his own choice; “their real allegiance, however, was exhibited at the religious level,” in their setting up a calf at Samaria (8:5-6).⁸¹ He goes on to describe the religious and political in Israel as “interrelated,” but this is more of a passing comment, as he continues to state that “Israel’s corruption manifests itself in its idolatrous worship.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Machinist, 164.

⁸¹ Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*, 179. I appreciate Dumbrell immensely for his insights, especially on the centrality and scope of covenant. It is unclear why he seems to become so singularly focused here.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 181.

If my analysis is correct, Dumbrell's is a false dichotomy, for if Yahweh is usurped as king, there is already a corruption of covenant, already a violation of a system inherently both religious and political, i.e., theopolitical. As Lind states, "In ancient Israel, religion and politics were one. Yahweh as political leader to whom the people committed themselves in obedience made his will known through the prophet. Thus torah and word of Yahweh through the prophet, rather than kingship as an institution representing violent power...were at the center of Yahwistic politics."⁸³ By supplanting Yahweh's position as king, and thereby subverting the divinely instituted theopolitical system, the human king becomes an idol. Political behavior directly constitutes cultic corruption. By centralizing the state, Israel compromises its covenant vocation, another direct affront to Yahweh, and therefore a transgression simultaneously religious and political. Dumbrell mentions the calf at Samaria as an example of religious disloyalty, but if the calf is set up to secure the political power of the northern king(s) (1 Kings 12:26-30), is it primarily a religious or political offense? Again, one must conclude that this behavior is theopolitical, both political and religious at the same time, refusing to draw a sharp distinction between the two aspects or to subordinate one to the other.

The same is true for Israel's practice of foreign alliances, where the problematic differentiation by some scholars between Israel's religious and political behavior is even more pronounced. To begin again with Dumbrell, who seems almost solely concerned with "religious deviations,"⁸⁴ Israel's waywardness is due to "incorrect theology, which is indicated clearly by the national dependency on the Canaanite fertility cult and on other apostasies."⁸⁵ Prophesying against the divided people,

Hosea 11:12-12:2 takes up a new reproach against Israel and Judah as faithless and unrepentant, because of their Canaanite idolatry. Judah is on view (11:12b), where Judah still roams with Canaanite El and keeps faith with the 'holy ones' (i.e., of El's Canaanite court) by their policy of foreign alliances. Israel is on

⁸³ Lind, 401.

⁸⁴ Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*, 171.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

view at 11:12a and 12:1 as the inveterate liar. It is extreme folly for Ephraim (12:1) to seek security from any other source than Yahweh.⁸⁶

Through prophetic critique, “Israel is reminded of the first commandment. The survival of the nation depends on their keeping it, for polytheism denied Yahweh’s uniqueness.” Finally, “Hosea sees clearly that it is Israel’s spiritual adultery...which has undermined and drained the nation’s moral fiber.”⁸⁷

It is not that Dumbrell is incorrect *per se* in identifying Hosea’s referents, but rather that he too narrowly interprets Hosea’s critique. The Israelites did not wake up one morning and think to themselves, “We feel religiously unsatisfied. Let’s go to our neighbors and experiment with their cultic practices.”⁸⁸ Nor was cultic idolatry merely the by-product of political maneuvering in the international realm. Rather, such *realpolitik* actually *constituted* idolatry. Since Israel was in covenant with not just any suzerain, but with the divine Yahweh, vassalage to another would be synonymous with idolatry. Indeed, it could be argued that were Israel’s cultic practices to have remained the same (against all odds, of course), Israel would still have been guilty of idolatry. Dumbrell overemphasizes the cultic problem at the expense of the political, and more importantly at the expense of the unity of both.

Wolff also misses this in a minor way, when he relates the mention of silver and gold in 8:4b to idols only in the cultic sense, even though the immediate context is political.⁸⁹ He goes on to note Hosea’s decrial of Israel having to pay her “lovers” to take her (8:9), mentioning that Tiglath-pileser III reported Hoshea’s gift of 1000 talents of silver in tribute.⁹⁰ Considering the immediate context, and with the theology of covenant in mind, could not the “idols” in 8:4b also refer to alternative suzerains? Meanwhile, Pentecost inexplicably shifts gears from the political to the cultic where Hosea complains in 7:8 that “Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples”; despite

⁸⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 184, 185.

⁸⁸ Whether this could describe various phenomena among church attendees in the United States I will leave for another discussion.

⁸⁹ Wolff, 139.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 143.

this reference occurring in a section entitled “Failed International Politics,” Pentiuic writes that Hosea “probably refers to religious syncretism” with Assyria and Egypt.⁹¹ Such assertions fail to note that the religious and political are, at all times, interwoven to an almost indistinguishable degree.⁹² Under the Sinaitic covenant, where religion is inherently political and politics inherently religious; where I AM, creator of all and redeemer of Israel, reigns as sovereign and as suzerain; where the very purpose of Israel as a political community is the embodiment of Yahweh’s reign on earth and the mediation of his grace to the world; here, there cannot be religious faithfulness apart from political faithfulness, nor proper politics without proper theology. They are symbiotic; indeed in a very strong sense, they are one.

Hosea’s prophetic critique of Ephraim can therefore be read not merely as a critique of Israel’s political “promiscuity” or cultic idolatry, nor as the former leading to the latter, but ultimately as an indictment against Israel for adulterating its covenant identity before Yahweh, for worshipping “the projection of its own national ego into the world of the divine.”⁹³ As Levenson compellingly asserts,

In covenant theology, Sinai serves as an eternal rebuke to man’s arrogant belief that he can govern himself. The state is not coeval with God. Rather, it was born at a particular moment in history and under the judgment of a disappointed God. In a better world, one in which man turns to God with all his heart, it would not exist....For the theological tradition maintained that Israel had been a people before she was a worldly kingdom, a people to whom laws and even a destiny had already been given. She owes neither to the state.⁹⁴

By forgetting Yahweh as deliverer and provider, protector and king, Israel seeks to secure itself by the same means as the rest of the nations before whom Israel is supposed to be embodying Yahweh’s transformative kingdom, and to whom Israel is supposed to be mediating

⁹¹ Eugene Pentiuic, *Long-Suffering Love: A Commentary on Hosea with Patristic Annotations* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2002), 108.

⁹² This observation from the biblical narrative affirms the theological orientation of the scholars surveyed in Chapter 1, and particularly Cavanaugh, given his critique of modernity’s artificial separation of politics and theology.

⁹³ Lind, 400. Lind’s line here is a neat encapsulation of the theme of this entire project.

⁹⁴ Levenson, 74.

Yahweh's grace—and these, in the ultimate hope that the nations will join Israel in submission to Yahweh's reign.

Not only are religion and politics melded together as one phenomenon, but they act as one in the formation—or deformation—of Israel's identity. Identity is a continuous phenomenon, wherein theopolitical practices do not merely reflect, but constitute it. Of course, for Israel, it is *both* a “founding act” (Yahweh's act of election) *and* a “regulated process of repetition” (Israel's realization of election in Torah) that contribute cooperatively to identity. The point remains, however, that stability of identity is directly related to stability of practice.

Note the significant shift in Hosea 8:8, the change in Ephraim's very identity. The Northern Kingdom is no longer part of the special possession of Exodus 19:5, put aside by Yahweh for special purpose, but is now “useless.” Rather than being understood as merely “ineffective,” this can be read as a sort of anti-election, albeit temporary; it is a judgment that the northern kingdom is at this moment, and of its own volition, completely *other* than the community Yahweh established at Sinai. If this seems too strong an interpretation, consider the progression of names of Hosea's children conceived with Gomer (1:4-8). The first is Jezreel, named after the location of a bloody coup d'état under Jehu and undoubtedly condemning the political violence rampant in the north, as well as foreshadowing the site of Yahweh's impending judgment. The second is named “Lo-ruhamah,” or “not loved,” for Yahweh will “no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them.”⁹⁵ The third child, whose name is the culmination of this movement toward Ephraim's condemnation, is named “Lo-ammi,” or “No-kin-of-mine,” for “you are not my people and I am not your God.” It is clear that covenant with the Northern Kingdom is no longer in force, broken by Ephraim's own theopolitical practices and then officially annulled by the covenant suzerain. That said, hope remains, for the people will not forever be estranged from their Lord (1:10).

⁹⁵ This statement is in contrast to Yahweh's next, namely that he will have pity on the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and save it. Yet, it is significant that Yahweh rejects in 1:7 the use of typical military means to achieve Judah's salvation; instead, “I will save them by the Lord their God.”

Covenant and Identity in the Prophets: Jeremiah and Civil Religion

A century later, the prophet Jeremiah is commissioned to declare Yahweh's judgment over the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which during his career increasingly succumbed to the same tendencies as its former northern counterpart. What we find in Jeremiah is a similar critique of *realpolitik* to that of Hosea, but specifically over against a particular understanding of the Davidic covenant that adulterates Judah's theopolitical identity in covenant with Yahweh. Examining Jeremiah in this manner sheds light on the significance of the theological-political symbiosis in Israel, and within that, the particular element of national story.

I begin by discussing the Davidic covenant itself, as presented in the books of 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. By 2 Samuel 7, King David, sitting back after achieving a measure of stability and contentedness, notices the disparity between his own residence and that of the Ark of the Covenant, the seat of Yahweh. He proposes to build a more prestigious structure for Yahweh, but Yahweh intervenes reminding David through the prophet Nathan that he (Yahweh) has never requested such a structure, that he has freely moved about with his people (7:1-7).⁹⁶ Instead, Yahweh tells David that he will make David's name great, and shall provide a permanent place for Israel. Moreover, with a metaphorical twist, Yahweh will establish David's "house," with particular attention to David's offspring, upon whom Yahweh will bestow attentive care and "steadfast love" (*hesed*, covenant faithfulness). In short, "your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (7:12-16). In this passage, there is no mention of conditionality upon Yahweh's promise; permanence, not contingency, is the theme.⁹⁷ We find an almost identical telling of the story in 1 Chronicles 17.

⁹⁶ The reader can sense a resistance on Yahweh's part to any move that would attempt to make Yahweh's presence static, to anchor him down or otherwise constrain him amongst his people and in the world. Note also that Yahweh's desired tent dwelling does not prompt David to question the luxury of his own accommodations; the latter is merely assumed as appropriate, by which David then evaluates the former.

⁹⁷ Note also that nothing is mentioned of David having earned this "house" by previous behavior. This is simply a gracious act of Yahweh's own initiative, for the sake of the people of Israel (7:10-11), read later in the Christian tradition to be preparation for the Messiah, rather than glorification of David.

David then charges Solomon to build the temple, and makes preparations since Solomon is still young (1 Chron 22).⁹⁸

Eventually, Solomon builds the grand temple and proceeds to dedicate it. Of great interest is the discourse of that dedication, in which Solomon alludes to Yahweh's promise to David, "There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel," but with the caveat, "if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me" (1 Kings 8:25; 2 Chron 6:16). The seemingly unconditional covenant with David has been, within a generation, conditioned by his "children's" covenant faithfulness. Whether "children" refers to royal heirs or to the whole people, it is clear that by Solomon's reign, ongoing allegiance to Yahweh's covenant is understood as necessary for the continuity of the dynasty. 2 Chronicles 7 reinforces this qualification. Here, Solomon receives a vision in the night, wherein Yahweh affirms his own covenant *hesed*, reminding Solomon that when he punishes Israel, he will also forgive, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways" (7:13-14). Yahweh affirms his consecration of the temple as a permanent dwelling for his presence, and reaffirms his establishment of the Davidic throne, but only "if you walk before me, as your father David walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my ordinances" (7:16-18). Moreover, Yahweh warns, "if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before

⁹⁸ It should be noted that in 22:2, "David gave orders to gather together the aliens who were residing in the land of Israel, and he set stonemasons to prepare dressed stones for building the house of God." It is not clear whether these aliens were used as slaves, but it no doubt prepared the way for Solomon to follow suit on a larger scale.

It is interesting, in light of the Davidic covenant passages above, to note David's remark to his son regarding his own desire to build the temple: "But the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood in my sight on the earth'" (22:8). In this confession of a father to his son, we see Yahweh's displeasure at the violence inherent in the centralizing state. Equally interesting is Solomon's own explanation to Hiram of Tyre when ordering cedar from Lebanon: "You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet" (1 Kings 5:3). Not only does this directly contradict 2 Samuel 7:1, where *prior to* entertaining the notion of a temple, David "was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him," but it more significantly transfers the onus for the violence upon David's enemies rather than himself.

you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from the land that I have given you; and this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among the peoples” (7:19-20). When passers-by ask why Yahweh has destroyed his own temple and the land of Israel, “they will say, ‘Because they abandoned the Lord the God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore he has brought all this calamity upon them” (7:22)—in short, because Israel has forsaken the Sinaitic covenant.

What sense do we make of this in conjunction with the promise to David? Certainly, it is possible for the Solomonic caveats to be later insertions into the texts by redactors concerned to explain the exile and to justify a renewed sensitivity to Torah. However, that would beg the question of why the insertion was made only later in the narrative (1 Kings 8; 2 Chron 7) and not in the original, most problematic passages (2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17). Surely, if a redactor is motivated by such profound concerns and is bold enough to change the text in this dramatic a fashion, he would go right to the source of the problem and adjust the original pronouncement; but the earlier passages are left alone. Therefore, I believe it more reasonable, exegetically and theologically, to read the narrative to say that within a generation—if not from the beginning and simply taken for granted—an understanding existed with divine confirmation that the continuation of the Davidic throne was contingent upon the continued obedience of Israel. Yahweh will, as promised, hold faithful to his own covenant obligations, and will even allow Israel to be restored with proper repentance; but the heirs of the covenant must abide by their own obligations for the covenant to remain active. Thus, the Davidic covenant is firmly situated within the expectations of the Sinaitic, where Yahweh’s election is always open to Israel, but must be realized in Israel’s own covenant faithfulness.

Jeremiah grapples with such contested interpretations of the Davidic covenant to the point of great personal suffering, as is well known. Of course, Jeremiah’s career might not have been expected to go in the dismal direction it did, as it began in the midst of a major project of

reform initiated in 625 under the auspices of King Josiah. It was during the various stages of reform, which included the purging of the Assyrian cult from Judean territory (2 Kings 22:1-7; 2 Chron 34:3-8), that the temple in Jerusalem was being refurbished and a copy of the Book of the Law was found (2 Kings 22:8ff.; 2 Chron 34:14ff.). As the narrative relates, Josiah and the people of Judah repented upon hearing the words of Torah, and pledged themselves to further measures for purification, “for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chron 34:21).

The work of John Bright is very helpful in relating the theopolitical backdrop of Jeremiah’s ministry.⁹⁹ By the mid-to-late seventh century, Assyria’s power was on the wane, and the kingdom of Judah saw an opportunity to finally reassert its independence. The Josian reforms, while no doubt aimed at correcting genuine problems in cult and politics, were likely motivated in part by nationalist desires to reassert Judean autonomy over against imperial rule.¹⁰⁰ Bright notes “oscillation between syncretism and reform coincident with shifts in the national policy” over time, with Josiah reversing Manasseh just as Hezekiah had Ahaz. And since any Assyrian-initiated cult would have symbolized “national humiliation,” a nationalist independence movement would certainly have moved to eradicate its elements. Josiah’s incorporation of former territories of Ephraim would likewise have contributed to the twofold vision of a free Israel united under the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. Additionally, this process occurred during a period of considerable tension and unease in the ancient Near East as the great empires of the era were dissolving: “Side by side with the excitement of newly found independence, and the optimism implicit in the official dynastic theology, there walked a profound unease, a

⁹⁹ John Bright, *History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 319. The first part of 2 Chronicles 34 tells of some of Josiah’s measures, including a campaign throughout Judah and in the lands of Manasseh and Ephraim in the north to destroy remnants of the Assyrian cultic system. This included the taking up of funds for the refurbishment of the temple in Jerusalem, money acquired in part “from all the remnant of Israel” (34:9). Clearly, Josiah’s reforms aimed at a reconsolidation of the Israelite nation, concentrating on the royal court and temple in Jerusalem.

premonition of judgment, together with the feeling...that the nation's security lay in a return to ancient tradition."¹⁰¹

Within this context, "the Deuteronomic law fell like the thunderclap of conscience."¹⁰² The finding of the Book of the Law catalyzed this reform program like nothing else could, and though found while reform was already in progress, arguably provided its core motivation. In this context, the Law would have been understood to say that "the nation's very life depended upon a return to the covenant relationship in which the national existence had originally been based," and until then, it was "living in a fool's paradise in assuming that Yahweh through his promises to David was irrevocably committed to its defense."¹⁰³ Reform, on the other hand, "called the people back behind the official theology of the Davidic covenant to an older notion of covenant, and committed nation and people to obedience to its stipulations."¹⁰⁴ For his acts of faithfulness, Josiah is informed that while judgment upon Judah is now inevitable, he will himself be spared the experience (2 Chron 34:23-28).

It is within this context that Jeremiah arises as prophet, one who "stood in a yet older tradition reaching back through Hosea to the Mosaic covenant itself."¹⁰⁵ While he undoubtedly supported Josiah's measures of reform and purification, Bright suspects this support likely waned as the measures became institutionalized, for in that process a priestly monopoly along with the attendant temple bureaucracy was established in Jerusalem. This likely contributed to a certain "secularization" of other aspects of society, "a separation of cultic and common life never known before." Moreover, the reforms tended toward external measures over against more "spiritual"

¹⁰¹ Bright, 320. There is no need to appreciate this statement by Bright in a merely sociological sense. It is consistent with the theological schema of covenant as well, though the faith in "official dynastic theology," as we will see, is misplaced, and notions of "security" require redefinition. Certainly insecurity and listlessness would have been expected after a long period of disregard for Torah, and a return to covenant would be viewed as necessary.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 321-322.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 321.

ones, creating “a false sense of peace that nothing could penetrate.”¹⁰⁶ Bright’s conclusion regarding the reform proves telling for our own discussion:

The very reform law that imparted a note of moral and religious responsibility to the national theology fortified that bogus sense of security against which Jeremiah battled in vain. Since the law demanded reform as the price of national security, the popular mind supposed that by making that reform Yahweh’s demands have been satisfied (chs.6:13f.; 8:10f.). The Mosaic covenant, its demands supposedly met, became the handmaid of the Davidic covenant, guaranteeing the permanence of Temple, dynasty, and state. The theology of the law had, indeed, been made into a caricature of itself: automatic protection bought by external compliance.”¹⁰⁷

Ultimately, under the reign of Jehoiakim, reform collapses altogether. Whether it was simply a lack of attention, or whether Josiah’s death and subsequent national humiliation galvanized opposition to and resentment of Deuteronomic covenant, “pagan practices crept back...and public morality deteriorated.” Those who spoke out against this deterioration were met with scorn, persecution, and even death. Thus, as Bright suggests, “one senses that the official theology with its immutable promises had triumphed in its most distorted form, and that the people were entrenched in the confidence that Temple, city, and nation were eternally secure in Yahweh’s covenant with David—for so prophet and priest assured them...”¹⁰⁸

It is against this larger backdrop that Jeremiah conducts his long and dramatic prophetic ministry in Judah. At the outset of the book, Yahweh appoints Jeremiah “over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:10). This commission is significant even at first blush because it suggests that the prophecy to follow is going to be global in character, with direct implications for international politics of the day. Moreover, Yahweh is clearly claiming international sovereignty, the singular authority to control the fates of kingdoms, and to appoint a prophet as mediator of that authority. What is also clear, though, is that in claiming such sovereignty, Yahweh is through Jeremiah directly repudiating his reduction to state god in the days of the early monarchy. This God is not in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 323.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 326.

service to the state, but rather is Lord of the nations, and he has appointed a spokesperson to proclaim his world sovereignty in the face of a people who would not.

Similarly to Hosea in Israel, Yahweh makes clear through Jeremiah his displeasure with Judah's *realpolitik* of foreign alliances. He complains, "They did not say, 'Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt?'" Yahweh then asks, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer 2:11-13). These complaints are noteworthy for their covenant allusions, namely to the historical prologue (Exod 20:2a; Deut 5:6a) and to the covenant witness of the heavens (Deut 30:19; 31:28). Yahweh asks specifically why Judah has appealed to Assyria or Egypt for help (Jer 2:18), as opposed to the suzerain who has already proved himself, namely Yahweh. Jeremiah seems to specifically target the ruling elite in Judah, warning them that on the day of the Lords' judgment, "courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded" (4:9). Like Ephraim before it, the leadership of Judah has committed theopolitical apostasy, and judgment is imminent.

With such a fate in view, Jeremiah 27 relates that a number of foreign dignitaries gather in the court of Zedekiah to devise a common strategy against Babylon. In the midst of this summit, Jeremiah declares that they are all to submit to Babylon, according to the word of the sovereign Yahweh, and that any prophet or other official proclaiming that their god—even Yahweh—will save them is a liar, a false prophet (Jer 27:8-10). As Pixley writes,

This is a truly remarkable historico-theological assessment of the geopolitical situation of that time. It can only be understood when we realize the royal theology that Jeremiah meant to undercut. This theology claimed that God had an eternal commitment to David and to the Jerusalem temple, God's resting place, and that its security was assured, regardless of greater geopolitical

developments. Jeremiah's ministry was devoted to destroying that false security, a security based on a theology that was not faithful to the Torah...¹⁰⁹

Two elements of Pixley's observation are particularly interesting. First, he underscores the very different and even competing views of Israel's national identity at play. One view, rooted in a distorted understanding of the Davidic covenant, confuses the *state* for the *covenant community* of Israel as Yahweh's vassal. Its propagators, operating out of their own institutional interests, attempt to secure themselves through a theology that conforms to their political practice and that ensures their survival. Jeremiah resists this vehemently, and his sharp response later in Chapter 46 to notions of allying with Egypt illustrate his confidence in Yahweh's word. This alternative empire, in whom the small kingdoms of Palestine consider placing their trust, is no match for Babylon as Yahweh's instrument of judgment: even as Egypt projects its power against an imperial competitor, it meets a grim fate in the day of the Lord's judgment (46:3-12). The Judeans are not to listen to those prophets who proclaim otherwise.¹¹⁰

Jeremiah's view is rooted in the Sinaitic covenant, and his is a "theology of uncompromising Torah loyalty."¹¹¹ Of course, in fulfilling his prophetic vocation, he becomes "a traitor to his nation at a grave moment of national crisis,"¹¹² or more precisely, Jeremiah has subverted one national identity in favor of another, more fundamental one. Opposed to him are all the kings, prophets, priests, and others who "believe that God crowns the Judean king and is loyal to him [notice the direction of this loyalty], elects Jerusalem as a resting place and will defend it, and chooses a people and protects them in the land given to their ancestors."¹¹³ Here, a national identity rooted in the claim of divine mandate for humanly constructed political institutions is cast aside by Jeremiah for the sake of a covenant identity rooted in Yahweh and his sovereignty.

¹⁰⁹ Jorge Pixley, *Jeremiah* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 87.

¹¹⁰ See Beat Huwyler, "Jeremiah und der Volker: Politische Prophetie in der Zeit der babylonischen Bedrohung," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 52 (1996): 193-205.

¹¹¹ Pixley, 83.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 83.

The second intriguing element in Pixley's quote is the emphasis on security, especially security based on false theology. Arguably, the theology Jeremiah resists is not simply the Davidic covenant and the promise of the house of David restored,¹¹⁴ but rather the notion that Yahweh would somehow bless the *realpolitik* of the nations as practiced within and by the nation of Israel. As Hosea made clear for Ephraim, kingship and alliances, state centralization, and the foreign policy of state interests all contradict Yahweh's intent for Israel to be a nation mediating his grace to the world. Recall Lohfink's description of ancient Near East national deities, those "earthly forces and powers that represented ultimate realities for human beings," and particularly human powers and powers that shaped history: "knowledge domination, violence, money, rivalry, war, life, death."¹¹⁵ To this list we may add security, which became the ultimate reality for Israel, in both the North and South. Security is what drove the people to demand a king of Samuel. Security, both national and personal, is what prompted David to centralize the state and establish a professional army, Solomon to expand the empire and institute slavery, Rheoboam to maintain conditions of servitude, Jeroboam to set up calves at Dan and Bethel, and the subsequent dynasties to take land, oppress the poor, kill the innocent and the prophets, enter into myriad foreign alliances and seek alternate suzerains. Security was the god of the Northern and Southern states, of their civil religions, and thus of their national identities; and though they may name that god Yahweh, declares Jeremiah, the Yahweh of the covenant will not bless them, but will bring an end to their apostasy.

If this assessment is correct, then what we find advocated by Jeremiah and other prophets is an alternate notion of national identity to that held by the monarchy and ruling elite. The latter portrays the Davidic covenant as an unqualified guarantee of state survival, such that no threat can be seen as a potential act of discipline or judgment, but rather can be resisted according to the means and methods inherent in the monarchical institutions Yahweh has ostensibly sanctioned.

¹¹⁴ Note that any concept of "restoration" would be foreign to the establishment interpretation since it conceived of the *actualization* of the Davidic promise as enduring and unable to be broken.

¹¹⁵ Lohfink, 2.

This, according to Redditt, ultimately constitutes Israel's "civil religion," revolving around a "national story," the height of which is the monarchy, and Yahweh is the ever-forgiving god who endorses it.¹¹⁶ Note that this story is an amalgam: an interweaving of certain aspects of Israel's covenant narrative, selectively sifted and reinterpreted, with a national narrative of Yahweh blessing and securing the monarchical state. In some ways, it is a departure from the Josian understanding that prompted repentance in his day; but it is also consistent with the Josian emphasis on centralization of power as key to continuity. In short, the existence and success of the monarchy is the central element of national identity.

On the other hand, Hosea, Jeremiah, and other prophets represent what can be called the *covenant* view of Israel's national identity. According to this view, the monarchical state is an inherently corrupt institution, its existence and practices inevitably constituting an adulteration of covenant. Their prophetic critiques aim in part to galvanize the leaders and people toward recapturing the previous period of covenant *hesed*, and the judgments they prophesy are part of that revitalization process.¹¹⁷

These competing views are manifested throughout the prophetic critiques, but especially in pericopes relating confrontation between the prophets and representatives of the ruling establishment. As Jeremiah declares early in the text, the nation has been corrupted as "the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so"; for this reason, Yahweh will bring retribution (5:29-31). In chapter 6, where Yahweh complains that "from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and

¹¹⁶ Paul L. Redditt, "When Faith Demands Treason: Civil Religion and the Prophet Jeremiah," *Review and Expositor* 101 (Spring 2004): 231.

¹¹⁷ O'Donovan argues that only at the point of Jehoiachin's reign, immediately preceding the exile under King Zedekiah, has the prophetic office essentially "taken over the mediatorial role, a sign that the monarchy, which was to mediate Yhwh's rule to his people, has been set aside" (O'Donovan, 77). Later, in his discussion of the convergence of mediatorial and representative roles in Christ, he identifies the prophetic role as "representative individual" who dramatized "the tradition of the isolated sufferers in Israel's liturgy," over against the "Davidide monarch" as "mediator of God's rule" (123). However, given the account I have presented, it is more reasonable to understand the prophet as the proper mediator of Yahweh's rule all along, a role necessitated once that rule had been usurped (albeit with Yahweh's reluctant acquiescence) by the monarchy.

from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.” These leaders have taken seriously neither the sin nor the suffering of the people, “saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Consequently, they will not be spared in the coming judgment, for “they acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush” (6:13-15).

Along these lines, we see in Jeremiah 28 an encounter between Jeremiah and another prophet, Hananiah, who addresses Jeremiah in the midst of the latter’s proclaiming Judah’s fate via visual demonstration. Hananiah publicly contradicts Jeremiah’s message with a proclamation of assurance: Yahweh will “break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years” (Jer 28:11). Hananiah then removes the yoke Jeremiah has been wearing, thereby symbolizing Yahweh’s rejection of Jeremiah’s message. As Redditt writes, the audience was now confronted with two diametrically opposed visions of the nation’s future: “Whom should they believe? It would be easier to believe Hananiah, because his version suited the belief that God would defend God’s people and return them to God’s land and God’s temple.”¹¹⁸ While Jeremiah agrees that Hananiah’s word would be good news if actually borne out, he ultimately returns to Hananiah with a word of judgment: “the Lord has not sent you, and you made this people trust in a lie.” For this transgression, Hananiah will die within the year (28:15-16).¹¹⁹

This confrontation helps illustrate the opposed viewpoints of Yahweh’s “outsider” prophets versus priests and prophets in the employ of the state. For the monarchical understanding of national identity, it is inconceivable that Yahweh would allow, not just the nation, but the state to fall. For the covenant view, nothing is unimaginable given the sovereignty

¹¹⁸ Redditt, 238-239.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Amos 7:10-17, wherein, following a prophetic denunciation of Ephraim for its injustice and syncretism as well as a corresponding announcement of judgment, Amaziah, priest of Bethel, complains to Jeroboam II that Amos has “conspired” against the monarchy in the very center of the kingdom. He then orders Amos to go back to Judah to prophesy and to never return to Bethel, “the king’s sanctuary, and...temple of the kingdom.” Amos counters by distancing himself from the career prophets of either kingdom, and announces a personal judgment upon Amaziah for the latter’s rejection of the word of the Lord (7:14-17).

of Yahweh; his word is to be obeyed. The survival of Yahweh's plan in and for the people of Israel is simply not synonymous with the survival of the state.

Moreover, it is interesting to note how the people's relationship with Yahweh is conceived within these opposing viewpoints. In the first, it is not simply the covenant nation of the Israel, but the *state* of Judah that is elected and blessed by Yahweh. The monarchy's politics, both its internal political ordering and its foreign policy, are assumed to be sanctioned by Yahweh for the expansion of the state, since the state itself is the manifestation of Yahweh's blessings and intent for Israel. Here, Yahweh is again god of the state, the securer of the state's survival, or more precisely, the divine underwriter of the state's own pursuit of security.

In the second, Yahweh's name is not to be taken in vain, as it was with Hananiah. Yahweh is Lord of all the nations, and it is a manifestation of Yahweh's sovereignty as well as his compassion that the nation of Israel is chosen to mediate grace to the world. To reiterate Lohfink's helpful take: "Israel's being chosen is not a privilege or a preference *over others*, but existence *for others*, and hence the heaviest burden in history."¹²⁰ The exigencies of state survival preclude other-oriented existence, undermining Israel's calling; hence the judgment. Yahweh knows the world simply cannot afford the continuation of an Israelite state, whether united or divided, for that is not what it means to be the People of God.

Prophetic Promise

Yet even in the face of certain judgment, the prophets do envision a "future with hope" (Jer 29:11) in which a new nation is complete, in perfect obedience to covenant. Amos foresees a day when Yahweh will "raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old," when he will "restore the fortunes of my people Israel" (Amos 9:11, 14a). Hosea promises that upon Israel's return to the Lord, Yahweh

¹²⁰ Lohfink, 37. Emphasis in the original.

will “heal their disloyalty” and “love them freely”; he will be the “dew” that nurtures Israel to again “blossom like the lily.” In that day, “they shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden” (Hosea 14:1-7). Indeed, the severing of covenant is undone in Yahweh’s mercy, when Hosea’s children will be renamed Ruhama, or “shown mercy,” and Ammi, or “my people” (21:1, 23).

And of course, there are Isaiah’s prophesies of a restored Jerusalem with a glorious future (2:2-5; 4:2-6; 26:1-4), as well as a future creation-wide kingdom of peace under the rule of an heir to the Davidic throne (9:1-7; 11:1-9). This leads to Waldemar Janzen’s discussion of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.¹²¹ According to Janzen, Isaiah’s first Servant Song in 42:1-9 portrays the elect people of Israel as God’s servant, who by the power of the Spirit will bring justice to the nations awaiting Torah. However, Israel fails in this mission and in the second Servant Song of Isaiah 49 a new servant is chosen, who, as an individual elect of God, will shoulder Israel’s calling. Here, the task is not transferred away from Israel to this person, but rather Israel is *incarnated* in this person who will fulfill its divine mandate. This person will simultaneously restore Israel and accomplish Israel’s mission of being a light to the nations.¹²²

In the final Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, this servant who is the incarnation of Israel is described further. The servant will experience suffering but will be exalted before the world (52:13-15). This one, supposedly struck down by God, is now viewed differently. He is seen as innocent, bearing the sins of the people Israel for their own salvation, and is therefore exalted, a truth to which the people witness and confess. This person “shoulders the calling of

¹²¹ Waldemar Janzen, “Suffering Servants,” in *Suffering*. Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics (Waco, TX: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2005): 20-28. Available at <http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/Suffering.pdf>. See also James M. Scott, “Jesus’ Vision for the Restoration of Israel as the Basis for a Biblical Theology of the New Testament,” Chapter 9 in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, Scott J. Hafemann, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 2002), 136-139.

¹²² Janzen, 22.

Israel and extends this calling to address both the nations and his own renegade people.”¹²³ This servant has suffered at their hands, but at the same time suffers vicariously for their sins. Thus “God’s new move” is to not ultimately reject the people of Israel despite their sundering of covenant, but rather “‘reducing God’s expectation’ of Israel to the obedience of *one* person and accepting it as vicarious for the people.”¹²⁴ The onus for the fulfillment of election and covenant is placed upon this one person, who will not fail. The people can therefore be comforted even in the midst and aftermath of judgment.

Now our discussion of election and covenant is further nuanced: Yahweh’s faithfulness, never in doubt, is extended in grace to include the restoration of the covenant vassal. This is not Yahweh’s obligation under covenant, since the Sinaitic covenant was conditional upon Israel’s faithfulness. Rather, Yahweh acts outside of covenant for Israel’s sake. This is an initiative of Yahweh’s freedom and grace, to overcome Israel’s failure to realize its own election by incarnating Israel in a Servant who will suffer on its behalf and thereby definitively fulfill Israel’s identity and mission.

Conclusion

This chapter has had the very important purpose of laying out the theopolitics of biblical Israel as normative for the church, whose relation to it will be made clear in the next chapter. Here, I have explained the significance of Israel’s election and covenant, which were given by Yahweh to Israel for the express purpose of embodying a theopolitics in the midst of the nations that would be a visible sign of God’s reign, and thus of God’s salvation, inviting the nations to join Israel in submission to and praise of that reign. I also delineated the ways in which Israel gradually syncretized its divinely ordained theopolitics with the politics of the nations and

¹²³ Ibid., 23. According to Janzen, the historical identity of this person is deliberately kept hidden, so that “the emphasis falls fully on the servant-role, a role marked not only by proclamation in words, but by suffering unto death.”

¹²⁴ Ibid., 24.

of empire, and how that syncretism led necessarily to an abandonment of covenant. I also pointed out that in freedom and grace, Yahweh did not likewise abandon Israel but promised through the prophets to restore the singular people to its election-and-covenant identity. How Yahweh accomplishes this is the subject of the next chapter.

What is important here is to note that nationalist appropriations of Israel as the forebear of the current nation are off-base from the start, given that Israel's identity is theopolitically unique and constituted in contrast with the world's political systems. Moreover, given that nationalism essentially entails the acquirement of power and the securing of its identity in political institutions—often through the use of violence—its necessary *realpolitik* cannot be made continuous with biblical Israel properly understood. Thus, any nationalist narrative presenting the present nation and/or state as rooted in Israel—whether the historical examples from the previous chapter or the contemporary examples discussed in Chapters 6 and 7—must be considered false. Israel cannot be appropriated in this fashion. Rather, continuity works in the other direction: a people must be engrafted onto Israel. And as will be made clear in the next chapter, the only people so engrafted is the church. This is only made more clear in light of the incarnation of Israel in Jesus Christ, Christ's definitive fulfillment of Israel's election and covenant, and the church as the theopolitical embodiment of that fulfillment. The next chapter will therefore demonstrate how the biblical theopolitics of Israel, and then of the church, is critical for discerning nationalism as a problem for ecclesial identity and practice and for correcting it.

CHAPTER 5—NEW TESTAMENT MESSIANIC THEOPOLITICS

Introduction

The previous chapter presented a theopolitical understanding of Israel's identity and mission as constituted in its election by Yahweh and the outworking of that election in covenant. It argued that Israel was called to be a singular theopolitical community, an embodied witness to God's reign on earth, a vision of what the world would look like under that reign. The chapter also narrated how Israel gradually abandoned that vocation by breaking covenant in various ways, was subsequently indicted by the prophets for doing so, and was judged accordingly. It also indicated, however, that even the most strident prophetic indictment was not without the hope that Yahweh may act, in spite of covenant stipulations, to restore Israel by fulfilling Israel's vocation vicariously. That vicarious fulfillment of Israel's election and covenant in Jesus the Messiah is the subject of this chapter, as is the subsequent embodiment of that fulfillment in the church. By relating these core elements of the Christian salvation narrative found in the New Testament, I hope to demonstrate that the church, via Christ, is, alone of all communities and collectives of people in world history, engrafted onto Israel's identity and mission. Therefore no state, and no other nation, can be considered elect in the Christian salvation narrative.

This chapter picks up where the previous one left off, namely with the promised definitive fulfillment of covenant in the one, chosen Suffering Servant. This servant, so understands the Christian tradition, is Jesus of Nazareth, who brings to Israel—and then to the nations—a “new covenant” that will not fail. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the one anointed as king of Israel who will be for Israel the “Way” toward finally realizing its election. In this manner, Christ proclaims a social order fulfilling and transcending Torah, inviting the world to come into the kingdom of God. Christ, in his lordship, establishes the church to embody the covenant as he has fulfilled it. This ties the church inextricably to Israel—thereby making Israel's theopolitics relevant to the ecclesia—and inaugurates the Messianic Age wherein the

kingdom of God is present alongside the old age of the powers that is passing away, and wherein the church awaits the day of that kingdom's final consummation.

Covenant in Jesus Christ

The Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity in Jesus Christ, his life and ministry, his crucifixion and resurrection, and finally his exaltation, constitute the central point and pivot of Christian salvation history, and the perfect embodiment of God's reign on earth. In Christ, covenant is restored and a People he calls his own is given identity as the definitive political community in the world. What is the nature of the "new covenant" Christ brings?¹ In what ways is it derived from, yet different from the Mosaic covenant, and why? How does it affect the direct relationship between God's sovereignty and the political identity of the People of God? This section will attempt to answer these questions, with the goal of demonstrating that the covenant with Israel has not changed in its intent and effect, but has been secured in and through Christ, and extended to all the people of the world. Through Jesus, a theopolitical community is established in the form of the ecclesia, whose purpose, like Israel's, is to proclaim and embody God's reign on earth.

The "New Covenant"

In Old Testament prophesy as well as the New Testament gospels and epistles, the reader is told that there will be a covenant between God and humanity, even after Israel has failed to uphold the one made at Sinai. We find in Jeremiah 31 that the nation of Israel (represented by Judah) had come to a point of no return in its rebellion against Yahweh and Torah, and had refused to repent and receive Yahweh's forgiveness. Therefore, writes Scott Hafemann, "what is

¹ See Jeremiah 31:31; Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8.

needed...is nothing less than a new beginning, a ‘new covenant,’ in which Israel will be decisively changed in her relationship to God.”²

But what is the nature of this new covenant? How does it differ from the “old” covenant? Hafemann points to the contrast made between the two by the prophet Jeremiah as read in 31:32, wherein “the essential difference between the new covenant and the Sinai covenant is not that a new *type* of covenant or a new *content* within the covenant will be established, but that the new covenant will not be broken like the previous one, in spite of the fact that under the Sinai covenant God was faithful to his covenant commitments...” The new covenant is therefore one that will not be forgotten.³ In the new covenant, according to Jer 31:33-34, God will place his law in the minds and hearts of the people of Israel, who, from the greatest to the least, will know the Lord. The law—the Torah—will be “inculcated by God within the heart of the people,” resulting in continuous faithfulness and fellowship with Yahweh.⁴ This “law” is “the Sinai Law itself as the embodiment of the will of God.” What distinguishes the new covenant from the old is that the people, given transformed natures, will be able to obey the Torah: “the contrast between the two covenants is a contrast between the two different *conditions of the people* who are brought into these covenants and their correspondingly different responses to the *same Law*.”⁵ Jesus, as the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17), is the perfect embodiment of Torah, and through the Spirit, will enable believers to embody it as well. The people will know the Lord directly and personally (which is not to say merely individually); because their hearts are transformed, they will be able to maintain covenant.⁶

² Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 129-30.

³ *Ibid.*, 130, in reference to Jer. 50:5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶ Lohfink provides a general note of caution here, reminding the reader to not dichotomize the Old Testament with the New. It is a mistake, he argues, to think the New Testament is about new inner spirituality or about love in contrast to wrath and punishment in the Old Testament. It is also a mistake to think the New Testament is about the individual as opposed to the “collective” in the Old Testament. In fact, the Old discusses individual responsibility, and the New emphasizes the people of God: “Of course the people of God in the Bible are more than a ‘theme.’ This idea is the basis, the ground of all biblical

Jesus as Messiah

Christian theology, as formed by the gospels and epistles of the New Testament, holds that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah foretold in the prophetic promises of the Old Testament, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the one definitively to hold David's throne. Jesus is presented in the royal line as heir to David (Matt 1:1-17). At the moment of Jesus' birth, a celestial announcement is made to the shepherds in the fields nearby that this child is to be the Messiah (Christ), Savior, and Lord (Luke 2). Through various events of his own life, Jesus recapitulates the story of Israel. Matthew 1-4 tells how he goes to Egypt to escape death in Palestine, as Jacob's family did. He is then brought back up from Egypt as Israel was delivered from slavery. After a time, he is baptized in the Jordan, reminiscent of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, and then he proceeds immediately into a 40-day period of testing in the wilderness, as Israel did for 40 years.

During this testing, as John Howard Yoder explains, Jesus is presented with multiple ways of being king,⁷ reminiscent of the many ways in which Israel was tempted to the practices of domestic and international *realpolitik* in order to secure its position vis-à-vis its neighbors. Where Israel succumbed to temptation, Jesus does not, and as the incarnation of Israel successfully fulfills covenant in this regard. Jesus' fulfillment is extended in the Sermon on the Mount, among other places, where he declares unequivocally that he has come to fulfill Torah (Matt 5-7, esp. 5:17). In Jesus, then, Israel and Yahweh are brought together in one person, who definitively fulfills the whole of covenant as both suzerain and vassal.

Jesus Christ is the "Way" by which the new covenant can be fulfilled. Lohfink explains that in Jesus, Israel is gathered together; he represents Israel as a whole, even echoing Israel's

theology in both the Old and New Testaments." See Lohfink, 122-23. Indeed, as Hans Urs von Balthasar comments, "Christ did not annul everything in the Old Testament that depended on law and on form; rather, his achievement was to make these things transparent to the light of life and to live them as the expression of the Old Testament's covenant-fidelity (*fides* in the fullest sense), now brought to perfection." See *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, (Great Britain: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1982), 218.

⁷ Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 24-27.

historical experience.⁸ Instead of having the people of Israel go into the wilderness again, Jesus goes himself, but then returns and enters into their towns and homes, into the context of their daily lives.⁹ Lohfink pairs up Mark 1:15 with Isaiah 52:7 in order to show what is happening in and through Jesus. In the former passage, Mark is prefacing his entire gospel with Jesus' statement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom [*basileia*] of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."¹⁰ The "gospel" or "good news" mentioned here refers back to the latter passage in Isaiah, wherein it is an announcement of salvation, encapsulated in the proclamation to Zion, "Your God reigns." This statement, he writes, was probably a confessional formula as it is found throughout the Old Testament. Its use in Isaiah, however, indicates a new level of meaning, i.e., that God's reign is being manifested in the world even now as an act of salvation.

Therefore, not only is redemption about the reign of God (a la Dumbrell), but God's reign *is* humanity's redemption. While God's sovereignty had long been celebrated in Israel's worship, the radical new idea is that his reign is "now being proved victorious in history."¹¹ This irruption of the kingdom of God into the world is not something abstract. The *basileia* is real, material, tangible. These passages declare that in the person of Jesus Christ, the People of God is beginning to be gathered together again, a sign to the world of the reign of God: "With the disciples begins the eschatological re-creation of Israel, and in the re-creation of Israel the reign of God is revealed...for Jesus the coming of the *basileia*, that is the acquisition of a space for the reign of God in the world, was the center of his existence."¹²

Thus, a new kingdom has arrived, out of which flows true justice (Mark 1:15; Luke 4). This kingdom is neither fully consummated nor entirely future, its nearness defined not so much by chronological imminence as by actual proximity. In Christ, it is present fully, though it

⁸ Lohfink, 128.

⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹⁰ This statement is paralleled in Luke 4:14-30, wherein Jesus makes the declaration after reading from Isaiah to worshippers in the synagogue at Nazareth.

¹¹ Lohfink, 129.

¹² Ibid., 130-1.

remains to be manifested fully throughout the world. The proclamation of this gospel, of course, is a threat to the established orders (Matt 2, 3, 21, 23), who eventually seek Jesus' destruction. Jesus, as the Second Person of the Trinity having emptied himself (Phil 2), does not resist their violence, but absorbs it despite the ever-present nationalist temptation, of which Judas Iscariot was merely the agent.¹³ In the narrative of John 18-19, we see Jesus, both Israel and Yahweh—and Yahweh having come to take back his throne—standing before a people, who, goaded on by the Jewish temple and political leadership, declare their allegiance to one king alone: Caesar (19:15). And so Jesus is killed, an enemy of the Roman empire, but even more so, an enemy of the continuing *realpolitik* cherished by powers even within the Israelite community.

But that is not the end of the story. In utter vindication by the Heavenly Father, Jesus is resurrected from the dead. He had spoken truly. He had practiced truly. He had believed truly. And in definitively fulfilling covenant for the sake of Israel—and thus for the sake of the world—Jesus is exalted by the Father, triumphing over the powers arrayed against him, and putting them in their places for all time (Col 1:15-20; 2:8-15). This is the good news he commissions his disciples to tell to the nations in word and in deed, which is largely to say, in communal life (Matt 28:18-10). All authority in the cosmos has been given to Jesus. The kingdom has arrived. True justice has come. Go make disciples to that new reality, conforming the world to its truth.

Jesus and Israel

In addition to Yoder's work mentioned above, Lohfink is again quite helpful for a theopolitical understanding of Jesus Christ's life and work. As he explains, "Jesus directed his efforts to Israel. He sought to gather it in view of the coming reign of God and to make it into the true people of God. What we now call church is nothing other than the community of those ready to live in the people of God, gathered by Jesus and sanctified by his death." Therefore, "it is very

¹³ Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 43.

meaningful to ask how Jesus gathered Israel and how he envisioned the community of the true Israel, because right here we reach the ultimately decisive question of *what the church should look like today.*”¹⁴

The fact that Jesus did not simply institute a school of discipleship, but rather first instituted *twelve* disciples, constitutes for Lohfink a “symbolic prophetic action”: “The Twelve exemplified the awakening of Israel and its gathering in the eschatological salvific community, something beginning then through Jesus.” This was a sign, something that was already present “in an anticipatory manner” but simultaneously pointing toward a fulfillment in the future, and which even now indicated what was to come.¹⁵ Everything Jesus did, even healing, was directed toward gathering the people of God in Israel from across all their various social, political, economic, and cultural divisions.¹⁶ And it is in God’s re-creation of Israel that the kingdom of God arrives. The Gentiles are never precluded from salvation, but Jesus’ attention is directed at Israel. The imagery in Scripture—particularly the pilgrimage of the nations—suggests that the Gentiles, “fascinated by the salvation visible in Israel, are driven of their own accord to the people of God.” Their belief is not so much the result of missionary activity, but rather “the fascination emitted by the people of God draws them close.”¹⁷ While God aims at and provides for the salvation of the nations, “the pagan peoples achieve participation in salvation by achieving participation in Israel.”¹⁸

Yet, this can happen only when Israel becomes such a recognizable sign, “when God’s salvation transforms his people recognizably, tangibly, even visibly.”¹⁹ Lohfink argues that “people of God” refers to something other than the monarchical national structure, and it is not

¹⁴ Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, John P. Galvin, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), xi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19. This argues against O’Donovan’s attempts to abstract political principles for application elsewhere, as though God’s politics can be emulated without participation in God’s salvific activity and community.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

“equivalent to the state of Israel.” Neither is it “merely the spiritual community of the pious.” Rather, it is “the Israel which knows itself to be chosen and called by God in its entire existence—which includes all of its social dimension.”²⁰ Consistent with the earlier discussion of election, Israel is to be a holy people on two grounds: the “electing love of God,” and also “whether [Israel] really lives in accordance with the social order which God has given it, a social order which stands in sharp contrast with those of all other nations.”²¹

Yet, as the gospels attest, Israel as a whole did not accept Jesus’ mission and message, at which point the function of the disciples became “the task of representing *symbolically* what really should have taken place in Israel as a whole: complete dedication to the gospel of the reign of God, radical conversion to a new way of life, and a gathering unto a community of brothers and sisters.”²² In the Sermon on the Mount as presented by Matthew, Jesus’ demands “presuppose from the perspective of salvation history that Jesus has announced the reign of God and made it present both in word and in mighty deeds on behalf of the afflicted members of God’s people.” Jesus proclaims the new social order of God’s people before the whole of Israel, just as Torah was proclaimed on Sinai.²³ What is key for Lohfink is that “the addressee of Jesus’ ethical instruction was neither the individual as such nor humanity in general. The addressee of his teaching was Israel, or the circle of disciples which represented Israel.”²⁴ The will of God in Jesus is the arrival of the kingdom and the “gathering of the true Israel.” Within this context, “the ones who do the will of God are those who believe Jesus’ message of the nearby reign of God and let themselves be gathered into God’s eschatological people.”²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., 122.

²¹ Ibid., 123.

²² Ibid., 34.

²³ Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁵ Ibid., 43. This is the new People of God, consisting, writes Paul, of the heirs of Abraham, all those who believed as Abraham did, and now in Christ. According to Lohfink, the task of the church in relation to Israel is to “prefigure eschatological Israel, to represent symbolically what really should have taken place in Israel as a whole.” It has the “task of making Israel jealous (Rom 11:11,14),” and so “must live its messianic existence so convincingly that Israel will abandon its reserve and come to faith.” The church “cannot exist without Israel”; it is a branch engrafted onto “the power of the ancient olive tree, Israel (Rom

Thus, Jesus' ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount must be understood in light of the gospel of the coming reign of God.²⁶ Lohfink argues that "'Jesus' yoke' replaces the Torah; his word, his teaching take the place of the Law of Sinai."²⁷ Yet it might be more accurate to say the Jesus' teaching *fulfills* the Law of Sinai, or reiterates it according to its original intent, which had been lost over the centuries. Nevertheless, within the community according to Matthew, "the place of the Torah is taken by the order of life and of society which is proclaimed by Christ." It is into this new order that the disciples are called to go throughout the world and call the nations (Matt 28:19-20).²⁸

What Jesus calls for is tangible in the here and now, even if it is yet to be globally consummated. When Jesus says "My kingship is not of this world," (John 18:36), we must carefully note the phrasing, argues Lohfink: "there is no reference to *heaven*."²⁹ Jesus' kingdom is *in* this world, but it is not *of* this world, "that is, it does not conform to the structures of this world."³⁰ Rather, it is the community of the family of God, counter to the "structures of

11:17)." The ecclesia learns from Israel "to recognize both the danger of arrogance on the part of those chosen and the irrevocability of God's electing love" (80-81).

²⁶ And so Lohfink asserts, in contrast to those like Reinhold Niebuhr who would portray nonviolence as "heroic" and therefore not realistic, that "The question is whether the gospel of the reign of God imposes intolerable demands, or whether the rule of God exerts a fascination which removes the burden and the difficulty from all the demands which it implies" (Ibid., 59).

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

²⁸ Ibid., 65-66. This point, and the biblical passage to which it refers, seems in some way to contradict Lohfink's discussion of the pilgrimage of the nations (17-19), where there is no missionary activity per se, but rather a "fascination" that draws in the Gentiles. While this paradox is not only in Lohfink, but in Scripture itself, it stands to reason that the primary way in which the Commission is carried out is through these images working together, i.e., going out to undertake active Christian community in the world's midst, with discipleship and teaching occurring as people are drawn into the alternative society of the ecclesia. Indeed, "the apostles are to take care that there emerge everywhere in the world communities of disciples in which Jesus' praxis of the reign of God (or, as we might say, the social order of the true Israel) is lived in radical faithfulness to Jesus" (137).

²⁹ Ibid., 49. This has implications for soteriology as well. When Paul says in Galatians 1:4 that "Christ died in order to 'rescue from the present evil age' all who believe," he is not referring to an assumption of believers into heaven so much as "the profound separation from the world which takes place through faith and baptism. The baptized person is rescued from the world to the realm of Christ's rule" (127). This should in no way negate the eventual direct presence of believers with God (2 Cor 5:1-8), but it should reframe our understanding of that destiny as a function of the more direct activity of Jesus within the world, i.e., toward a more holistic understanding of salvation.

³⁰ Ibid., 55.

domination” which characterize the world around it.³¹ This community is thus marked by peculiar virtues, such as a “radical ethic of renouncing violence.”³² It is barred from the use of coercive power, either within itself or in contact with any other community. Fighting for one’s rights with conventional means is out of the question; rather, Jesus’ followers should suffer injustice over asserting their rights through violence.³³ In this manner,

Jesus understood the people of God which he sought to gather as a *contrast-society*. This in no way means that he envisioned the people of God as a *state* or a *nation*, but he did understand it as a community which forms its own sphere of life, a community in which one lives in a different way and treats others in a different way than is usual elsewhere in the world. We could definitely describe the people of God which Jesus sought to gather as an alternative society.³⁴

The ecclesia “lives a social order which is plausible to humanity (Matt 5:16)” and is “anything but an elitist community.” However, it fulfills its mission “precisely by not becoming the world or by being dissolved in the world; it rather achieves this effect by preserving its own contours.”³⁵ If anything, this connotes the “separateness” of the new covenant community: it is by maintaining its own singularity while welcoming the world into it that the ecclesia fulfills its own mission.

³¹ Ibid., 49. This is Lohfink’s conclusion after a brief but interesting discussion on the absence of the mention of fatherhood in the messianic community, referring specifically to Matthew 23:8-12. Too symbolic of patriarchal domination, the role, like kingship, is precluded by God as Heavenly Father (Matt 23:9). This has direct implications, he argues, for the use of honorific titles in the church, up to and including the pope as “Holy Father” (45-49).

³² Ibid., 54. Here, Lohfink mentions the typical parameters of debate over nonviolence, with one side arguing that such a stand is only possible for an individual with no responsibility for others, and the other desiring the entire world to follow Jesus’ example in its political and social behavior. However, Lohfink reiterates his earlier assertion that Jesus “always had in mind *Israel* or the *community of disciples* which was the prefiguration of the Israel in which the reign of God was to shine.” It was to *this society* that Jesus referred (55).

³³ Ibid., 55.

³⁴ Ibid., 56. While in his later writings, Lohfink distances himself from the language of “contrast society” so as to present the church as something constructive in its own right rather than only existing over against some other entity, there is no doubt that the constructive community envisioned in this quotation would be, by definition, alternative to empire and the socio-political ways of the nations.

³⁵ Ibid., 66.

The Sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ

Yahweh proves through Israel that he is the Lord of all nations, indeed of all history. In Jesus Christ, God continues to manifest his sovereignty, as beautifully demonstrated in the Incarnation. As von Balthasar describes it, “the whole affair proceeds in the sovereign freedom (and so in the power and majesty) of the God who has the power to ‘empty himself, in obedience, for the (eventual) taking of the form of a servant, and from out of the divine form itself.’”³⁶ As we are told in Philippians 2, the second person of the trinity did not consider his power something to be retained at the cost of the Father’s will for humanity. Therefore, becoming incarnate in Jesus, God becomes one of us, or rather, as we were originally intended to be. The result of Jesus’ perfect obedience to the Father—“obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8)—is his exaltation to the position of sovereign over the nations of the earth.

The New Testament is filled with allusions to this exaltation. Not the least of these is the “Great Commission” text of Matt 28:18-20, which contains Christ’s rather startling yet often overlooked claim, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” This claim harkens back to the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14 wherein Daniel relates,

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like the Son of Man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, is, through obedience to the Father even to death on a cross, exalted to the position of sovereign over the world. O’Donovan interprets the fulfillment of Daniel 7 as the role of a “Davidic heir,” such that there is envisioned “a structured form of political leadership for authority to be exercised by ‘the people and the saints of the Most High’ (7:27).” In this sense, Christ as “Son of Man” is placed in a “clearly representative role,” namely, that of representing a restored Israel, which would

³⁶ Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, (Great Britain: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1990), 26-7.

mediate God's rule.³⁷ This is a consequence of O'Donovan's presumption that "if the Davidides were the vessel by which political authority was given to Israel in the first instance, then they must be the vessel by which it would be restored. The coming of the Kingdom must at least *satisfy* the lack in Israel's life created by the long disappearance of Judah's monarchy."³⁸ Such a "lack" is important to O'Donovan, since he believes a major part of later Israel's inability to adequately serve Yahweh is its "depoliticization," or the "political difficulties which have arisen from a lack of power, or from its excessive diffusion" following the collapse of Judean state.³⁹ However, O'Donovan does not account for the possibility that Israel's problem might have been earlier in origin, and in actuality an *alternate politicization* than called for in its election and covenant. Certainly, Jesus is a Davidic heir; the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 make that abundantly clear. However, if the foregoing theopolitical account is correct, then what we see in Christ as Lord is not a continuation or extension of the Davidic monarchy as such, nor is it the legitimation of the institution as properly exercised, but rather *Yahweh's reassertion of divine kingship* over against human usurpation. It is in this reassertion of divine kingship that the sovereign Christ "precedes the people and elects and creates the people," constituting not only the ecclesia but every person in it via incorporation into the people of God. As Harink states, "The mystery of the ages apocalyptically revealed in Jesus Christ the king is not the salvation of individual Jews and Gentiles. It is the reconciliation of Israel and the nations in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 15:7-13), the creation of a new humanity the reality of which is anticipated in the new theo-socio-political entity, the church (cf. Eph 2:11-3:12)."⁴⁰

If this is accurate, then it must mean that Christ alone is given such authority in the Messianic Age, that "already/not yet" era existing between Christ's exaltation and second advent. Thus, I believe O'Donovan misreads the Daniel pericope when he claims that in it, God confers

³⁷ O'Donovan, 116.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁰ Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 73.

his authority upon “mankind” as an extension of Israel, such that “mankind is now free to interpret God’s law in a way that realized God’s purposes for mankind’s welfare.”⁴¹ While in Daniel 7:27 authority is given to the saints to reign in place of the pretenders, this is clearly a reference to a consummated eschaton, a fulfillment which no one in the New Testament claims to have accomplished. Jesus, on the other hand, clearly claims to have fulfilled 7:13-14, and so it is more reasonable to understand that “Son of Man” is more properly a direct reference to God’s kingly rule manifested fully in Christ as Lord. Jesus Christ alone rules in the Messianic Age. None of this, however, takes away from O’Donovan’s arguably more solid claim:

The kingly rule of Christ is God’s own rule exercised over the whole world...St. Paul declared that God has ‘disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public show of them in Christ’s triumphal procession’ (Colossians 2:15). That must be the primary eschatological assertion about the authorities, political and demonic, which govern the world: they have been made subject to God’s sovereignty in the Exaltation of Christ...this awaits a final universal presence of Christ to become fully apparent.⁴²

While this “eschatological assertion” indeed awaits its consummation, God’s reign through Christ is present even now. Christ’s sovereignty in the Messianic Age is of the same scope as that of Yahweh’s sovereignty in the Old Testament. As with “*Yhwh malak*,” it is a sovereignty over the created order, including over the international political system. And it is to be humbly embodied (as opposed to triumphalistically mediated) by the ecclesia—around the world and throughout time—which invites the world to join it in worship and service to the sovereign God of the universe.

Yet the capacity of God cannot be acknowledged without paying heed to the character of God, especially as demonstrated in his sovereignty. As von Balthasar reminds us, “God is not, in the first place, ‘absolute power’, but ‘absolute love’, and his sovereignty manifests itself not in holding on to what is its own but in its abandonment—all this in such a way that this sovereignty displays itself in transcending the opposition, known to us from the world, between power and

⁴¹ O’Donovan, 104.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 146.

impotence.”⁴³ Harink agrees, explaining that the sovereignty of Christ is cruciform, and the church participates in that cruciformity. Thus, “the church enacts and makes visible its ‘lordly’ freedom in the patience, suffering, and ‘witness’ (*martyrion*) it shows in the face of enmity and oppression.” Martyrdom is the church’s witness to the character of the Messiah’s theopolitical rule, “the bodily, visible sacrament of the church’s participation in Christ’s sovereignty among the nations, for the nations—the manner in which it is a ‘royal priesthood.’”⁴⁴

Covenant and Church: The Significance of 1 Peter

That essential core of the covenant—unconditional love of God and neighbor—does not change from the Old to New Testaments, from the old to new covenants. And if that comprises the essence of the purpose of election and Torah, then the shape and form those claimed for Israel’s theopolitics is normative for the church even today. This connection is made strongly in the New Testament book of 1 Peter, which, for Douglas Harink, exhorts the church to “take up, dwell in, and live out of its identity as ‘the elect, the exiles of the Diaspora’ [1:1], a chosen people called out from the wider social and political orders to embody and display God’s transforming holiness and love as its peculiar mission among the nations.”⁴⁵

The Church in the Messianic Age

The *ekklesia* addressed is the community of Jesus the Messiah, who “enacts in his concrete historical life and death, within the concrete historical conditions of his time, an *alternative sociopolitical messianic life*” and calls his followers to imitate that life “as their baptismal share in his own being and act as the incarnate Word, crucified, risen, exalted, and

⁴³ Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 28.

⁴⁴ Harink, 72-73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. Translation of 1:1 by Harink.

coming again in glory.”⁴⁶ This means that the church in no way requires the security of conventional politics in order to be faithful to its identity and mission; all that is necessary has been accomplished in Christ.

As with Israel, 1 Peter 1:1 indicates that the church is constituted by God’s own choosing, and that its existence is intrinsic to its character as God’s people.⁴⁷ As opposed to nations throughout history that have constituted themselves by self-assertion, territorial control, and violence—“such peoplehood is at best an approximation, at worst a simulacrum or parody of true peoplehood”—Israel and the church are constituted by God in “grace and peace” (1:2). In this way, the church can actually “refuse self-assertion” and its attendant coercion and violence, since its establishment is rooted in “the Father’s sovereign love and election constituted in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Son.”⁴⁸

The initial salutation of the letter also indicates the church’s exilic status, which Harink interprets as synonymous with separateness. God’s election of his people necessarily sets that people apart, making it a holy people to witness “with the whole of its life” to God’s very nature. Thus, Israel and the church—including their “praise, politics, social and economic order, personal responsibility”—belong to God and God alone. They are “strangers among the nations” whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), “rooted in God’s own triune being and action.”⁴⁹ And what makes God’s people foreign or separate is the fact that God’s reign is being actualized here and now; this means that the church can be vulnerable, living “out of control” of the world’s processes.⁵⁰

Diaspora is something different, however. Diaspora has to do with dispersion, or the deliberate “sowing abroad” of the people of God among the nations of the world as seeds of the gospel, witnesses to God’s grace and reign. This is the Jeremianic model, where a people sent

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

into exile is separated from its home, but yet flourishes in its present location, and does so as itself, i.e., without needing to conform to its surrounding systems. In this way it may participate in society from a distinctly ecclesial standpoint; while it may often be an “irritant” in its society of residence, critical and even subversive of that society’s way of life (for the sake of its members), it can also become in their shared life a “witness of cultural, social, and political order obedience to the lord of the universe, an icon through which the wider society, by God’s grace, might behold its own true form and destiny.”⁵¹ This is diaspora for the nations.

The chief underlying theme operating in 1 Peter is the Messianic Age of Jesus Christ, and by believing in, loving, and following Christ in every sense, “the church now shares in the divine power (the ‘grace’ 1:10)” of this age. The manner of the church’s sharing in divine power is that of sharing in Christ’s suffering, for this “Jesus Messiah” is the suffering servant of Isaiah, in whose suffering and glorification is revealed “God’s way of making history.”⁵² This is the “apocalypse” of Christ, the revealing of what was only alluded to in the prophets. It is this sort of “retrospective messianic hermeneutic” of the Old Testament that is operative throughout 1 Peter, and that helps tie the church so firmly to biblical Israel.⁵³

The messianic hermeneutic of 1 Peter, especially as it addresses both hope and holiness in 1:13-16, is manifested as well in a certain account of time. According to Harink, “messianic time is the time of God’s invasive and decisive reign.” We still await the fullness of that reign, but it is present here and now in the “comprehensive alteration of reality already brought about through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.” The powers have already been subjected to Christ (3:22) and the people of God are already destined for his own glorious

⁵¹ Ibid., 35-36. I would take small issue with the notion of the church within “wider society,” given the church’s transhistorical and transcultural nature. There is arguably a sense in which the cities, states, and nations of the world themselves operate within the larger context of the church as a people and the salvation narrative it proclaims.

⁵² This is in direct contrast with the claims of theologian Stephen H. Webb, who will be taken up in the final chapter of this study. As will be explained there, for Webb’s political theology, grace is not a source of significant historical change.

⁵³ Harink, 51.

inheritance (1:4). While it may seem, especially in persecution, that the powers of this world still reign and are definitive of the age, messianic time declares otherwise: “In the face of often seemingly powerful evidence that the powers are victorious (‘Be realistic!’ as they say), what is called for from the church is an act of hopeful resistance,” in which the messianic age—both already present and not yet fully so—“is grasped in thought and action as the all-determining truth of the church’s life, and indeed of the life of the world.”⁵⁴

Hence the centrality of holiness for the church, what is commonly recognized as the chief theme of the epistle. Holiness is an attribute of God, which means that the church’s holiness stems from God’s very being and in God’s initiative in constituting a people reflective of that being. The holiness of the people of God is therefore “a matter of being transformed by, conformed to, and sharing in the prior action and character of God,” which entails obedience and proper orientation of desire. Unholiness, by contrast, is a refusal to be thus formed, and is furthermore an epistemological failure in which we are incapable of properly perceiving God and our true ends.⁵⁵ Holiness and messianic time are brought together in 1 Peter 1:17-21, where the people are called to live in “reverent fear” of God,⁵⁶ reverence that liberates the church from anxiety about marginalization or even death in the cultures in which it resides. Christians are prepared to be witnesses—i.e., martyrs—for the sake of the gospel of Christ, the inherent righteousness and justice of the kingdom of God.

The Church and Israel

This church, rooted in Christ, is then given its purpose in the world, namely that given to Israel at Sinai in Exodus 19. Here we reach the crucial passage of 1 Peter 2:4-10, and particularly

⁵⁴ Ibid., 53-54. As will be shown in the final chapter, this conception of messianic time contradicts the understanding of time and future espoused in the political theology of Richard John Neuhaus, for whom time is inescapably bound to tragedy and violence, requiring the “realistic” politics to which Harink here alludes.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 55-56.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 58.

verses 9 and 10, which appropriate the calling Yahweh gives Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 for the church: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”⁵⁷

It is well known that biblical authors wrote their works with earlier texts or traditions in mind in order to more effectively communicate their messages. Here, as Joel Green puts it, “Peter has studied the past with an eye to serving the present and especially to showing the continuity between followers of Jesus and Israel of old.” Peter focuses on the theological unity between Israel and the church, not to preclude their historical differences, but to root this “‘elect clan’ in the antiquity of the relationship between God and Israel.”⁵⁸ Robert Wall and Eugene Lemcio explain that such “sub-texts” reflect the later author’s own Scriptures as well as their strategies for appropriating those Scriptures for the crises of the day. Ultimately, a “hermeneutical environment” emerges wherein the biblical author’s Scriptures interacts with his story of Jesus or the early church to “bring focus to the theological meaning of ‘the events that have been fulfilled among us’” and to define more clearly the theological dimensions of the People of God. Thus, the direct appropriation and reiteration of Exod 19:5-6 in 1 Pet 2:9-10 indicates a deliberate theological analogy at work.⁵⁹ Like Israel, the church “takes its place among the nations as a people among peoples, but with its own distinct political *raison d’être*, authority, calling, and practice,” its political character “decisively and critically embodied in and given to it by its own sovereign, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ To reiterate Exodus 19:5-6: “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”

⁵⁸ Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 63.

⁵⁹ Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 76 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 17.

⁶⁰ Harink, 71.

It is important, explains Jo Bailey Wells, to recognize the structural role that the OT material plays in 1 Peter, especially the theological role: the material is “drawn together for the purpose of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the Hebrew Scriptures.” It is clear that those Hebrew scriptures are considered authoritative, and thus “we find them re-read from a new perspective, and scoured for their themes of promise, election, and covenant which are found to come together and make sense in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ As the previous chapter demonstrated, Exodus 19:5-6 establishes the unique identity of the people of God, and while it is a call to obedience, the identity obedience fosters is the central point.⁶²

Appropriating the Exodus pericope, then, the declaration of 1 Peter 2:9-10 functions as “the fundamental indicative for the entire epistle,” reminding God’s people of their identity and compelling them to live holy lives even in the midst of crisis (2:11-5:14).⁶³ As already indicated in Harink, the Exodus pericope clearly plays a hermeneutical role in 1 Peter, as the material is “drawn together for the purpose of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the Hebrew Scriptures,” which are considered authoritative and are here “re-read from a new perspective, and scoured for their themes of promise, election, and covenant which are found to come together and make sense in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ In this manner, the entire story of Israel’s election is appropriated for the church, or perhaps more properly stated, the church is brought into Israel’s story of election.

The appropriation of the Exodus pericope in 1 Peter is significant, not least because of the nature of the church as perceived in the non-Pauline epistles, namely as a “pilgrim community.” This motif entails four primary themes: (1) separation from former allegiances; (2) travel to a certain destination; (3) hardships faced along the way; and (4) reception of blessings upon completion of the pilgrimage. In particular, “the two primary elements of the...letter’s

⁶¹ Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 305 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 211.

⁶² See Wells, 40; Levenson, 43.

⁶³ Wells, 210-12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

ecclesiology are its sense of community and its transcendence of a competing society.”⁶⁵ Hence the understanding that the church’s identity, derived in part from Israel as reinterpreted in Christ, necessitates a similar sort of “separateness” to that which Dumbrell attributes to Israel’s calling. In this calling of the church, the “theological blueprint” cited by Dumbrell is applied to the Christian community, i.e., the divine dominion resulting in the restoration of creation to its original intent. The ecclesia therefore has a “common covenant and common calling” with that of Israel; it is “carrying forward Israel’s covenantal politics.”⁶⁶

Implications of Biblical Theopolitics for Ecclesial Identity

If the church is indeed a continuation of Israel’s covenant politics, as radically fulfilled in Jesus Christ, then there are a number of significant implications of the biblical narrative for the church’s theopolitics. First, there is no division between the church’s life of faith and the church’s politics. As Yahweh stood at the center of Israel’s politics following the exodus, so does Jesus Christ stand at the center of ecclesial politics upon his crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation. As with Yahweh over Egypt, Jesus has demonstrated sovereignty over the powers and therefore “impinges upon every facet of the political” not only for the covenant community but for the world. Consequently, the necessary corollary of Christ’s sovereignty is the total exclusivity of the church’s allegiance. The church’s self-understanding and self-presentation is therefore inherently theopolitical with Jesus Christ “intensely engaged with questions of power.” Political and theological become one, and there is no politics that escapes from the theology of Jesus Christ and his reign. Moreover, neither the church nor segments thereof can behave in such a way as to compartmentalize its liturgical practices from its political identity: each is a function of the other, and neither can function independently.

⁶⁵ Wall and Lemcio, 202.

⁶⁶ Bader-Saye, 2.

Second, as identity is in part performatively constituted, the church is only fully and actively the church to the degree that it faithfully practices its vocation and mission. On the one hand, the election of the church is a divine act, securing forever the conditions of possibility for the church's fulfillment of its mission. In this sense, as with Israel, identity is first of all *received*, rather than generated, by the people. On the other hand, that election is, subsequently, only realized in practice. The ecclesia finds itself liberated from the powers through Jesus Christ, with the calling to embody God's reign in the world. Insofar as its practices correspond to this calling, to its divinely revealed purpose(s), the ecclesia can properly consider itself as such. Where it diverges in practice from its election, whether that is through a more overt substitution of the powers as sovereign, or more subtly via altered teaching and practices, the ecclesia (or parts thereof) alters its identity, acting as something other than the true (new) covenant community of faith. Liturgy, doctrine, and political practices are all interwoven, all part and parcel of ecclesial identity.⁶⁷

Third, as Israel's calling is appropriated for the church, the descriptors contained therein make claims upon the church as well. The connotations of separateness contained in "chosen race," "royal priesthood," "holy nation," "God's own people" are part and parcel of ecclesial identity. The church is set apart for particular use by God in the world, namely to mediate the grace extended via Christ, but it is also to act as the definitive (though not only) embodiment of God's reign through Jesus Christ, reflecting in its practices the attendant subjugation of the powers. It does this not primarily for its own sake, but as a "visible place and living witnesses" of God's desire to "liberate and change the entire world." Thus, separateness is not conceived as a quest for purification so much as a necessity for furthering the mission, for "embodying a

⁶⁷ Lest this paragraph be taken to espouse some sort of donatism, I am not arguing that the church completely ceases to be the church where and when there is sin. God's action in Christ and the Holy Spirit preserve the church even in spite of itself, ensuring that at least somewhere, there is always part of the church that remains faithful, and that the parts that are not may always avail themselves of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. However, I am claiming here that where there is sin, the church is not merely the church behaving badly, but rather the church is less than fully church. This is a matter of sanctification, which I am arguing here is tied to identity.

politics of blessing.” Or as Harink nicely puts it, the “politics of doxology, that is, the people of God making history and discerning its 'progress' through the crucified, risen, and exalted Christ whom it worships.”⁶⁸

Closely related to the third implication is a fourth: the church is unique in its identity and mission. What Yahweh does in Israel is a singular, unique endeavor. While some would present Israel as an exemplary political community whose principles of governance can be abstracted and universalized,⁶⁹ Lohfink corrects that by emphasizing how it is the *community of Israel itself* that is to be universalized. Its singularity is maintained, but its boundaries are expanded. Israel’s theopolitics cannot be abstracted and applied elsewhere without fundamentally altering them; rather, a people can only be engrafted onto Israel, and biblically, this occurs only with the church through Jesus Christ. Consequently, what continues through the church is a singular endeavor of constituting and sustaining a visible communal sign of salvation to the world, an embodiment of the kingdom of God on earth. Significantly for Christian nationalism, which has historically and in its many forms sought to make the present nation the continuation of Israel, the church cannot be supplanted from this role without fundamentally altering the salvation narrative it proclaims. Where nations claim the mantle of the community of salvation, of the hope of the world, of the prefiguring of the kingdom of God, they counterfeit the Christian narrative and make themselves simulacra or parodies of the church.

Finally, as a manifestation of God’s power of initiation, everything necessary for the church to be the church has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. Indeed, in Christ, as indicated in 1 Peter 2:10, a new people has been established via God’s own free action in Christ and engrafted onto the people of whom Jesus is the perfect embodiment. Thus, the ecclesia does not attempt to secure itself using the means of the powers, nor does it even define “security” in the same way. It does not require anything taken from the powers, nor does it require the powers to secure it space

⁶⁸ Harink, 72.

⁶⁹ This is O’Donovan’s fundamental premise in *Desire of the Nations*, throughout which he explicitly seeks to abstract and generalize from Israel’s experience for the sake of a renewal of Western politics.

to operate.⁷⁰ Politically, or theopolitically, this means that the identity and mission of the church—as engrafted onto Israel—stems from God’s very being, to which the church must become conformed in both the defining and ordering of its life together and its relations with other human communities. In the messianic age, in view of the church’s source and sustenance in Christ,

the Christian community endures, even embraces its precarious, vulnerable, and dispossessive messianic existence as a sojourner and exile in an ungodly society, because it is confident that its cause is ultimately secured by God’s justice in the cross and resurrection and not by its ability either to secure and control its own place or safety in the wider world or to have its civil rights granted, acknowledged, and protected by the wider world.⁷¹

As to this last point, the prophetic witnesses examined in these two chapters carry more specific implications. Both *realpolitik* and civil religion are inherently problematic as practiced within and by the church, whether it is by institutions within the church over against other institutions (inter- or extra-ecclesial), or whether it is by segments of the church acting in the name or interests of various world powers. This has direct relevance for this study, for as I explained in Chapter 2, nationalism operates as a two-fold project. First, it works to cultivate or enhance or reinforce a particular national identity among a given people, one that gives purpose to that people’s existence and that binds the people together in a more cohesive manner. Second, it attempts to acquire for that same people a certain measure of political power—usually in the form of an independent state apparatus—that will secure that people’s interests (or at least the interests of the nationalist elites). Typically, these two aspects are bound up with one another such that, on the one hand, political power will be sought as a means to further secure the nation’s

⁷⁰ On this point, O’Donovan asserts that “if the mission of the church needs a certain social space for men and women of every nation to be drawn into the governed community of God’s Kingdom, then secular authority is authorized to provide and ensure that space.” Yet this contradicts his earlier principle that “The power which God gave to Israel did not have to be taken from Egypt...first. The gift of power was not a zero-sum operation. God could generate new power by doing new things in Israel’s midst” (O’Donovan 95). Moreover, it begs the question as to why the state needs to secure such space if God is able to initiate new power and space himself.

⁷¹ Harink, 58.

identity, but on the other, identity itself may be crafted as much as possible by elites to achieve political power for the nation, usually in the form of galvanizing the public.

As we have seen from the prophetic witnesses of Hosea and Jeremiah, such activities are deeply problematic to election and covenant. The fact that Yahweh calls Israel—and then the church under Jesus Christ—to be a counter-model to the surrounding polities means that the People of God cannot define itself in the same way or with the same means as those polities. Thus, when a nation or state appropriates elements of the stories of Israel and the church for its own purposes—“projecting its national ego into the world of the divine”—and especially when such a nationalist move emanates from within the church itself, a clear corruption of ecclesial identity is taking place. The church in that context ceases to be the church, and becomes something decidedly other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to construct a theological criterion for the assessment of nationalist discourse, primarily in the form of a theopolitics derived from Scripture. I have therefore examined the nature of Israel’s election by Yahweh and the covenant born of that election, looking specifically at the political community being formed therein and the expectations for its practices internally and in relation to the world. Examining Israel’s own story, from covenant to state centralization to prophetic critique, I have argued that Israel’s attempts to identify itself with more conventional political communities and their practices constituted an abandonment of its singular covenant, and a de-actualization of its election.

With the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, however, Israel’s election is re-actualized and fulfilled. A new community in the form of the ecclesia is established and engrafted onto Israel to continue the mission of embodying God’s reign on earth, now definitely and salvifically demonstrated in Christ. The calling upon Israel is

applied to the church as well, such that all the essential elements of a new theopolitics and a new social order pertaining to Israel at Sinai are appropriated for the church. The ecclesia is that people entity charged with embodying the alternative politics of God amidst the powers and before the watching world.

Having established a biblical politics as criterion for evaluation, this study now proceeds into an examination of nationalist discourse within the church in the United States. Chapter 6 looks at nationalism propagated in national narratives by various members of the Christian Right, while Chapter 7 looks at the more sophisticated political theologies of Stephen H. Webb and Richard John Neuhaus for the same. In both chapters, particular attention is paid to the ways in which the authors are seeking to authenticate, in Anthony Smith's sense of determining the true essence, America's national story. Inevitably, this requires an interweaving of salvation narratives—the biblical with the national—in a way that inevitably leads to alterations of the former for the sake of the latter.

CHAPTER 6—NATIONALISM IN THE AMERICAN CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Introduction

To this point, I have argued that certain theologians of politics have taken inadequate account of nationalism as a distinct problem facing the church, as well as the significance of biblical theopolitics—involving a thoroughgoing treatment of biblical Israel—as normative for ecclesial identity and as a criterion of evaluation for challenges to it. In response, I have provided a theoretical account of the phenomenon of nationalism, both at the general level within the scholarship at large, and then more specifically with regard to the relationship between nationalism and faith traditions. I have demonstrated that contrary to the claims of certain nationalism scholars and certain theologians, nationalism is not merely a state-driven, utterly fabricated movement; nor does it rely merely on a transcultural, transhistorical conception of religion. Rather, nationalism is both constructed and constrained according to the prior formation of the nationalists themselves, as well as the cultural framework within which their people live. It often requires the selective use and deliberate intertwining of the biblical narrative with the present nation in order to garner the support of participants in Christian faith traditions. For this reason, nationalism is a problem for the church not primarily because it acts as an external force upon the church, co-opting Christian allegiance from the outside, but because it emanates from within the church as a heterodox salvation narrative and attendant politics.

By way of putting forth a theological norm for evaluation, I have provided an account of biblical theopolitics that sees the theopolitical identity and mission of Israel as utterly unique and singular, as attested to by Israel's election and covenant. As Israel does not live up to that identity and mission, they are fulfilled in Christ as the Incarnation of both Israel and Yahweh primarily, and secondarily of general humanity and its Creator. The church, engrafted onto Israel (rather than replacing it), is the theopolitical embodiment of Christ's fulfillment of Israel's covenant, and of the opening of that covenant to the Gentiles. As such, the nature of Israel as a

theopolitical community is continued in the church, as fulfilled in Christ. This is of great importance to the problem of nationalism, for insofar as the church in a given context propagates a sort of Christian nationalism—an interweaving of the biblical narrative, and Christian theological tradition revolving around that narrative, with national narratives—it by definition alters the salvation narrative it proclaims and claims to embody, and thus fails to be the church *qua* church, according to its covenant identity in Jesus Christ.

This chapter and the next look more closely at Christian nationalism within the American context. The present chapter considers narratives that propagate the explicit conception of America as a Christian nation, even God’s New Israel, a conception espoused most fervently by the American Christian Right. It examines conceptions of American national identity as evident in the discourse of major Christian Right organizations, and especially in the literature of figures central to the movement. To this end, I perform a sort of content analysis, i.e., examining the discourse in order to (1) determine to what extent said discourse is, in fact, nationalist in nature; and (2) evaluate that discourse in light of the biblical theopolitics offered in Chapters 4 and 5.

To accomplish the first task—the determination of the nature of the discourse, particularly in the leading figures’ written literature—I rely upon Andrew Murphy’s notion of the “American jeremiad,” as well as Anthony Smith’s “sacred foundations” rubric: chosen/exceptional community, territory, golden age and decline, and shared sacrifice and glorious destiny. While these categories often overlap or are blurred in the discourse itself, I will identify as specifically as possible those claims and assertions that correspond most clearly to these aspects of national identity. As to the second task, since the nationalist narrative taken up here is inherently theopolitical, I provide an evaluation of nationalist claims in light of the biblical theopolitics of Israel and the church. I argue that this nationalist discourse, which emanates from within the church itself, constitutes a syncretistic salvation narrative, distorted from the Christian faith, entailing a theopolitics that supplants the church with the American nation as the extension of Israel.

With both this chapter and the next, it is worth recalling two further elements of Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolic account of nationalism. The first is the idea of *ethnie*, or perhaps more helpful for this study, that "cultural core" of the nation seen to give the nations its character and to define its identity. American Christian nationalists seek to advance their conceptions of America's cultural core—particularly as it is connected with a divine mandate of some sort—over against what they perceive as threats by persons or groups attempting to alter that core or to replace it altogether. As we will see, this results in a form of what Brass referred to as "symbol competition" on the part of these nationalist elites.

More importantly, there is also the notion of nationalist *authentication* as the pursuit of national holiness. In both of the remaining chapters, the figures presented seek to recover, articulate, and propagate a particular vision of America's "true self," and insofar as that identity is bound with divine direction, blessing, and judgment, maintaining proper national identity becomes a matter of Christian holiness, faithfulness to the God who has chosen America for a singular purpose in the world. As such, the following are theopolitical accounts, and as I will show, they ultimately challenge the theopolitical account of reality proclaimed in the ecclesia.

Andrew R. Murphy and the American Jeremiad

Andrew Murphy provides a helpful framework for understanding, yet distinguishing between, the nationalism of Christian Right narratives in this chapter and the political theology of Stephen H. Webb and Richard John Neuhaus in the next. In both cases, the nationalist message relies heavily on what Murphy considers to be a distinctive form of political discourse: the American jeremiad.¹ Jeremiads (named, obviously, for the Old Testament prophetic speeches of the prophet Jeremiah in Judah and Babylon), provide both an explanation of current misfortune or

¹ Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Of course, as the work of Marx, Hastings, Gorski, and Smith attest, the basic thrust of the jeremiad is nothing new to America. But there is perhaps something to be said for the unusual prevalence of this model in American political discourse through the centuries.

suffering by the community as well as the hope and way of forgiveness and restoration. The jeremiad first specifies the problems that demonstrate a decline in the community as compared to a previous, more ideal life. It identifies those turning points where and when the nation went wrong. It calls for repentance and then renewal, with whatever reform is necessary to accomplish it.² Whether in colonial New England, the Civil War, or the twenty-first century, “the jeremiad seeks to use political power to intervene on one side of a divisive cultural or political issue.” The jeremiad cannot be reduced to a set of policy initiatives, but rather constitutes “a vindication of the American past and the virtues of previous generations.”³ It hearkens back to a golden age, an “idealized portrait of a community’s founding” that makes certain claims about that community’s attributes while simultaneously pointing to contested claims in the present.⁴ What makes the jeremiad distinctive and so significant is its “connection to a larger, sacred story tied intimately to the particularities of the nation’s origins and development.”⁵ For this reason, the decline of the nation is significant not only for that people, but for the world at large, since the present nation is so integral to the universal sacred narrative, or in Murphy’s terms, “world-historical.” Thus, “the American jeremiad is not just a historical or political argument but a theological, even cosmological, one.”⁶ Notice already the salvation narrative character to the jeremiad.

Story is central, both in terms of its form and in terms of its selective formulation.

Narratives are moral stories about how the past has led into the present; for this reason, “jeremiahs” must ignore those elements that do not further their plots, plots which must come across as both natural and coherent in order to be persuasive. This fact begs questions about how

² Ibid., 6-9. One should note the clear similarities between the jeremiad and what Smith discusses both as “sacred foundations” and as “stages of national formation.”

³ Ibid., 9-10. One should note here the correspondence of the jeremiad as Murphy describes it with the two main processes of nationalism: formation of national identity and the pursuit of power to actualize it in political community. While this dissertation concerns itself primarily with the former, Murphy’s description here is helpful in demonstrating to what degree the processes can be intertwined.

⁴ Ibid., 134. Murphy’s work is quite complementary with Smith’s. Moreover, Murphy emphasizes competition between various jeremiahs, not only in type (traditionalist, progressive), but in source (conservative, liberal, etc.). This is reminiscent of Paul Brass’s work on symbol competition, discussed in Chapter 2.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Ibid.

they craft their narratives to be as widely appealing as possible, how they use narratives to accomplish their political goals.⁷ In discussing the past, nationalists must skillfully arrange historical and mythical elements in certain ways so as to galvanize the populace behind their agenda. When such narratives emanate from multiple sources and compete for dominance, it is often not the facts themselves under dispute; rather, claims about the meaning and significance of those facts are at issue, particularly as a larger story is appropriated to situate and interpret the significance of those facts.⁸ The reader should immediately note, therefore, that the jeremiad as a form of political discourse contains both constructive and constraining elements: a deliberate tie is being made by the nationalist to a pre-existing, more expansive narrative toward which the people already find themselves compelled. Put differently, recalling Anthony Smith, the jeremiad is part and parcel of *authentication*, that process by which the nationalist determines and propagates the “true” vision of the nation in question.

While the jeremiad exists because of a decline from an earlier or founding ideal, it should not be seen as inherently negative or pessimistic. Rather, it is a discourse of theopolitical hope insofar as it provides within itself direction for national restoration and renewal. In the American case, decline and judgment matter insofar as the nation plays a key part in preparing the world for God’s reign.⁹ The power of the jeremiad therefore lies in bringing forth “a dynamic tension between despair and hope,” combining a lament of decline with celebration of chosenness “into a powerful narrative of imperiled national promise and a yearning for national renewal.”¹⁰ America’s decline is significant not only for its self, but because it is key to a “larger, transcendent purpose.” Its rise to power is the result of divine blessing upon its earliest settlers and founders, whose legacy must therefore shape the politics of the present.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

Murphy distinguishes between two types of jeremiads most prevalent in American political discourse. While both types present the nation's past—as the nationalists frame it—as the standard for evaluating the present and the basis for future hope, they differ in how they appropriate their narratives. *Traditionalist* jeremiads emphasize “concrete social practices, institutions, and traditions,” lamenting the nation's departure from those elements. Renewal requires a recovery of those elements, largely in their original form. This is why, for example, one would find in traditionalist jeremiads an argument for a strict constructionist interpretation of the Constitution. *Progressive* jeremiads, while providing similar laments of the current situation of decline from a past ideal, focus rather on the “fundamental principles lying at the heart of American nationhood.” The realization of these principles has been thwarted time and time again and must be pursued more fully.¹²

American Christian Right Nationalism

In the spring of 2010, the Texas Board of Education undertook its once-per-decade review of public school history and social-studies curricula.¹³ This event held significance beyond Texas, since by virtue of sheer volume, Texas textbook sales often determine the dominance of particular textbooks over others across the entire country. The fifteen-member board, consisting of ten Republicans and five Democrats and led by dentist Don McLeroy, created considerable controversy when it sought to make changes in the curricula reflecting a decidedly conservative approach to American history, with emphases on the definitive contributions of political figures such as Ronald Reagan and organizations such as the Heritage

¹² Ibid., 109.

¹³ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/11/us/politics/11texas.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/17/AR2010031700560.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/weekinreview/21tanenhaus.html>; and; all articles accessed April 27, 2010).

Foundation, the Moral Majority, and the National Rifle Association, to the detriment of other figures and organizations usually associated with the American political left. Particularly evident in the discussions was the move to specifically underscore the influence of Christianity on America, and the identity of America as a Christian nation.

As part of the curriculum review process, the board called for a panel of six experts to aid the largely teacher-comprised writing teams in their revisions. Among the six were two figures of importance for the present study. The first, David Barton, is nationally known as the founder and leader of WallBuilders, an organization “dedicated to presenting America’s forgotten history and heroes,” and particularly, as one of Barton’s books is entitled, “America’s Godly Heritage.”¹⁴ WallBuilders develops educational materials that, contrary to many contemporary histories, emphasize “the periods in our country’s history when its laws and policies were firmly rooted in Biblical principles,”¹⁵ and attempt to dispel what the organization considers to be the myth of separation of church and state.¹⁶ The organization emphasizes biographical approaches to national history, particularly the religious faith of American political figures,¹⁷ an approach it considers to be more “inclusive” than typical contemporary historiographical approaches wherein “economic causes are the primary and almost singular emphasis of study.” It concentrates on its library of “rare...first-edition works of our Founding Fathers” in which it conducts its primary research, and from which “we are able to document the rich religious and moral history of America as well as to establish the original intent undergirding the various clauses of our Constitution.”¹⁸ Barton, who is described on the WallBuilders website as a textbook consultant,

¹⁴ David Barton, *America’s Godly Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Press, 1993).

¹⁵ See the essay, “God: Missing in Action in America’s History” (<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=100>, accessed April 23, 2010).

¹⁶ See the essay, “The Separation of Church and State” (<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=123>) as well as Barton’s *The Myth of Separation* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Press, 1992).

¹⁷ See the essay, “A Few Declarations of Founding Fathers and Early Statesmen on Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible” (<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=8755>, accessed April 23, 2010).

¹⁸ See <http://www.wallbuilders.com/ABTOverview.asp> (accessed April 8, 2010).

is a Texas resident, former vice chair of the Texas Republican Party, and Republican National Convention political consultant.¹⁹

The other expert worthy of note is the Reverend Peter Marshall, whose organization, Peter Marshall Ministries, is dedicated to “helping to restore America to its Bible-based foundations through preaching, teaching and writing on America’s Christian heritage and on Christian discipleship and renewal.”²⁰ Marshall told a reporter for *The New York Times* that the Texas standards ““were seriously deficient in bringing out the role of the Christian faith in the founding of America.”” In response, he urged the writing teams to include in their revisions considerations about the theology of the Founding Fathers and the biblical roots of that theology.²¹ Marshall’s 1977 book, *The Light and the Glory*, which is a prime example of American Christian nationalism, has informed Christian Right discourse for decades and will be discussed below in detail.

The Christian Right and American National Identity

The Texas textbook controversy illustrates the ongoing influence of the American Christian Right in formulating, propagating, and seeking the institutionalization of a particular understanding of American national identity. Various other organizations are involved in this broad endeavor, acting on a range of public policy issues, including everything from abortion and homosexuality to prayer in school and school vouchers to foreign policy and the war on terrorism. In many cases, these issues are cast in terms of America’s identity as a Christian nation. American Values, led by former conservative presidential candidate Gary Bauer, sees the

¹⁹ See <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2004/10/David-Barton-The-Myth-Of-Church-State-Separation.aspx> and <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/photoessay/3.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).

²⁰ See <http://www.petermarshallministries.com/index.cfm> (accessed May 14, 2010).

²¹ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html>.

America envisioned by its founders as a “shining city upon a hill”²² and “a nation with a calling,” a calling that necessitates a foreign policy promoting freedom and democracy. Such a policy should protect “our homeland and interests abroad” as well as “advance the values necessary to assist other nations and peoples in their struggles for freedom.”²³ American culture was founded upon “Biblical truth,” according to the American Family Association, and the Bible’s usefulness is “evidenced by the vision of our forefathers as set forth in the Declaration of Independence.”²⁴ The Family Research Council sees America’s national culture and political system as founded “primarily by Christians” and “the Judeo-Christian worldview has provided a sound basis for the flourishing of our national culture and our political system.”²⁵ FRC Action, the lobbying arm of the Family Research Council, likewise cites “Judeo-Christian standards of morality” as appealed to in the Declaration of Independence.²⁶

Typically for these organizations, national identity is part and parcel of a broader conservative Christian theology, American exceptionalism contextualized within fundamental “biblical” convictions about the world. One group that is rather explicit about this is the Christian Worldview Network, directed by Brannon Howse.²⁷ This group brings together a number of conservative clergy and public figures in a nationally touring seminar called the “Christian Worldview Weekend,”²⁸ which discusses everything from evangelism to the necessity of a six-day biblical creation account, to the virtues of representative democracy and free market economics, and offers a broad educational program as a follow-up to the seminars.²⁹ A telling

²² See <http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/culture.php> (accessed April 8, 2010).

²³ See <http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/nationalSecurity.php> (accessed April 8, 2010).

²⁴ See <http://www.afa.net/Detail.aspx?id=31> (accessed April 8, 2010).

²⁵ See <http://www.frc.org/religion-culture> (accessed April 8, 2010).

²⁶ See <http://www.frcaction.org/about-us> (accessed April 8, 2010).

²⁷ See <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/christian-worldview-network/>.

²⁸ See <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/>. Speakers at “Worldview Weekend Family Reunion” in April 2010 included such prominent evangelical clergy as David Jeremiah, Erwin Lutzer, and Ron Carlson, as well as conservative commentator David Limbaugh (brother of national radio talk show host, Rush Limbaugh). Other fairly regular speakers include former television star Kirk Cameron and international six-day-creation advocate, Ken Ham.

²⁹ As a broader educational program and a follow-up to the seminars, the organization provides a “Worldview Test” containing around eighty-five statements to which the respondent must indicate her level

pointer to the group's interweaving of patriotism and more traditional fundamental theology is a story on their website about a 2003 Worldview Weekend at Immanuel Baptist Church in Wichita, Kansas. At that seminar, speakers "taught a unified theme concerning witnessing, faith and true conversion." Topics at the seminar included "Hell's Best Kept Secrets," "True and False Conversion," and "The Incredible Faith of Atheism." While evangelism and unbelief are frequent concerns of conservative evangelical theology, what is interesting is the photo of Howse leading congregational singing. In the picture, a massive American flag provides the backdrop for the stage, another flag stands at stage left, and the lyrics projected on the screen for congregational singing are those of "America the Beautiful." Also displayed is the seminar's former logo, a modified Great Seal of the United States with the name of the seminar imprinted upon it.³⁰

What these organizations pay special attention to, since it constitutes their *raison d'être*, is America's *decline* from an earlier period properly embodying its Christian identity. For example, Bauer's American Values asserts that the nation is experiencing a "virtue deficit" where right and wrong have become increasingly ambiguous, a situation that has given rise to "hostility

of agreement, including the following examples: "The Bible and a biblical worldview played an instrumental role in building our American civilization, original laws and form of government," or "Jesus was crucified on the cross but was NOT physically raised from the dead," or "When you study the Bible as a whole, it becomes clear that God is very supportive of an economic system that is based on private property, the work ethic, and personal responsibility." Test available at <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/test/results.php?regid=f864fc296ea8b6d2a8673b7bb78c1eba&testid=WORLDVIEW&takeid=c467bca23649d8201d6c8896ca935dc4> (accessed May 8, 2007). Registration is required to take the test, which involves only name, age, gender, and e-mail address. Statements are simply listed with drop-downs for responses; there is no categorization of statements by topic or theme. Based on the test-taker's responses, she is rated according to one of five categories: "strong biblical worldview thinker," "moderate biblical worldview thinker," "secular humanist worldview thinker," "socialist worldview thinker," or "communist/marxist/socialist/secular humanist worldview thinker." As I did not answer any of the questions when I examined this test in 2007, I missed 170 out of 170 points and was rated as the last; the ratings labels are sorted from most correct and/or desirable to least, according to the testing criteria and evaluation of responses. Conveniently, the ratings page allows the respondent to see an answer key for the test, indicating which answer of agreement/disagreement is the "correct answer" for each statement. Also noteworthy, only here on the answer key are the statements sorted into categories like "Civil Government," "Economics," or "Education."

³⁰ See <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/photos1906.shtml> (accessed January 19, 2010). While the seal logo, set against a waving U.S. flag, served as the primary website logo until at least May 2007, it is now only available on side pages, such as this one: <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/digest.shtml> (accessed May 11, 2010).

towards organized religion, sexual exploitation, the homosexual agenda, the demise of the family and the culture of death.” One of the root causes of this state of affairs is the alleged secularization of the country, involving a “substantial effort by secularist forces to prevent people of faith from continuing to acknowledge religion in the public square.” Rather, “Americans need to be reminded of our nation’s moral roots and the virtues that spring from those roots.” Such would help restore the nation to a place where standards of morality are clear cut, “where virtue isn’t seen as something old-fashioned but as something to treasure and pass on from one generation to another.”³¹

Concerned Women for America asserts that Western Civilization has traded the Judeo-Christian worldview, once its “bedrock,” for “an irrational secularism based on an unthinking and cruel relativism.” This “foolish exchange” is worked out in numerous and unjust public policies that strike at Judeo-Christian principles such as the sanctity of life, religious freedom, family integrity, parentally-controlled education, and national sovereignty.³² The American Family Association cites the “ungodliness and depravity assaulting our nation.”³³ Family Research Council criticizes the notion of a “‘wall of separation’ between all expressions of faith in God and all aspects of public life” and the consequent “bigotry against people of faith, especially Christians (who are the most frequent target).”³⁴ Vision America laments that “our nation is abandoning the bedrock moral values, which are our heritage from God, and the very foundation of our liberty.” This is due in no small part to “those in America...who openly ridicule and belittle people of faith,” “whose goal is nothing less than the transformation of our country in their own image” and who “seek to silence our witness and to banish Christianity from the public square.”³⁵

³¹ See <http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/culture.php>.

³² See <http://www.cwfa.org/coreissues.asp> (accessed April 8, 2010).

³³ See <http://www.afa.net/Detail.aspx?id=31>.

³⁴ See <http://www.frc.org/religion-culture>.

³⁵ See <http://www.visionamerica.us/about-us/>.

In short, what these organizations point to, if not provide explicitly, is a narrative of America interwoven with traditional Christian theological themes. America is the covenant nation, founded on “Judeo-Christian principles” in such a way that is unique in world history up to its inception, but is not ultimately exclusive to America, since the mission of the nation is to spread those principles of national life around the globe. Yet, America has strayed from its calling, which requires urgent and direct action by Christians in order to be faithful. As such, nationalism—defined as the recovery, propagation, and institutionalization of a particular national identity—is a theological virtue, since it recalls the nation’s divine mission, whose enactment constitutes Christian faithfulness.

The Christian Right as Nationalist Movement

Unfortunately, this fundamental impetus behind such Christian Right discourse is not adequately treated by existing secondary literature. This scholarship helpfully describes the movement’s activist history, its organizational makeup and funding, its public leaders, and its direct political involvement in state and national politics in the United States.³⁶ It discusses the various ways in which Christian Right leaders were courted by existing conservative figures into overt political activity, participating—and eventually even leading—in a fusion of militarism, moral traditionalism, and free market economics.³⁷ However, there is a marked paucity of social-

³⁶ See John C. Green, James L. Guthrie, Corwin E. Smidt, and Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Religion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches from the Front* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996); Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds. *The Christian Right in American Politics: Marching to the Millennium* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

It should be noted that the Christian Right is not treated extensively in most of the theopolitical literature, either. The scholars surveyed in Chapter 1, for whatever reason, do not take on the Christian Right in their work. Again, this points to the need for more sustained engagement, given the Christian Right’s influence upon Christian nationalism in the United States.

³⁷ Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 162. Diamond’s account is quite thorough regarding Christian Right organizational activity, and her treatment well-nuanced and properly balanced. Her study even begins with a critique of social scientists who have “established an enduring set of analytical blinders with their rhetorical descriptions of ‘extremists’ and the ‘radical right’” (5). She is particularly helpful with her

scientific treatments of the Christian Right as a nationalist movement. Most of the literature tends to focus on organizational development and activities. These are rarely if ever put into terms of nationalism, and while one could classify them under the second nationalist process of the pursuit of power and institutionalization of a particular national identity, there has been little attention to the Christian Right regarding the *formulation* of national identity in the first place. Other works label the Christian Right as a nationalist movement, but they tend not to connect to nationalism scholarship at large or to properly nuance the Christian Right itself.³⁸

That said, the literature does provide a useful framework for understanding the basic outlines of the movement. The Christian Right is defined as a “political alliance of evangelical Protestants and politically like-minded Catholics who share their social, political, and moral concerns.”³⁹ Its emergence and growth as a movement is “rooted in the sociopolitical restructuring of the 1960s,” with the goal of restoring the Christian character of American culture and providing Christian-based policy solutions to American social problems.⁴⁰ Evangelical

research into the relation of Christian Right organizations to the development of more aggressive US foreign policy in the 1980s, especially in Latin America (206-245).

³⁸ For example, Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006). Goldberg rightly points out that Christian nationalism can be characterized by “extrapolating a total political program from [biblical] truth, and yoking that program to a political party” (6), and that vision of the movement is “the restoration of an imagined Christian nation,” rooted in “a revisionist history that claims the founders never intended to create a secular country...” (7). She also accurately understands that in the present context of the war on terror, “for America to triumph, it would have to purify itself, restore God to the center of public life, and finally vanquish liberalism” (8). However, a serious problem in Goldberg’s study is its lack of nuance. Specifically, she includes together in this one movement virtually all publicly known conservative Christians, without much distinction in terms of conceptions of national identity and proposals for achieving/maintaining power; for instance, Reconstructionists, more “mainstream” CR figures like James Dobson and Gary Bauer, and political operatives like Ralph Reed are all labeled “Christian nationalist” with little substantive distinction between them (11-14). Moreover, she provides little discussion concerning how various leaders with opposing theological frameworks rationalize their cooperation (38-39). Her emphasis on networking and cooperation acts as a broad brush, useful for showing various associations, but largely neglects to identify or explain variations in vision or especially how different elements of contradictory theopolitical identities somehow become unified into one.

³⁹ Murphy, 87. Murphy’s study is an exception to the dearth of secondary treatments of Christian Right nationalism; however, his study is not concerned with the Christian Right as a movement so much as the use of the jeremiadic form of political discourse by both conservatives and liberals in America.

⁴⁰ Ronald E. Hopson and Donald R. Smith, “Changing Fortunes: An Analysis of Christian Right Ascendance Within American Political Discourse,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no.1 (March, 1999):1-2. Sara Diamond points out that surveys done in the 1950s showed American clergy occupied by foreign policy concerns, anticommunism chief among them, but that emphasis shifted after the

clergy like Jerry Falwell were wooed by conservative activists such as Paul Weyrich (the Catholic founder of the Heritage Foundation who is widely viewed as the father of the Christian Right) and Richard Viguerie (inventor of direct-mail campaigns) into becoming leading spokespersons for the movement, not least because of their positions within major American churches and the attendant ability to galvanize large numbers of Christians to the cause.⁴¹ Along the way, the Christian Right became allied with American neoconservatism in a relationship that revolves around “a critique of domestic culture and a foreign policy conducted as a beneficent empire.” What unifies these often theologically disparate movements is a combination of cultural issues such as “the quality and content of public education, moral relativism...and liberalizing sexual politics, including access to legal abortions and same-sex marriage,” and foreign policy concerns about the position of the United States in the world both economically and militarily.⁴²

The Christian Right is therefore best characterized by “a collection of overlapping agendas,” including a particular take on American civil religion wherein America is a Christian nation particularly favored by God, “chosen by God to fulfill his will,”⁴³ and where “Christian Right leaders may be likened to the prophets of the Old Testament, who repeatedly called on Israel to repent.” Of course, in the Old Testament narratives, these warnings to Israel are ignored, resulting in various divine punishments. Thus, “many activists see their role as that of ‘redeeming America,’ calling it to repent for many sins and directing it to the path of salvation.” They perceive themselves as “reluctant political warriors who feel the need to protect America

1960s to concerns about the traditional nuclear family and the ability of evangelical activists to participate in the American political process (Diamond, 100,161).

⁴¹ Diamond, esp. 29, 110-111, 161-178. Shortly thereafter, Weyrich and Falwell co-founded the Moral Majority, whose first board of directors included such well-known conservative Christian leaders as D. James Kennedy, Charles Stanley, and Tim LaHaye (174).

⁴² Scott Kline, “The Culture War Gone Global: ‘Family Values’ and the Shape of US Foreign Policy,” *International Relations* 18, no.4: 457.

⁴³ Clyde Wilcox and Carin Larson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), 15, 19. The authors rightly note that civil religion is not the exclusive domain of the Christian Right, and that often, the content of civil religion is contested (15-20). This echoes the work of both Andrew Murphy and Paul Brass.

from policies that might result in a loss of God's favor."⁴⁴ They therefore see the movement as defensive, seeking to safeguard America's Christian heritage from secular Americans who are waging a culture war against it (and them), attempting to undermine traditional beliefs and practices.⁴⁵

In this light, I believe the Christian Right is best defined as a nationalist movement because it is, in Donald Heinz's words, predominantly "engaged in a contest over the meaning of America's story," i.e., "how Americans choose to understand and interpret their beginnings, their historical experience, their cultural and spiritual meaning and identity, and their calling and destiny."⁴⁶ Heinz argues that Christian Right members see "status elites" in American society—government, mass media, education—as opposed to their values and story. These elites by and large control the national socialization process, primarily through "control of public symbol production." The Christian Right therefore seeks to exert its own control over symbol production in order to project a symbolic portrayal of America—a "countermythology"—that is in accord with their understanding of its history and heritage.⁴⁷

Movement leaders have written prolifically, typically viewing America as a chosen nation. The nation is directly connected to the Old Testament covenants, in some of the more pronounced instances "sounding like seventeenth-century Protestants in their description of the special relationship that existed between God and New World Israel." In others, the notions of election covenant are central, presenting the United States as "the chosen power of the contemporary world, the strongest and most righteous of recent states." In either case, America is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁶ Donald Heinz, "Clashing Symbols: The New Christian Right as Countermythology," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 59, no.1 (Jan.-Mar., 1985):155. Of these secondary sources, Heinz's article most directly corresponds to Paul Brass's treatment of symbol competition in nationalist movements.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

God's chosen people, inheriting its particular theopolitical status as transferred over time and around the world.⁴⁸

According to Andrew Murphy, this is part of the American jeremiad. American traditionalist jeremiads, most prevalent in the discourse of the Christian Right, see the past as concrete model. The Christian Right emphasizes the concrete practices of society in an earlier period as normative. This includes religious and moral beliefs, discourse, and socio-political practices from the past that are still considered binding today. For the Christian Right, the past—particularly the golden age of America's founding era—sets parameters for national life, specific guidelines for contemporary political agendas.⁴⁹ Within this conception, “a Judeo-Christian consensus structured public life, and men of great character embarked upon the American experiment in self-government without attempting to separate religion from politics.” This golden age embodies “sexual restraint, public religiosity, a commitment to the common good, and deference to traditional sources of authority,” with the public role of Judeo-Christian principles acting as the definitive mark of community.⁵⁰ It is this model which the traditionalist jeremiad of the American Christian Right holds as normative for American national identity and contemporary political practice.

⁴⁸ Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 141.

⁴⁹ Murphy, 111. Murphy proceeds to argue that the traditionalist jeremiad is therefore marked by a rejection of religious pluralism in contemporary America, and for that reason is problematic for American political life. The progressive jeremiad, however, is much more open to a variety of religious traditions, since it is concerned much more so with the more general underlying principles of the American story and life. I believe Murphy is somewhat mistaken in his portrayal of each camp, since even hard-core Christian Right narratives of America themselves embrace religious pluralism (religion being understood as private and individual); they simply attribute it to America's Christian heritage instead of to Enlightenment thought. Also, it should be noted that Murphy places Richard John Neuhaus within the traditionalist camp, leaving the progressive camp for the more politically liberal likes of Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bill Moyers. I believe this is a mistake, given the central definition of the progressive jeremiad as emphasizing transcendent principles versus concrete practices. I will demonstrate in the next chapter that Neuhaus's discourse (as well as that of Stephen H. Webb) actually resembles the principle-based, rather than concrete practice, approach.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

The Nationalist Narrative in Christian Right Literature

At the root of the wide-ranging endeavors of the American Christian Right is a particular narrative of American national identity. This narrative portrays the American nation as exceptional for its divine calling, and as evidenced by the power and prestige it currently enjoys in the world. The nation was born in a covenant context, and was blessed for most of its history for abiding by that covenant. Yet it has been for several decades a wayward vassal, a nation in the midst of a tumultuous identity crisis. This crisis requires direct and immediate resolution in the form of a return to the nation's founding religious and political principles and practices, or the nation will face sure and imminent destruction.

This narrative of American Christian nationalism, which by its very nature constitutes a theopolitical project, is portrayed explicitly in the discourse crafted by certain key Christian Right authors. This section examines such discourse using Anthony Smith's rubric of "sacred foundations": (1) community: rooted in a particular sacred narrative, the nation as divinely chosen and called to a particular mission, requiring a particular holiness; (2) territory: the nation's sacred space; (3) glorious past: the nation's golden age and subsequent decline; and (4) the nation's shared sacrifice and sacred destiny. For the purposes of this study, I have reconfigured the third and fourth foundations to an extent: the third is the golden age narrative, highlighting the contributions of key figures, while the fourth includes a combination of decline and renewal, including some emphasis on the necessity of sacrifice for the latter. With this reconfiguration in mind, this section examines in particular the nationalist narrative in the writings of two of its key instigators—Peter Marshall and David Manuel—as well as three major Christian Right leaders: D. James Kennedy, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. As the secondary literature attests, the latter three have had an enduring influence on Christian Right formulations of national identity and pursuit of policy objectives over the past three decades. Yet, the existing literature does not

adequately discuss the content of their message—i.e., the substance of their nationalist narrative—particularly along theological lines.

Community

To properly understand American chosenness within the Christian Right nationalist narrative, one must first address Peter Marshall and David Manuel's 1977 book, *The Light and the Glory*.⁵¹ The book is explicitly theopolitical, steadfastly portraying America as the modern extension of Israel. Marshall and Manuel begin by arguing that Israel's "corporate covenant relationship" with God was not a singular event, but rather the first and exemplary instance of God's ongoing practice of relating to the nations. In particular, God elected America to be a "light to lighten the Gentiles" . . . a demonstration to the world of how God intended His children to live together under the Lordship of Christ." The earliest settlers saw themselves as a people called to continue Israel's covenant relationship with God,⁵² and this self-perception is normative today, for "God was making His most significant attempt since ancient Israel to create a new Israel of people living in obedience to the laws of God, through faith in Jesus Christ."⁵³ Israel's "Covenant Way" was extolled by the Puritan settlers, who along with the Pilgrims "had known

⁵¹ Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977). This book was revised and expanded as *The Light and the Glory: 1492-1793* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell 2009), the first in the trilogy entitled "God's Plan for America," containing also *From Sea to Shining Sea: 1787-1837* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 2009) and *Sounding Forth the Trumpet: 1837-1860* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 2009). Each is available as well in children's versions, and *The Light and the Glory* still holds a prominent place in various homeschooling curricula. The final book in the trilogy carries endorsements from Bill Bright, Christian Right activist and founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, and conservative syndicated columnist Cal Thomas, as well as U.S. Senator Sam Brownback and former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft.

As to the book's significance (in addition to Marshall's involvement in the Texas textbook debate), historian John Fea cites sales of *The Light and the Glory* at almost one million copies between 1977 and 2008, but points out that what is even more significant is "its impact on hundreds of thousands of Christians, including students in home schools and private Christian academies, in promoting a 'Christian view' of American history. It was not the first (or the last) book to declare that the United States was founded as a 'Christian nation,' but it has certainly been the most influential." See John Fea, "Thirty Years of Light & Glory," *Touchstone* 21, no.6 (Jul./Aug. 2008):27.

⁵² Marshall and Manuel, 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

that they were separated unto God and called out for a special purpose.”⁵⁴ God used “servant-leaders” such as William Bradford, John Winthrop, and George Washington, who were “living out the example of Jesus Christ,” to “show the way in the building of His new Promised Land,”⁵⁵ “a new Jerusalem, a model of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth.” Thus, “we Americans were intended to be living proof to the rest of the world that it *was* possible to live a life together which reflected the Two Great Commandments and put God and others ahead of self.”⁵⁶ As “God’s New Israel,” America is the ultimate communal advancement to date of the Christian salvation narrative.⁵⁷

This covenantal understanding of America is picked up quite clearly in the work of D. James Kennedy, Presbyterian minister and major figure of Christian Right theopolitics.⁵⁸ For Kennedy, America is “the most blessed nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth,” as marked by its “freedom and abundance.”⁵⁹ The reason for this abundance is “its adherence to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 256. The authors claim much earlier in the book that it is for this reason of covenant that “it is impossible to enter into nationalistic pride.” Covenant entails contingency and the very real possibility of judgment, not to mention an honest appraisal of national failures (26). However, the authors do not seem to consider the possibility that such a portrayal is no less exceptionalist, and therefore carrying the very real potential of “nationalistic pride.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷ This is not to mention the salvation of Western Civilization. As Marshall and Manuel later posit, “God knew what the twentieth century would hold in store. He also knew the totalitarian darknesses that would arise out of Europe and Asia, and knew that England alone would never have the spiritual power to stop them. And so He planted the seeds of light that would make the difference, early in the seventeenth century” (Ibid., 154).

⁵⁸ Until his death in 2007, Kennedy was pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. From there, he directed numerous initiatives in conjunction with Christian organizations dedicated to propagating a particularly Christian, covenantal understanding of American heritage. To this end, he founded Coral Ridge Ministries and the Center for Reclaiming America for Christ, the latter which closed down following his death.

⁵⁹ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What If America Were a Christian Nation Again?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 133. This description occurs in a section on the importance of a “balanced emphasis on patriotism” as part of appropriate Christian education.

Kennedy’s co-author, Jerry Newcombe, is most recently the author of *The Book that Made America: How the Bible Formed Our Nation* (Ventura, CA: Nordskog Publishing, 2009). At the time of the publication of *What if America...?*, Newcombe had an undergraduate degree in history and a graduate degree in communications. He also served as the producer of Kennedy’s television ministry, *The Coral Ridge Hour* (<http://www.jerrynewcombe.com/jerry.html>). Despite his co-authorship, I will be referring primarily to Kennedy throughout the text of this chapter, since he is the primary figure of relevance.

faith in Jesus Christ and the Bible,”⁶⁰ for “America was a nation founded upon Christ and His Word,”⁶¹ a nation given birth by the “Puritan and evangelical form of Christianity.”⁶² The early Pilgrim and Puritan settlers came to the New World “to advance the gospel and the kingdom of our Lord, Jesus Christ,”⁶³ forming a nation Kennedy calls the “last best hope of people on earth.”⁶⁴ Their settlement and survival were directly aided by God: “the founders of this country had multiple reasons to believe that God was scattering their enemies.” Therefore, “we would do well to remember the greatest hero who ever fought for the freedom of America, that One who has fought to establish this Christian land.”⁶⁵ The nation, “a nation unique in the history of the world,”⁶⁶ is thus the direct product of God’s own devoted effort:

God loves America. When you consider what He went through to bring our forebears to this magnificent land, and when you realize what He accomplished in bringing forth a new nation on this continent—a government founded on Christian principles and dedicated to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—you have to realize that He had a dramatic vision and purpose for this nation.⁶⁷

Jerry Falwell is largely in agreement with Kennedy’s description of the nation.⁶⁸ In his view, “God promoted America to a greatness no other nation has ever enjoyed because her heritage is one of a republic governed by laws predicated on the Bible.”⁶⁹ Despite her numerous failures, “it is right living that has made America...without question the greatest nation on the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 134.

⁶¹ Ibid., 4.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴ D. James Kennedy, *Character & Destiny: A Nation In Search of Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 52.

⁶⁵ Kennedy and Newcombe, 6-7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, 18.

⁶⁸ Before his death in 2007, Jerry Falwell was a Baptist minister and televangelist, who became a major Christian Right leader in the 1980s in association with Paul Weyrich, when with Weyrich he founded the Moral Majority. Earlier, in 1971, he founded what would become Liberty University, a major conservative evangelical college in Lynchburg, Virginia, boasting in 2009 a residential enrollment of about 12,000 students, and an online enrollment of more than 36,000 (<https://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=6925>, accessed May 10, 2010).

⁶⁹ Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1980), 16.

face of God's earth."⁷⁰ According to Falwell, "God has blessed this nation because in its early days she sought to honor God and the Bible, the inerrant Word of the living God." America was to be a Christian nation, for while the Founding Fathers were not all Christians, "they developed a nation predicated on Holy Writ. The religious foundations of America find their roots in the Bible,"⁷¹ roots which are essential to liberty. For this reason, "we have enjoyed a unique relationship toward God."⁷²

Pat Robertson echoes these authors but more explicitly relates the biblical narrative to the American constitutional system.⁷³ America is without precedent, save one, namely that "established thousands of years before by the tribes of Israel in their covenant with God and with each other."⁷⁴ According to Robertson's study of the documents and testimony of the founders, it is the "Old Testament stories of God at work with His people, Israel, and the New Testament stories of the Christian church" that most influenced the development of the U.S. Constitution.⁷⁵ Reading the Constitution within the framework of the Declaration of Independence (which one must do since the former does not directly reference God), one finds God as (1) the source of liberty: "God is the Lawgiver, a biblical precedent for the legislative branch of government"; (2) "the nation's ultimate protector": "God is the Chief Executive, the Commander-in-Chief, a biblical precedent for the executive branch of government"; and (3) "the nation's judge": "God is

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20. As he states later on, "America has been great because her people have been good. We are certainly far from being a perfect society, but our heritage is one of genuine concern for all mankind" (243).

⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

⁷² Ibid., 252.

⁷³ Marion Gordon (Pat) Robertson is a televangelist and the founder of numerous Christian Right organizations, including the Christian Coalition, as well as the still operating television network CBN and its flagship show, *The 700 Club*, and the American Center for Law and Justice. In 1988, he campaigned for the Republican nomination for President of the United States.

⁷⁴ Pat Robertson, *America's Dates with Destiny* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 90. Interestingly, this book is organized quite like Smith's authentication process of rediscovery of heritage, identification of decline, and path to renewal. The first part, entitled "Beginning Our Journey," contains chapters on "*Rediscovering...*" this or that element of the national heritage as portrayed by Robertson. The second part is entitled "Losing Our Way" and discusses "The *loss...*" of various elements of American national character, such as the "rights of the majority," "power by the people," or "honor and the will to win." The third part, called "Finding Our Way Again," claims "a mandate to *return...*" to various of these elements by virtue of political activities going around the time of the book's publishing (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

the Chief Justice of the universe, a biblical precedent for the judicial branch of government.”⁷⁶ In light of this direct divine connection, “the Constitution could not survive a people who did not believe in God or his laws.”⁷⁷

Quoting several founders on the necessity of religion for sustaining the country, Robertson also asserts that “without a people governed individually by God’s laws, the nation would self-destruct.”⁷⁸ Free society depends on individual self-restraint, which is rooted in the biblical conviction that each person will be rewarded or punished according to the divine standard. In the New Testament, the desire to live righteously is “reinforced by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by the comfort and discipline of the church.” The grace of God in Jesus, while promising forgiveness, nonetheless motivates obedience. In this way, the “law of the heart” orients one’s response to the nation and its laws.⁷⁹ In short, as the lone theopolitical reflection of Israel, America’s political order is established by God and modeled directly on God’s own exercise of authority. Christianity thus supports the nation and its political institutions by ensuring the individuals proper disposition, through God, to the nation and its political order.

Territory

The sacredness of land is not a primary theme in Christian Right nationalist discourse as a whole, but neither is it entirely absent. The territory of America-as-New-Israel, while taking a backseat to the people’s chosenness, is viewed within the context of God’s covenant for global salvation. This is apparent in at least two ways. First, the New World is specially and divinely reserved land. Notwithstanding the indigenous peoples already present, the land is described as the “virgin wilderness of America.”⁸⁰ The discovery and settlement of the Americas by European

⁷⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁰ Marshall and Manuel, 22.

Christendom was central to God's "grand design for the New World." As Marshall and Manuel explain, "He had withheld it from man's knowledge this long, in almost virginal purity. He had stocked it with an abundance of game and fertile soil, natural resources and beauty—all that a people would ever need—as a fitting abode for the followers of His Son."⁸¹ Kennedy echoes Marshall and Manuel's claim, stating that "God in His infinite wisdom and providence reserved this nation, separated by two oceans from the civilized world of that day, until such a time as this. I believe He set this land and these people apart as the last best hope of people on earth."⁸² Quite in the tradition of Israel, then, the explorers and settlers who were led to the New World were brought providentially into a land of abundance—one might say, "flowing with milk and honey"—as the site of their theopolitical mission. The territory in North America thus becomes sacred, a divinely designated instrument—in conjunction with the people—of God's salvation of the world.

The second way in which territory plays a role for Christian Right nationalism is as the cosmic battleground between God and Satan. As Marshall and Manuel portray the situation, the Americas of the fifteenth century constitute the final unchallenged earthly domain of the devil. In reference to the explorers, they write that "Satan had failed to keep the Light of Christ from establishing a beachhead in practically the only part of the world in which he still reigned unchallenged."⁸³ Satan is implicated in the sinking of the *Pinta*, in fact, because he is "unable to thwart the Christ-bearer's mission or keep him [Columbus] from invading his [Satan's] domain."⁸⁴ So not only is the New World the "Promised Land" for the nation America as the "model of the Kingdom of Christ," but it must be wrested from the hands of its current overlord,

⁸¹ Ibid., 46. These quotations illustrate a tension in the book between the so-called "virgin wilderness" of the Americas and the role of the native peoples there, with whom Marshall and Manuel elsewhere demonstrate a certain sympathy.

⁸² Kennedy, 52.

⁸³ Marshall and Manuel, 42.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 46. Incidentally, they conclude that while Satan was likely behind the actual sinking, God allowed it possibly as a way to humble Columbus and reorient the Christ-bearer back to his proper mission (46-47). This is another example of the theologically framed speculation that fleshes out documented fact throughout their work.

the ultimate Enemy himself. This fits very well within the context of covenant, not only as a general echoing of Israel's conquest and settlement period, but in terms of a particular land as the unique and definitive geographic locus for God's salvation of the world.

Golden Age/Heroes

The third sacred foundation is the nation's "glorious past," which is prevalent throughout much of the Christian Right's nationalist discourse. While some narratives begin or end earlier or later than others, there is universal acknowledgement of the importance of the early settlers, particularly the Puritans, as well as the major figures of the founding period of the United States. As Anthony Smith and Andrew Murphy both point out, these golden age narratives are exemplary: they are both the primary criterion for interpreting the present national condition, delineating its areas of present deterioration, as well as the *telos* toward which the nation must strive for salvation. Often within the literature, golden ages will be presented in both a general sense—broad statements about the way things used to be—and more specifically, in the form of particular stories and figures.

The notion of "golden age" is reflected specifically in the various biographical sketches and particular stories found throughout these works. One example is Marshall and Manuel's depiction of Christopher Columbus, whose first name, meaning "Christ-bearer," becomes the authors' theme for America's discovery. Columbus, whose story comprises the first two chapters of the book, had become convinced of a divinely given, "almost mystical mission: to carry the Light of Christ into the darkness of undiscovered heathen lands, and to bring the inhabitants of those lands to the holy faith of Christianity."⁸⁵ Unfortunately, over time, Columbus's pride and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 31. The authors rely for this claim on excerpts from a translation of Columbus's journal, in which he cites the Holy Spirit as giving him the inspiration to sail to the Indies (17) and appropriates for himself biblical prophecies regarding conveying a "light to the nations" (31). Interestingly, Columbus's "mystical" experience occurs, according to the authors, in a "half-waking dream" while he was "sick with a fever and

greed get the better of him, and his mission of discovery descends into one of conquest.⁸⁶

Marshall and Manuel are frank when it comes to acknowledging certain instances of European exploitation, and some of the greatest villains of their narrative are figures such as Cortez, Pizarro, and the Conquistadors. Conversely, their heroes of the period are the more humble figures of the Franciscan and Dominican friars who sought a relative level of protection for the indigenous population.⁸⁷

In a later era, it is the Puritans who are the heroes of the story, for they “more than any other, made possible America’s foundation as a Christian nation.”⁸⁸ It is the Puritan conviction that “the Kingdom of God really *could* be built on earth, in their lifetimes” that provides the very foundation of New England, and therefore the nation.⁸⁹ Persecuted in England, the Puritans undertake an “exodus” to America in order to build “a Biblical Commonwealth in New England.”⁹⁰ With their “Moses,” John Winthrop, they executed “an essential maneuver in the drama of Christendom” against its own corruptions. As such, “these Puritans did not flee to America; they went in order to work out that complete reformation which was not yet

in the depths of despair” (21). Yet the credibility of Columbus’s claim in such a context goes unquestioned in their account.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 47. As they put it, “the Columbus era soon deteriorated into such a debacle of rape, murder, and plunder throughout Central America, that we could not conceive what possible connection it might have with any divine plan for the establishment of a new Christian commonwealth” (67). This development is viewed by the authors not as a disconfirmation of their claims of American election, but rather as a divergence from that election.

⁸⁷ In places, the authors demonstrate a candor and judgment rather uncharacteristic of the Christian Right on these issues, and particularly for a book published in 1977. At one point they state, “In Mexico, where silver was abundant, the Indian farmers were forcibly taken from their fields and set to mining, with no thought for the crops on which the population was entirely dependent. Widespread famine was the result, and that, plus their total lack of immunity to the white men’s diseases, amounted to genocide of mind-numbing proportions” (Ibid., 68). And in contrasting the two types of Spanish newcomers, they write, “The Conquistadors had brought monks with them, possibly to salve their consciences, or to boost the morale of the men who were so far from home. But these Franciscan and Dominican friars were not straw men; they loved God—deeply and totally. They were as committed to serving Him, as their military masters were to serving themselves” (69). They specifically cite with approval the efforts of Bartolomé de las Casas to redress injustices done to the native population and to protect them from further exploitation (71ff.).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 154.

accomplished in England and Europe.”⁹¹ While Kennedy describes their move as essentially a “church-relocation project,”⁹² Falwell writes, “The heritage of the Puritan Pilgrims is one not of a church, but of a nation; these were men and women who were not only the progenitors of a state, but also the ancestors of a nation.” They provided the religious foundation for the liberty Christians enjoy today.⁹³

Winthrop was central to this as, in Cotton Mather’s words, the *Nehemias Americanus*⁹⁴; under his leadership, in covenant, the Puritan settlers demonstrated a commitment that is normative for Americans today and that is “more demanding than most of us are willing to make.”⁹⁵ This twofold commitment—“vertical” between the nation and “Christ as Lord and Master, as well as Savior,” and “horizontal,” from neighbor to neighbor “and ultimately to that specific body of Christian neighbors of whom God calls one to be a part”—is the foundational contribution of the Puritans to America as a Christian nation. God raised them up deliberately as “foundation stones, not merely of American democracy, but of the Kingdom of God in America.”⁹⁶

A third major golden age event in these narratives is the Great Awakening, during which Americans, by way of Christian conversion, came to see themselves as a cohesive nation defined by the “Covenant Way.” As part of a succession of clergy who would spiritually prepare the colonies for later resistance to Britain, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield helped revive the Puritan covenant identity through an intensive emphasis on Christ’s forgiveness and freedom from sin. It was through revival meetings that “the Body of Christ was forming in America” and “Americans were rediscovering God’s plan to join them together by His Spirit in the common

⁹¹ Ibid., 157.

⁹² Kennedy and Newcombe, 20.

⁹³ Falwell, 30.

⁹⁴ Marshall and Manuel, 160.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 168-169.

cause of advancing His Kingdom.”⁹⁷ As Robertson explains, “people were also tired of dull, ineffectual religion, forced upon them” by either colonial forefathers or by representatives of the Crown. Spiritual awakening prompted “new commitment to personal and political freedom.”⁹⁸ In continuity with Israel, this awakening “was actually a *reawakening* of a deep national desire for the Covenant Way of life.”⁹⁹ Note here the significance for American identity: in the Great Awakening,

we began to become aware of ourselves as a *nation*, a body of believers which had a national identity as a people chosen by God for a specific purpose: to be not just ‘a city upon a hill,’ but a veritable citadel of Light in a darkened world....Now, through the shared experience of coming together in large groups to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Americans were rediscovering God’s plan to join them together by His Spirit in the common cause of advancing His Kingdom.¹⁰⁰

In revival, the nation is becoming self-aware. Here, the gospel of Christ is seen as solidifying American national identity, for it is America that is to be the definitive theopolitical embodiment of Christ on earth.

Kennedy cites the Great Awakening as the impetus for the American independence movement. As Americans “‘were overwhelmingly churchgoing’” in contrast with the British, the Declaration of Independence was indisputably “‘a religious as well as a secular act.’”¹⁰¹ This is the fourth golden age period to be considered here: the American Revolution and early constitutional deliberation. As Marshall and Manuel explain, the colonies had already practiced democratic government for a century before the British began making increasingly stringent demands on them in the form of taxation without representation¹⁰² and especially with renewed

⁹⁷ Ibid., 251.

⁹⁸ Robertson, 59.

⁹⁹ Marshall and Manuel, 240.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 251. One imagines Edwards and Whitefield would be somewhat surprised at their role in this development as described by the authors, given their rather consistent self-identification as British subjects. See George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Marsden discusses Edwards eschatological view of Anglo resistance to what he saw as the anti-christ, papist forces of France, etc., but Edwards did not really conceive of a substantive national division between Britain and her colonies.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy and Newcombe, 31.

¹⁰² Marshall and Manuel, 263.

Anglican worship and church control.¹⁰³ The founders, Robertson explains, had been raised to understand politics within the context of a fallen world dominated by sin. For this reason, “civil government was instituted by God to protect people’s rights.”¹⁰⁴

But the biblical narrative itself is suspicious of kingship, specifying for Israel’s kings the specific scope of their authority.¹⁰⁵ According to Robertson, the covenant between God, the king, and the people required the king to protect the people’s “unalienable rights”; if he failed to do so, he would be removed from office. Thus, George III would only retain his office if he did the same; but “King George had broken the compact.”¹⁰⁶ Even then, though, the founders’ behavior is exemplary: they “listed their grievances carefully, proclaimed their liberty, declared their separate and equal status, defended their honor, and defeated their king....By their example we learn that it is our right and duty as citizens to judge the laws and the lawmakers of this nation by the laws of God in the created order and in God’s Word, and then to act.”¹⁰⁷ Because George III had violated the proper, God-ordained exercise of earthly authority in demanding total submission to himself—constituting “tyranny and oppression”—American colonists were forced to react and seek their independence, an understanding strongly reinforced by colonial clergy at the time¹⁰⁸; indeed, “the American church became the cradle of a revolution.”¹⁰⁹ Thus was born

¹⁰³ “It was now clear to even the most undiscerning Puritan that passive, docile submission to English rule would mean the reimposition of the oppressive authority of the Church of England from which God had delivered their forefathers. The struggle *was* spiritual” (Marshall and Manuel, 260).

¹⁰⁴ Robertson, 68.

¹⁰⁵ For Robertson, this suspicion is not part of a general disapproval of state centralization and *realpolitik* as portrayed in Chapter 2/4 of the present study. Rather, it exists in his argument as a way to justify democracy, ultimately via violent means.

¹⁰⁶ Robertson, 71. Unfortunately, Robertson does not make clear how the notion of God’s direct removal of an Israelite king is equivalent to armed rebellion by the people.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 72. “Defense of honor” appears occasionally in multiple works by these authors, but with the exception of Marshall and Manuel, no theological justification is attempted for the violence implicit in the principle.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall and Manuel, 263. The authors mention in particular the 1773 Declaration of Marlborough (Massachusetts): “Death...is more eligible than slavery. A free-born people are not required by the religion of Jesus Christ to submit to tyranny, but may make use of such power as God has given them to recover and support their laws and liberties...[we] implore the Ruler above the skies, that He would make bare His arm in defense of His Church and people, and let Israel go” (267).

¹⁰⁹ Robertson, 59.

the cry, “No king but King Jesus!”; resistance and revolution were a return to gospel theopolitics, as these authors understand it.¹¹⁰

Marshall and Manuel gauge God’s approval of the Revolution by its success.¹¹¹ Central to this success is the role of George Washington, whom the authors present as an iconic figure of Christian devotion and humility. They describe Washington, alluding to his many prayers, as “a man under authority—God’s and Country’s.”¹¹² Robertson, too, is enamored with Washington, whom he admires for consistently allowing personal faith to interact with politics: “Not once during his distinguished service to this nation did he minimize or shelve his deeply felt commitment to God, to the Bible, or to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...he established for all time how Christian people can live by their own convictions and at the same time govern all the people fairly and wisely.”¹¹³ As Washington consistently “heeded his inspired intuition,” the colonial army was able to tactically trump the moves of the numerically superior British regulars.¹¹⁴ Marshall and Manuel go into some detail on the events of the Revolutionary War, including simultaneous colonial attempts at reconciliation with Britain, which they repeatedly compare to Israel yearning to return to Egypt.¹¹⁵ In the end, the colonial victory demonstrated

¹¹⁰ Marshall and Manuel, 267. As they quote Samuel Adams upon voting for independence, “ ‘We have this day restored the Sovereign, to Whom alone men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and...from the rising to the setting sun, may His Kingdom come’ ” (309).

¹¹¹ As they claim, “if there is one thing that the Bible teaches, it is that God honors obedience with His blessing. He does not honor disobedience” (Ibid., 270).

¹¹² Ibid., 288. The authors find these prayers in William J. Johnson, *George Washington the Christian* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1919). The book is available electronically at http://books.google.com/books?id=MzWruWAnHM0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=william+johnson,+george+washington,+the+christian&source=bl&ots=Dz3NyGfrH9&sig=SvedtxZlWrzwo0qniwbgYIBKIbg&hl=en&ei=Aq7ES7_kBoOMNpWrqPYN&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CAwQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹¹³ Robertson, 107.

¹¹⁴ Marshall and Manuel, 298.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 301-303. They write regarding deliberations in the Continental Congress considering reconciliation with Britain, “The situation was reminiscent of the Israelites in the wilderness, convincing one another that they had been better off in Egypt, and daily growing more and more certain that the only thing to do was to go back. For out in the wilderness they were forced to face the unknown and put their entire trust in God” (302). Yet “realists” like John Adams prevailed, arguing British rule would be even worse, to which the authors add, “Nine plagues in a row had failed to soften Pharaoh’s heart, and the comparison between him and George III was now being made in more sermons than ever” (303).

“God was with them all the time,” God’s grace favoring them to succeed,¹¹⁶ such that “Americans had the unseen aid of their strongest Ally.”¹¹⁷ In this event, “we had seen how miraculously God would intervene to preserve and protect his covenanted people....God made certain that those same covenant promises which He made to our forefathers when He brought them here, would always be a viable possibility in the United States of America.”¹¹⁸

Much of the same is claimed for Constitutional deliberations. For Kennedy, the signers of the Constitution “were definitely Christian for the most part. At least 90 to 95 percent of them were practicing, Trinitarian Christians.”¹¹⁹ Even the five percent who were not orthodox were “pro-Bible and had somewhat of a Christian worldview.”¹²⁰ Thomas Jefferson is a key figure, particularly as Kennedy considers the debate over separation of church and state central to the question of national identity. Jefferson, as the deist portrayed in typical histories, is a “fictional character...the creation of the secular elite, our secular educational system, the media, and of liberal judges.”¹²¹ Rather, Kennedy portrays Jefferson as a consistently church-going Anglican, who suffered a crisis of faith under certain family circumstances. The so-called “Jeffersonian Bible” was simply intended as a book on ethics and morals, not an indictment of Christianity. Jefferson’s own personal religiosity was unmistakable,¹²² and his letter to the Danbury Baptist Society, from which the explicit claim of separation of church and state originates, was never meant to preclude Christianity from the public arena. Of course, “I don’t think that we could say that Jefferson was a genuine Christian in the sense of one who had been transformed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, one who trusts in the death of Jesus Christ for his salvation.” He saw Christianity as little more than a code of ethics. But even as a “nominal

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 313.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 317.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 336.

¹¹⁹ Kennedy and Newcombe, 206.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 216. Kennedy relies for these numbers on the work of David Barton, discussed above.

¹²¹ Ibid., 42.

¹²² Ibid., 49ff.

Christian,” Jefferson’s beliefs and actions were “totally antithetical” to what the American people have been told.¹²³

Decline and Renewal

In all of the accounts discussed here, there is a sense that what was going in a more or less straight trajectory with regard to America’s maturing in its covenant identity—and particularly its rise to global power by the mid-twentieth century, which is seen as indisputable proof that America is blessed by God for its faithfulness—was radically derailed in the 1960s. Not only do the political, economic, and cultural developments arising from that decade constitute decline from the nation’s identity as forged in its founding golden age, but they act collectively as the impetus for these works of nationalism. In response, the nation must recover the political, cultural, and religious practices that once defined it according to the Christian Right narratives. Only then can it be saved from judgment. Yet even past or prospective judgment acts not to falsify the nationalist accounts, but are read within them as part and parcel of covenant: God’s peculiar people are punished for violating covenant, but the blessings of covenant can be regained with proper repentance and obedience.

For Marshall and Manuel, America had been up to the 1960s a paragon of nationhood in the world; optimism reigned, and “the American Dream was about to come true.” Yet, “with a suddenness that is still bewildering, everything went out of balance.”¹²⁴ The United States began to suffer military defeats in Vietnam; its president was assassinated; America’s youth began rebelling against authority in all forms; emerging nations that had benefitted from American generosity turned “unanimous in their hatred of us”; foreign policy lost its proactive assertiveness.¹²⁵ The economy declined, educational scores waned, and psychiatric disorders

¹²³ Kennedy and Newcombe, 52-53.

¹²⁴ Marshall and Manuel, 13.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

erupted. “Most mystifying” was the “loss of moral soundness”; there had always been isolated breakdowns, but now the problem was widespread.¹²⁶ Above all, the scandal of Watergate defied expectations for the presidency, which up to that point “was a symbol of all that was right and decent in America.” Tearing down such an “idol of our ‘civil religion’... was such a shattering experience for so many.”¹²⁷ This decline, they assert, is due to forgetting the nation’s Christian heritage, rejecting a national life wherein people would live in obedience—as a nation—to Jesus Christ, so as “truly to be *one nation under God*.”¹²⁸

Kennedy’s earlier work places America’s decline firmly within the context of covenant and national chosenness. Even though God went to great pains to bring America about, “God is also our loving parent, and His heart is broken by the way we have neglected Him.... He will not allow us to continue in rebellion forever.”¹²⁹ Great nations fall, he explains, usually because of internal moral deterioration, their “compromise of their own foundational beliefs, loss of faith in the values that made them great...”¹³⁰ Such compromise has been foisted upon America by secular humanists, “liberal educators,” and socialists in American universities. In response, “the Christian church is being forced to defend itself against the blatant, premeditated, willful, and malicious attack of those determined to overthrow the freedom and spiritual values of this nation.” Christians face “a radical and totalitarian agenda to seize control of the media” in order to control the flow of ideas and subject Christians to scorn.¹³¹ As victims of this assault, Christians are simply trying to preserve “what is our own: a nation discovered, tamed, founded, defended, and nurtured from infancy to greatness by men and women of faith.... We did not start

¹²⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁹ Kennedy, 18. It is interesting to note that Kennedy’s earlier book is considerably more strident in tone than the later one, which could have something to do with the political climate at the time. *Character & Destiny* was published during the Clinton Administration, which is specifically cited therein as contributing to America’s precarious position (23), while *What If America...?* was published during the administration of George W. Bush, and contains a strong, if indirect, defense of aggressive Bush Administration policy toward terrorism following 9/11, which, true to form for American exceptionalism, he calls “the day that changed the world” (pp. 173ff.).

¹³⁰ Kennedy, 47.

¹³¹ Ibid., 77.

the culture war, but we have a profound commitment to this nation and its values, and we *will* stand up for them.”¹³²

Kennedy laments that the nation has turned its collective back on the God of the founding fathers, choosing to exclude religious principles from culture and politics.¹³³ The culture wars are largely to blame: the priority of tolerance and the loss of “absolutes,” the deterioration of the nuclear family, the loss of the sanctity of life for the unborn, sex education,¹³⁴ and liberal jurisprudence caused by activist courts and organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union.¹³⁵ He is particularly concerned with secular humanists in public education, “amoral and anti-Christian” educators who are exposing students “to a deadly virus that will eat away their souls.”¹³⁶ The “liberal establishment” has incrementally revised history in order to “take Jesus Christ out of the picture.” This bodes ill for America: “When we freely confessed that this is a Christian nation, in days gone by, we prospered. We were the ‘shining city on a hill.’ Alas, we are no more.”¹³⁷ Kennedy writes that until the mid-nineteenth century, the Bible was the “chief textbook” in a fairly explicitly Christian public education system.¹³⁸ However, he now sees anti-Christian prejudice in educational curricula, not to mention general ignorance about the founding fathers: “If the educational elites get their way, not only will schoolchildren not know about the Christianity of the founders of this country, they won’t even learn about our founders. Period.”¹³⁹ The problem most recently includes “antipatriotism” in post-9/11 curricula criticizing United States foreign policy.¹⁴⁰ Kennedy tells the reader that, left unchecked, the consequence of these

¹³² *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³³ Kennedy and Newcombe, 41.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapters 6-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 220. See also pp. 202ff., which discuss the First Amendment and the question of separation between church and state.

¹³⁶ Kennedy, 47.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³⁸ Kennedy and Newcombe, 134.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

developments will be that “your children and grandchildren are going to live in a godless society where life will be but one tragedy after another. In that day no life will be worth living.”¹⁴¹

Pat Robertson is quite specific about sources of American decline, discussing such things as the humanism of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and John Dewey¹⁴²; biblical higher criticism¹⁴³; the similarities between the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and the “The Humanist Manifesto” of 1933, and their alleged rejection of both supernaturalism and capitalism.¹⁴⁴ He also specifically cites the American Civil Liberties Union as complicit in “the loss of majority rights,” namely rights to practicing faith in the public square. This is manifested in evolution versus creationism cases as well as “the undermining of the nation’s spiritual heritage” by defending the removal of prayer and Bible reading from public schools.¹⁴⁵ Added to this is judicial activism and its results, such as *Roe v. Wade* and the legalization of abortion, not to mention Vietnam and the “loss of honor and the will to win.”¹⁴⁶ At the end of it all, writes Robertson, one sees America in very much the same condition as biblical Israel:

At the time Isaiah wrote, the people of Israel, like the citizens of America, had departed from their spiritual roots. They were in deep trouble. They had forsaken the ways of God and were living in immorality and corruption. Their treasury was bankrupt. Their military might had ebbed away, and they found themselves surrounded by a powerful enemy. The end was in sight for their once proud and prosperous nation.¹⁴⁷

Falwell is even more centrally concerned with both the economic and military aspects of America’s decline: “she has, both economically and militarily, lost her prominence among the nations of the world.”¹⁴⁸ Near the very beginning of his book, written at the end of the Carter

¹⁴¹ Kennedy, 248.

¹⁴² Robertson, 175ff.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 192-195.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapters 19 and 20.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁴⁸ Falwell, 97. This book was written around the time that Falwell joined with Weyrich and Viguerie in galvanizing the nascent New Christian Right. While the context certainly dates his argument, it does not

Administration, he laments that “the United States is for the first time, in my lifetime, and probably in the lifetime of my parents and grandparents, no longer the military might of the world.”¹⁴⁹ By disarming to any degree, the country surrenders its sovereignty, and consequently, its liberty.¹⁵⁰ Falwell makes an adamant, if brief, biblical case for strong militarization, rooted in Romans 13:1-6, and states plainly that “nowhere in the Bible is there a rebuke for the bearing of armaments.”¹⁵¹

While the country is far too weak in projecting power abroad, it is far too strong in projecting power domestically: “today government has become all-powerful as we have exchanged freedom for security.” Speaking economically as he is, redistribution of wealth is tantamount to tyranny, and is therefore “alien to the Founding Fathers of our country.”¹⁵² Rather, a biblical economic approach would emphasize the priority of free-enterprise, as espoused by such figures as Milton Friedman.¹⁵³ Free-enterprise is consistent with individual political freedom, and “no nation has survived long when its citizens were denied the free market and individual initiative.”¹⁵⁴

Yet, for Falwell, “there is a bond among personal freedom, political freedom, and economic freedom that is an indissoluble one,” which means that “at the root of America’s problems today is the decay of our individual and national morals.”¹⁵⁵ This is due in large part to the state of education, which since World War II has seen “a continuing infiltration of socialism

outdate it, for the concern expressed animates Falwell’s discourse throughout his career, to no less a degree than it did the direction of the Moral Majority at that time.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97. As he laments, “Ten years ago we could have destroyed much of the population of the Soviet Union had we desired to fire our missiles. The sad fact is that today the Soviet Union would kill 135 million to 160 million Americans, and the United States would kill only 3 to 5 per cent of the Soviets because of their antiballistic missiles and their civil defense” (98).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁵³ On this count, he writes, “The free-enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. Jesus Christ made it clear that the work ethic was a part of His plan for man. Ownership of property is biblical. Competition in business is biblical. Ambitious and successful business management is clearly outlined as a part of God’s plan for His people” (*Ibid.*, 13).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

onto the campus of our major colleges and universities.” Bible and prayer were replaced with “courses reflecting the philosophy of humanism.”¹⁵⁶ At the primary and secondary levels, “basic values such as morality, individualism, respect for our nation’s heritage, and the benefits of the free-enterprise system have, for the most part, been censored from today’s public-classroom textbooks.” The result is increasing moral chaos, marked by increased sexual promiscuity and violence in schools.¹⁵⁷ All of these problems—military, economic, cultural—are rooted in America’s “spiritual condition,” which is “desperately in need of a divine healing.”¹⁵⁸ As Falwell puts it in a section entitled, “The Need for National Repentance,” “we are literally approaching the brink of national disaster. Indeed, ‘if God does not judge America soon, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.’”¹⁵⁹

Falwell may have had something like this in mind when on September 13, 2001, he commented to Pat Robertson on *The 700 Club* that all those who have attempted to secularize America—pagans, gays, abortionists, feminists, and the ACLU among them—were culpable for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon two days earlier. Falwell was excoriated in the press for his comments, but His explanation and apology the next day were even more revealing of his nationalism. In a phone interview with CNN, he referred directly to Scripture and particularly to Proverbs 14:23, which for him points to the necessity of Christian principles undergirding national identity and public policy.¹⁶⁰ He explains that those who have pursued secularization in America “have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 205. Along with his concentration on the military inadequacy of the late 1970s, his fear of socialism or even communism may seem antiquated to the reader. However, in the same way these themes continued unabated throughout Falwell’s career, they continue to this day in the discourse of some of the Christian Right organizations discussed below.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 206.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 243.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 248.

¹⁶⁰ If the transcript is accurate, Falwell quotes Proverbs 14:23 to say, “‘living by God’s principles promotes a nation to greatness, violating those principles brings a nation to shame’” (<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/14/Falwell.apology/>, accessed May 6, 2010). This is a misquotation, or at best, a loose paraphrase; the verse actually states, “In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”

was founded.” This in turn “‘created an environment which possibly has caused God to lift the veil of protection which has allowed no one to attack America on our soil since 1812.’”

If America’s recent decline is due to a rejection of its founding covenant identity, then the way forward must be a recovery of that identity. 2 Chronicles 7:14, a ubiquitous reference in these works, is interpreted as promising that if Christians humble themselves and pray, God will heal the entire nation.¹⁶¹ As exemplified by America’s forefathers, say Marshall and Manuel, renewal of the vertical and horizontal aspects of the Covenant Way is both necessary and possible.¹⁶² For Kennedy, to achieve a “new birth of freedom,” America will need to rediscover its Christian roots, its “genuine history” marked by more or less explicit Christian faith at both the popular and elite levels.¹⁶³ Moreover, “a new birth of freedom will not take place until there are multiplied new births in the hearts of Americans,” namely that rebirth made possible in Christ, and “liberty under law” attendant to that.¹⁶⁴ Evangelism and conversion are therefore central to American national renewal,¹⁶⁵ integral to the “cultural mandate” for Christians to influence society and exercise proper dominion as instructed as early as Genesis 1:28. Therefore, the political and cultural institutions that “have been taken over by unbelievers who have produced monstrosities that give glory not to God but to Satan,” must be recaptured (through the system) and redirected.¹⁶⁶ “The time has come, and is long overdue,” Kennedy declares, “when Christians and conservatives and all men and women who believe in the birthright of freedom

¹⁶¹ 2 Chronicles 7: 14 reads, “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

¹⁶² Marshall and Manuel, 358.

¹⁶³ Kennedy and Newcombe, 168.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 69. See also p. 191.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁶⁶ Kennedy, 58-59. Kennedy explains at this point that he does not subscribe to the dominion theology most commonly associated with Rousas John Rushdoony and Gary North, which calls for direct Christian control of the country with a legal system forcibly remade in the likeness of Old Testament Israel. As Kennedy maintains, “I think that teaching gives the impression that Christians believe they are to lord it over unbelievers, and I believe that only isolates us even further.... We are not simply to hold on to our faith and rule the world, but we are to share our faith and love with all mankind and, together, we are to live in peace until Christ returns” (60).

must rise up and reclaim America for Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁷ This heritage is “what is ours by right,” so “we must be just as persistent and as unbearable to our adversaries as the Israelites were to Pharaoh.”¹⁶⁸

For Robertson, the importance of and potential for renewal is exemplified in the events described in the final part of his book, entitled “Finding Our Way Again.” Here, the 1980 “Spiritual March on Washington,” and the 1981 inauguration of Ronald Reagan exemplify what renewal requires, and the imminent 1988 election provides renewal’s next significant opportunity. The 1980 march exemplified the centrality of prayer and of solidarity. Robertson reflects that as he sat on the platform at the event watching a variety of men and women pray, he marveled at their ethnic, economic, and denominational diversity; yet, “they were one, and their prayer for the nation was one prayer.”¹⁶⁹ Reagan’s inaugural is noteworthy for its encapsulation of core commitments of the Christian Right in covenant America: the priority of the nuclear family, opposition to abortion, the importance of school prayer—“Ronald Reagan was committed to the renewal of the spiritual life of the nation from the beginning of his first term”—the fight against crime, and supply-side economics.¹⁷⁰ Reagan’s reelection confirmed the rightness of his commitments,¹⁷¹ and the upcoming presidential election between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis would be their next major test, the next national opportunity to definitively return the nation to its foundation and proper identity.

For Falwell, national renewal requires “godly leadership” in the family, church, and nation, which alone can put America “back on a divine course.” Divine healing will come when people pray and obey God, “but we must have leadership in America to deliver God’s

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 80.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 81.

¹⁶⁹ Robertson, 281.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 285ff.

¹⁷¹ Reflecting on Reagan’s reelection in 1984, Robertson writes, “The president had kept his inaugural promise to begin an era of renewal for the nation and her people. As President Reagan stood to speak, millions were thanking God for hearing and answering their prayers” (Ibid., 291).

message.”¹⁷² Godly leadership is tied to good citizenship, such that “the pastors, the priests, and the rabbis of America have a responsibility, not just the right, to see to it that the moral climate and conscience of Americas is such that this nation can be healed inwardly.” Inward healing will bring outward healing.¹⁷³ This hope of healing lies squarely with the “Christian public in America,”¹⁷⁴ and only “if God’s people will humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways.”¹⁷⁵ The situation is urgent: “We must turn America around or prepare for inevitable destruction....God has no reason to spare us if we continue to reject Him.”¹⁷⁶ Like Kennedy, and Robertson less explicitly, Falwell calls for a spiritual rebirth rooted in the individual citizen, a “regeneration in Christ Jesus” that will return the nation “to God and to the Bible as never before in the history of America.”¹⁷⁷ As he writes, “We need a revival of righteous living based on a proper confession of sin and repentance of heart if we are to remain the land of the free and the home of the brave!”¹⁷⁸

True renewal, however, will inevitably involve sacrifice. This is the point where these narratives most closely connect to Smith’s fourth sacred foundation of sacrifice and destiny. “How few people today are willing to sacrifice for the salvation of the Western world,” laments Kennedy. Too many are concerned more with their own personal interests and pleasures. Commitment to God must be paramount for freedom to reign; anything short of that leads to national destruction.¹⁷⁹ Is it not possible, asks Kennedy, that we may have to suffer for national renewal?¹⁸⁰

America, a Christian nation, demands an equal sacrifice from each of us. Did you ever consider the fact that birth itself involves great sacrifice?...Even when President Abraham Lincoln uttered the phrase ‘a new birth of freedom,’ the

¹⁷² Falwell, 17.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 20. This is as opposed to “the liberals,” who here are lumped together with “the pornographers, the smut peddlers, and those who are corrupting our youth.”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 243.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 243, 263.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 266.

¹⁷⁹ Kennedy and Newcombe, 64-66.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 234.

ground surrounding him was saturated with blood, and tears were flowing throughout the land. There was a new birth of sorts after the Civil War. The Union was safe, and slowly the nation healed.¹⁸¹

Christians are losing the culture war because they are too comfortable and lackadaisical in the face of very active opposition. God will raise others up if today's Christians do not step forward, but "if we don't get involved, we will suffer loss."¹⁸² For that reason, "it is absolutely essential that we be victorious." Indeed, it is not merely the earthly state of the nation at stake; the success of the cultural mandate is tied directly to the eternal fate of the believer. Kennedy states, "Unless we are overcomers who claim victory over tyranny in this world, then we shall not be with Christ in heaven...Heaven is for victors. It is not the resting place of losers and defeatists who simply gave up and let the secular liberal elite dictate policy and pervert the world."¹⁸³ National renewal via the cultural mandate, then, is of ultimate, eschatological importance to faithful Christians.

As a final point with regard to these narratives of decline, it is worth noting Andrew Murphy's discussion of nostalgia in Christian Right jeremiads. Nostalgia "returns individuals to times and places of real significance in their lives," which for many senior Christian Right leaders is the 1950s. Nostalgia often tends toward an overestimate of both the virtue of the past (as reconstructed) and the decline of the present.¹⁸⁴ These leaders' emphasis on the decline beginning in the 1960s is part and parcel of the effort to connect the experience of their audience with the reconstructed past. Yet, it is not simply the 1950s longed for; rather, "they believe the 1960s destroyed traditions that had existed, virtually unchanged, since the founding."¹⁸⁵ This nostalgic turn is evident in the literature considered here. Marshall and Manuel's introduction alludes to it, portraying the breakdown of the 1960s just as "the American Dream was about to come true," presumably in the preceding decade. Kennedy, for his part, equates the "authentic

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 234.

¹⁸² Ibid., 237.

¹⁸³ Kennedy, 263.

¹⁸⁴ Murphy, 131-132.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 133.

history of America” with “the history that I learned as a child.”¹⁸⁶ And Falwell laments that “the United States is for the first time, in my lifetime, and probably in the lifetime of my parents and grandparents, no longer the military might of the world.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, “I remember a time when it was positive to be patriotic, and as far as I am concerned, it still is. I remember as a boy, when the flag was raised, everyone stood proudly and put his hand upon his heart and pledged allegiance with gratitude.”¹⁸⁸ The point here is not that these authors are merely universalizing their own experience, but rather that they see their own personal narratives taken up in the national narrative they are attempting to empower. Their own histories have in certain ways bound them to particular understandings of American nationhood over against others. Their personal identities are therefore part and parcel of the national identity which they espouse, whose decline they lament, and whose renewal they pursue with vigor. In this sense, nostalgia acts as a constraint on their nationalist endeavors, their own upbringing acting to limit the possibilities of available materials for their nationalist message. Yet it also acts to interpret or reinterpret elements that transcend their heritage, such as the biblical narrative, which are then reinterpreted in light of their nostalgia to authenticate a particular national identity.

Evaluation

One notices within these texts the overwhelming concern with the meaning of American national identity. These authors are indeed, in Heinz’s words, “engaged in a contest over the meaning of America’s story,” and go to great lengths in fashioning an alternative story—comprised of historical and theological claims alike—that will effectively resist the secular “status elites” and their “control of public symbol production,” or one might say, public *narrative* production. They advocate what they consider the nation’s cultural core to be over against those

¹⁸⁶ Kennedy, 71.

¹⁸⁷ Falwell, 9.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

who they perceive as propagating changes to that core or alternative cores altogether. To this end, they attempt to inculcate in their readers a particular vision of the American nation that entails an interweaving of elements of the Christian theological tradition, especially the biblical narrative, with national history and myth. This is their project of authentication, by which they seek to champion America's "true self" over against opposing understandings of American national identity. As Smith's theory indicates, it is also a sort of pursuit of holiness, in which faithfulness to the proper conception of America is faithfulness to the God of Jesus Christ. Thus, in the end, they are advocating a syncretized theopolitics.

In *The Light and the Glory*, Marshall and Manuel regale the reader with a mixture of historical fact and narrative speculation,¹⁸⁹ typically within an explicitly theological framework rooted in a particular interpretation of the biblical narrative. However, upon examining their appropriation of both the historical and biblical narratives, one finds that the authors have read them somewhat carelessly and certainly selectively, conforming those texts to a pre-existing nationalist understanding or agenda. This is evident in several ways throughout the book. First, they provide little explanation of their own historiographical method, and where they mention it, it prompts more questions than it answers. For instance, daunted by the fact that the historical documents might take them at least a year to read through, Marshall's church congregation pitches in as "research assistants." Mentioning no requirements or training for the task, the authors relate how these parishioners "were pressed into service...responsible for reading through each book, article, sermon, and letter, and making a preliminary assessment of its potential usefulness." "Usefulness" is never defined, and no standard or method of content analysis is cited for this process; the authors are simply thankful to end up with "a distillation which could be assimilated in a few months."¹⁹⁰ Elsewhere, they refer to Marshall's "steadfastly maintained

¹⁸⁹ Their regular practice is to flesh out the facts they find with imaginative narrative sequences, usually qualified with "we can almost hear" or "one can imagine what transpired." It becomes difficult at points to distinguish between the documented and the imagined.

¹⁹⁰ Marshall and Manuel, 21.

professional skepticism” in carefully sifting through “the new ore samples, looking for the occasional nugget.”¹⁹¹ While the reject pile regularly dwarfed the “keepers” pile, no explanation is given as to the criteria involved in source selection, which means the reader is left with no ability to know if documents rejected would have contradicted the authors’ claims. Whether by accident or by design, their authentication of the true American story is inherently selective.

Second, there is the appropriation of the biblical covenant model for America. Contrary to the biblical theopolitics explained in Chapter 4 of the present work, Marshall and Manuel assume that a covenant relationship between a nation and God is not unique to biblical Israel, but can be established even now.¹⁹² Of course, this is not a common occurrence, or the case of America would not be so unique and special as they claim it to be. Rather, it must be that America is singularly elected for this modern covenant. However, they do not provide a theological or exegetical justification for this claim, generally or in the American context. Rather, they base it on the historical discourse of the early American settlers and figures of the founding era. At every turn, they provide evidence after evidence to demonstrate that these historical persons perceived God as acting directly in their circumstances to form a new nation defined by post-Reformation separatism. While their historical case is intriguing and somewhat persuasive, they have not established that America *was* actually elected to covenant, but merely that its early settlers and founders *thought* it was. At one point they write, “Whenever we began to wonder if we might not be ‘shoehorning’ history to fit our presuppositions, we had the recorded beliefs of the settlers themselves as a guide.”¹⁹³ Yet they miss the fact that those recorded beliefs do nothing to prove their theological covenant hypothesis, but merely demonstrate that the hypothesis itself is recurrent in American history. What *The Light and the Glory* offers, then, is little more than an historical account of American self-perception.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹² Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 25.

Third, covenant, as a presupposed given, then becomes the lens through which they filter the setbacks of colonial America; what might from the outside seem to falsify claims to covenant are rather rationalized as part of the covenant context. So even Columbus's pride and greed is not a repudiation of his claimed calling, but only a divergence from it. The Spanish friars, not the conquistadors, are the proper locus of the continuing narrative of American settlement. And when it comes to the later New England colonists, the authors read the historical evidence to indicate a consistent approach on the part of the colonists of repentance in response to calamity, which fits well within a covenant context of blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience, respectively. Blessings would continue to the colonists for generations, "as God continued to honor the obedience of their fathers and grandfathers (Deuteronomy 7:9). But inevitably, because He loved them (and because even God's patience has an end), he would be forced to lift the grace which lay upon their land, just enough to cause them to turn back to Him." Then the "wisest among them" would call the people back to repentance, and blessing would be restored.¹⁹⁴

Because the covenant argument has become tautological, with no possibility of falsification, all included evidence is read as affirming of their hypothesis. On top of this, they argue that their approach actually mitigates against nationalism:

And incidentally, from *this* position, it is impossible to enter into nationalistic pride. Inherent in God's call upon our forefathers to found a Christian nation was the necessity to live in a state of constant need and dependency upon His grace and forgiveness. Anyone tempted today to take an elitist attitude regarding our nation's call need only look at how badly we have failed—and continue to fail—to live up to God's expectations for us.¹⁹⁵

What the authors have failed to grasp, or at least to admit, is that they have defined even America's failures as extraordinary, because they occur within the unique covenant context of "God's New Israel." Therefore, even their emphasis on America's failings is still a form of exceptionalism, and especially as it is tied to renewal according to the nation's unique covenant identity.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 26.

Perhaps most seriously, there is their problematic appropriation of Scripture. Besides the unjustified abstraction and appropriation of biblical Israel's covenant, which pervades the work as a whole, Marshall and Manuel distort the contexts and traditional meanings of various biblical pericopes to support their argument. Again, their hypothesis is not open to falsification. For example, while they claim submission to civil authority is taught clearly in Scripture, Marshall and Manuel argue that "America was a new event in the history of man," in which a "body of Christians" was placed in a new land with no existing civil authority; they were to establish their own. Relying on Galatians 5:1—"For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit to a yoke of slavery"—the authors justify violent rebellion by American subjects of "King Jesus" against the British. This one, proof-texted verse, divorced from its original context concerning the requirements of Gentiles for Christian conversion and discipleship, "proved to be the key to all that followed."¹⁹⁶ From this, they argue that had the colonists submitted to the increasingly stringent demands of the British crown in the eighteenth century, "it would be like the Israelites—after all God had done for them to bring them out of Egypt—turning around and inviting Pharaoh to bring his troops to Canaan and put them back under servitude."¹⁹⁷ Since submission to the crown would be tantamount to "a repudiation of all that God had been building in America, ever since He had first called them to His new Canaan," violent rebellion—necessitating the killing of Christians by other Christians—is not only justified, but is the only responsible and "realistic" course of action. That this might in fact contradict other major portions of Scripture, such as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, does not come up in their narrative.

What is particularly fascinating about *The Light and the Glory* as nationalist discourse is that it is not only a narrative of God's activity in the formation of the American nation, but it is also a story about the *recovery* of that narrative, which Marshall and Manuel are at pains to portray as no less divinely directed, if on a smaller scale. From the compilation of historical data

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 254.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 257.

to the process of writing, the authors claim “providential” guidance.¹⁹⁸ Whenever they found the going difficult—often in relation to especially problematic findings—“we spelled out our doubts to the Lord in prayer. If we were going to navigate through the rocks and shoals that lay ahead, He would have to put His hand on the helm, and fast.”¹⁹⁹ Apparently in response, key sources appeared “with a timing only God Himself could have directed.”²⁰⁰ And on one hazy morning, as Manuel objected to Marshall’s claims regarding Puritan convictions about the possibility of building the Kingdom of God on earth, “suddenly a breeze came out of nowhere and scattered several chapters’ worth of manuscript across the patio. As we gathered up the pages, it occurred to David [Manuel] that this was the only breeze to stir a paper in the last three days.” Apparently associating this with the breath of the Holy Spirit, Manuel dropped his objections and listened again to Marshall’s argument. And then, “for the next hour and a half, the Holy Spirit gave us insight after insight....”²⁰¹ The Holy Spirit is thus seen by the authors as directly involved in formulating their claims and confirming the trajectory of their argument. In short, not only is America providentially brought into being, but Marshall and Manuel’s *authentication* of that narrative, i.e., of America’s covenant identity, is likewise divinely directed. Yet it is interesting to note the degree to which such confirmation of their research takes the form of appeals first to spiritual experience rather than to Scripture or theological tradition, a move typically associated with Protestant liberalism rather than the evangelical biblicism in which context *The Light and the Glory* is usually received. It is this experience, filtered through their presuppositions, that then governs their reading of the sources, historical and biblical alike.

Several concerns arise as well when evaluating the arguments of D. James Kennedy. Like Marshall and Manuel, he unjustifiably abstracts and misappropriates biblical Israel for use in the American context. America’s unprecedented freedom and abundance are credited to its

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 80.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 145-146.

genuine Christian faith, a relationship that only makes sense biblically within a covenant context of stipulations, blessings, and curses. He indicates this specifically when he discusses the significance of 2 Chronicles 14 for the American situation:

Certainly the Israelites needed to repent and turn to God. But that is not what the verse says. It says *we* need to repent. It says *we* need to turn from our wicked ways, and then God will heal our land. God indicates His proprietary interest in His own. We are His own peculiar people who belong to Him ('who are called by My name'). These words are a great command from God to repent. There is no doubt that the United States needs to repent of its wickedness. We are overrun with pornography and blasphemy and ungodliness and immorality—perversion of every sort. We are called by the name of the second person of the Triune Godhead, Jesus Christ. We are Christians—a name first applied to us as a word that was meant to be an insult. Yet we consider it a noble title to be called after the name of Him who loved us even unto death. We are His people. We are the ones who are commanded to repent, to turn from our wicked ways. Then and only then will God heal our land. Judgment begins at the house of God.²⁰²

Not only do we see here how easily this discourse can slide from identifying the “we” as either the church or the nation—after all, the comment occurs within a discussion of *American renewal*²⁰³—but it relies on an all-too-common deliberate redirection of a particular covenant promise. As discussed in Chapter 4, upon dedicating the temple, Solomon is told by Yahweh in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” The promise occurs within a specific context of covenant blessings and curses, hypothesizing God’s judgment on the physical land—Israel’s source of sustenance—if and when they are disobedient, and allowing for the possibility of renewal as God’s covenant people. In widespread Christian Right discourse, however, verse 14, beginning with “if my people...” is appropriated alone, thus abstracting it and making it applicable to societal, rather than natural and agricultural problems, to the “land” as the nation

²⁰² Kennedy and Newcombe, 224.

²⁰³ Just the page before, Kennedy states, “If America is truly to be renewed, it will not be through the political process, as important as that is. I believe we need a renewed vision, for ‘where there is no vision, the people perish.’ God can do the impossible, so we can experience a renewal in this land. And a genuine revival is what we need most if there is to be a new birth of freedom in America” (Ibid., 223).

and/or state and not the tilled earth. Thus, the promise is misappropriated for the sake of national renewal, which by implication reinforces American national identity as formulated within divine covenant.

Second, in his more recent work, Kennedy explains in an endnote that he is relying for his historiography on the works of two nineteenth century historians, Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy (1812-1878) and George Bancroft (1800-1891), the latter whose history “was the standard for at least half a century,” but is no longer widely read “because he is politically correct.”²⁰⁴ That the academic study of history might have developed and advanced since the early-to-mid-twentieth century (Kennedy’s childhood), much less the nineteenth, or that new sources may have been uncovered that reinterpret earlier sources and methodological approaches does not seem to matter. Rather, the same hermeneutical lens used by those historians is used a century later, with no justification given for its continued adequacy.

One must also question his clearly functional take on the faith of Thomas Jefferson, which seems to get at some underlying assumptions in Kennedy’s work. While admitting explicitly that Jefferson was not a Christian in an orthodox sense, Kennedy goes into considerable detail on Jefferson’s religiosity in order to counter claims that Jefferson advocated a two-way separation of church and state. In this sense, Jefferson’s religiosity is exemplary as it functions to uphold Kennedy’s conception of American identity and principles. That Jefferson was not committed to “real Christianity,” as Kennedy puts it, appears to be beside the point. In other words, for Kennedy, the question of the theological truthfulness of Jefferson’s convictions takes second place to their usefulness to the American project, a point which puts into some question Kennedy’s later exhortations to Christian evangelism. If Jefferson’s religiosity was so useful to

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 235n.3. Again, considering Newcombe’s undergraduate degree in history (one of my own undergraduate majors as well), it is inexplicable that no more recent historiography was consulted, save that of conservative activist David Barton and Paul Johnson, a British journalist to whom Kennedy refers as an “eminent historian” (43).

the founding of the country, then why conclude that Christian conversion is necessary for renewal, *in addition to* the rediscovery and acknowledgment of the country's religious heritage?

This sort of functionalist approach to Christianity comes out in Robertson's writing as well. Faith—centering on a conviction of divine reward and punishment—breeds individual self-restraint and responsibility, which is integral to sustaining the nation and its republican political order. This order, meanwhile, is predicated—even directly modeled—on reading key founding documents as direct embodiments of specific biblical characteristics of God and God's dealings with Israel. With no theological justification to speak of, Robertson simply equates America's situation with Israel's, drawing direct parallels for instance between the American colonial situation under George III and Israel's trouble with human kings. This allows him to equate Yahweh's judgment of Israel's kingship with colonial armed rebellion against the British crown.

Such a move is quite blatant in Falwell's writing, although for Falwell it is even more problematic given his unqualified advocacy of militarism and unbridled capitalism. *Listen America!*, appearing early in his political advocacy career, emphasizes again and again the necessity of a strong American military as essential to its identity. He laments America's declining military strength—i.e., it is not in a position to kill enough of its enemies—and equates it directly with the dissolution of the country. There is little indication that he changed his mind later, given his statement during the 2004 election season exhorting followers to “Vote Christian. This means pro-life, pro-family, and pro-national defense. These are second nature to God's people...”²⁰⁵ Yet, when one considers the prophetic critiques of Israel's militarism, state centralization, and *realpolitik*, it would seem that not only has Falwell inappropriately abstracted biblical Israel as a model for the American nation, he has misunderstood the Old Testament covenants altogether, and is attempting to conform America to the very *distorted* theopolitics for which Israel was later. As Cavanaugh points out, for Old Testament Israel, “one of the concrete signs of God's favor is a *lack of military strength and preparation*. Indeed, the emphasis is often

²⁰⁵ Wilcox and Larson, 9.

on the military weakness of Israel.”²⁰⁶ Since, as Chapter 4 explained, Israel is indicted specifically for its institutionalization of power politics, continuing to advocate them as “second nature to God’s people” constitutes the perpetuation of grievous theopolitical error that, in the very narrative to which Falwell appeals, results in divine condemnation.²⁰⁷

Secondly, following Milton Friedman’s lead, he ties economic autonomy directly to individual freedom. This, of course, raises questions about Falwell’s definition of freedom, but that is of less concern to this project than his use of Scripture to justify it. He writes that “the free-enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs,” but how can a collection of individual proverbial observations “outline” anything, much less a “system” in any genuine sense of the word? Falwell seems to be reaching for any semblance of a biblical rationale that he can lay his hands on, no matter how loose. Moreover, to make his argument, he must ignore the prophetic critique of Amos which implicates militarization in domestic poverty and economic injustice. This puts Falwell’s militarism-free-enterprise schema into considerable doubt, as it does his stated commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture.

For this project, however, the most significant problem manifested in these works is that by misappropriating biblical Israel as they do, i.e., by making the nation America the extension of Israel as central to God’s plans for global salvation, these authors supplant the church, and by implication, Jesus Christ as Lord. The burden of Chapter 5 was to demonstrate the ways in which it is the church, not any particular earthly nation, that is engrafted onto Israel as God’s people and that constitutes the embodiment of Jesus Christ’s fulfillment of Israel’s covenant. It is the church, as a theopolitical community and alone of all political communities in the world, that acts as the embodiment of the Christian gospel and carries forth in community the mission of global salvation. Yet for Marshall and Manuel, it is America, not the church, that brings “light to the

²⁰⁶ Cavanaugh, “Empire of the Empty Shrine,” 17.

²⁰⁷ This is also why, given the forms of divine judgment in the prophetic literature—i.e., typically as logical extensions of the sins themselves—it is interesting that 9/11 was perceived by Falwell and Robertson as a judgment on homosexuality and secularism rather than the militarism and capitalism epitomized by the institutions attacked, institutions embodying the very ideologies Falwell advocates.

Gentiles” as the direct continuation of Israel’s covenant relationship with God, and in the form of a people living through faith in Jesus Christ. For Kennedy, it is America, not the church, that is the new and unprecedented nation called to model liberty to the world. It is America, not the church’s Lord, that constitutes the “last best hope of people on earth.” For Robertson, it is America, not the church, that is the unique polity established according to God’s own character and attributes, the unprecedented theopolitical extension of Israel. For Falwell, it is America, not the church, that is the society predicated on the Scriptures, in unique relation to God. For these authors, the saga of America is the definitive salvation history today, the most formative story that shapes American Christian identity and that points us to God’s salvation of the world. The church—supposedly transcending all earthly barriers and separations—can thus be divided for the sake of the American project, its members enlisted to fight for the realization of its national identity over against Christians claimed by other national identities.

Finally, I argued in Chapter 3 that Adrian Hastings is mistaken to claim that nationalism, particularly exceptionalism appropriating biblical Israel, tends to flourish among the “theologically untrained laity,” the common people, who do not know better than to substitute their own nation for the church. I argued that by his own historical account, the role of educated clergy in fostering national identity amongst the populace could only mean that nationalism arose not in the absence, but fully in the presence—and even in consequence—of certain hermeneutical and theological frameworks. I believe the present account of the literature of prominent Christian Right leaders substantiates my argument. Marshall, Kennedy, Falwell, and Robertson are all clergy, and it is largely by virtue of their pastoral teaching, both spoken and written, that their nationalist narrative is propagated.

Note that, true to nationalist form, these authors have had to be highly selective in what aspects of the American narrative they choose to highlight or even to repackage in order to portray the nation as exceptional, as unprecedented (except by Israel), and as founded and living

within a unique covenant relationship with God.²⁰⁸ This is true for the biblical narrative as well. Not only is their own nation placed in the role of the church as the extension of biblical Israel, but the authors *misappropriate* Israel's own narrative in the process, interpreting Israel as more of a super-nation—a kingdom operating with divine favor according to the politics of the world—than as an *alternative to* the nations. There is no acknowledgment of Israel as a counter to empire, to the ways of the nations in their continual turmoil and strife. Rather, Israel is to these authors a model of a nation that acts as the locus of God's salvific activity on earth, and simultaneously as a uniquely rich and powerful country. This is an aberration of genuine biblical theopolitics; yet their congregants, listeners, and readers would not know it from their teachings.

It is this clergy-propagated theopolitical aberration that constitutes an alternative and competing salvation narrative to that of orthodox Christianity and the biblical texts. Here, salvation is viewed in distinctly national terms, rather than either the *denationalized* language of the certain New Testament texts (e.g., Galatians 3:28) or the *renationalized* language of the ecclesia in others (e.g., 1 Peter 2:9-10). Salvation, in the form of national renewal, entails the exaltation of American national identity, rather than its relativization. This salvation narrative requires the distortion of the biblical text in order to reconceive the present nation in *revised* covenant terms, terms that are divorced from the genuine biblical conceptions of either Israel or the church. This results in distorted teaching and the propagation of an altered and syncretized theopolitical identity; it also gives rise to rationales for the pursuit of power, both to institutionalize or re-institutionalize America's covenant identity, and to justify the use of violence against any entities perceived as threats, from the American Revolution to twenty-first century international terrorism. Hence, Christian Right nationalism, emanating from within the church itself, acts as a counter-current to orthodox theopolitics.

²⁰⁸ For example, there is a remarkable absence of any substantive treatment of the slavocracy in the American South, except to point to Lincoln and emancipation as heroic and consistent with America's divine calling. That slavery was inextricably bound with earlier heroic figures and political developments goes virtually unaddressed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined Christian Right discourse as a case study in American Christian nationalism, using Anthony Smith's rubric of "sacred foundations." I argued that such Christian Right discourse constitutes a form of nationalism, in which America is portrayed as uniquely and divinely chosen for a sacred mission, which it has subsequently rejected and to which it must return, lest it face judgment. It does this by selectively interweaving elements of American history and myth with elements of the biblical narrative. I then evaluated the discourse as to its own internal coherence as well as its coherence to the biblical theopolitics outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, finding that—as a nationalist narrative highly selective and distortive in its use of national and biblical elements—not only is the discourse marked by numerous internal inconsistencies that effectively undermine many of its claims, but it improperly appropriates the biblical text to which it claims allegiance in a way that is theologically problematic. In effect, America replaces the church as the definitive theopolitical community engrafted onto biblical Israel.

I believe this case study supports my argument in the first chapter regarding what I perceive as inadequacies in current theopolitical critiques of nationalism. These treatments tend either to neglect nationalism as a problem distinct, though rarely separate, from the activities of state and market, or to present nationalism—in conjunction with certain problematic scholarship—as the exclusive purview of the state, entailing an utterly fabricated narrative by elites free from internal or external constraint, and relying upon a transnational, transcultural understanding of religion. Rather, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the nationalism of the Christian Right is a nationalism formulated and propagated within segments of the church itself, often in resistance to certain moves by state elites. It deliberately interweaves national history and myth with elements of the biblical narrative—a very particular source and tradition—certain interpretations of which have formed nationalist elites and their audiences alike prior to the

nationalist movement in question. Yet it distorts that biblical narrative, a problem that can only be discerned and neutralized with a robust recovery of biblical Israel's theopolitics—particularly in conjunction with the presentation of ecclesial theopolitics in the New Testament. This will be true as well for the next and final chapter, in which I take up the nationalism found within the political theologies of Stephen H. Webb and Richard John Neuhaus.

CHAPTER 7—POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND NATIONALISM

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the nationalist narratives of major figures in the American Christian Right. I argued there that these narratives, understood through Anthony Smith’s rubric of “sacred foundations,” constituted theopolitical narratives in that they interwove American history and myth with the biblical narrative, resulting in a national identity of divine election and mission. The nation subsequently declined from that identity, necessitating current Christian Right efforts at national renewal, central to which is a “recovery” of this narrative, and particularly of the beliefs and practices of America’s golden ages, the periods of the nation’s early settlers and founding fathers. As I explained, Andrew Murphy calls this type of narrative a “traditionalist jeremiad,” named for its prescribed recovery of specific socio-political practices and institutions.

The other type of jeremiad Murphy cites is the “progressive jeremiad,” a narrative that focuses not so much on specific practices as fundamental principles of American nationhood. It looks to the ideals of the past, especially America’s founding period, and laments how those *principles* have been “co-opted and frustrated by the apathy or, worse yet, the active collusion of elites eager to maintain their own positions of power.”¹ While the progressive jeremiad pays less attention to the specific practices and institutions of prior periods, it no less than the traditionalist jeremiad selectively reads, appropriates, and reconstructs a narrative of American national identity that is in line with its particular vision.²

¹ Murphy, 114.

² Murphy also explicitly points out that the jeremiad is not the exclusive purview of political conservative figures. He takes for example Bill Moyers, who in multiple contexts has used a progressive jeremiadic discourse in arguing for liberal political policies. Juxtaposing Moyers with Pat Buchanan, Murphy illustrates the ways in which each side of the “culture wars” uses the same technique for disparate agendas, which indicates for Murphy the centrality of the jeremiad for American political discourse (Ibid., 142-152).

This final chapter discusses two examples of the progressive jeremiad, as found in the work of theologians Stephen H. Webb and Richard John Neuhaus.³ In both cases, fundamental principles of American national identity are under threat and requires immediate recovery and safeguarding. As opposed to the more straightforward narratives found in Christian Right discussion, Webb and Neuhaus articulate these American principles or ideas via more systematic political theologies. For Webb, it is the notion of providence, which he reads as a particularly American theological orientation. For Neuhaus, it is the idea of democratic freedom, rooted in a dialectic of social contract and transcendent covenant. Both theologians see America's (Judeo-) Christian identity at stake, portraying that identity and threats to it in theological terms, and both pursue theopolitical projects aimed at recovering earlier theological understandings.

This chapter examines Webb and Neuhaus in turn, looking at the ways in which each of their projects constitutes not only a jeremiad, in Murphy's terms,⁴ but also in Smith's terms, a nationalist project of *authentication*: selectively recovering, reinterpreting, and propagating a particular vision of American national identity—America's "true self"—seen to be in continuity with biblical Israel and the Christian salvation history, and under threat from contemporary forces. Again, this entails both the notion that they are defending a particular "cultural core" against perceived threats, as well as the idea that *authentic* national identity, as tied to particular theological moves, is tantamount to a form of political *holiness*.

³ I take up these two scholars for several reasons. First, it is important to point out that nationalism exists not just in popular narrative accounts by well known clergy, but also in more sophisticated academic theologies. Second, their accounts are both "contemporary" and salient to political theology in the early twenty-first century. Third, they have both engaged and been engaged by some of the thinkers surveyed in the first chapter of this study. Neuhaus and Hauerwas have engaged each other directly for years, and Neuhaus has been engaged by Hauerwas's students at various points. As well, Webb has engaged Hauerwas in each of his works of political theology, and Webb and Cavanaugh have held a public exchange over one of Cavanaugh's articles. Thus, both theologians, Neuhaus's death in 2009 notwithstanding, remain direct interlocutors in theopolitical scholarship, and I discuss them here in part to argue how that scholarship ought better to evaluate them.

⁴ Admittedly, Murphy may not see Webb and Neuhaus as examples of the progressive jeremiad (indeed, he fits Neuhaus within the traditionalist camp), since he would not view their jeremiads as resulting in religious pluralism, one of the hallmarks of his progressive depiction. However, as he explains it, the form (traditionalist or progressive) is determined more by its content than its effects, and in terms of accounts of particular practices and institutions versus fundamental principles and ideas, Webb and Neuhaus clearly articulate the latter.

These authors are more theologically sophisticated than the figures discussed in the previous chapter, and as such, their arguments are not as easily fitted to Smith's four sacred foundations of community, territory, glorious past and decline, and sacrifice and destiny. However, I believe some of these important elements can be found throughout their schemas, and I will highlight where they are most pronounced when appropriate. My primary aim, however, is to examine the form and content of their arguments to discern the ways in which the biblical narrative, and often other elements of the Christian theological tradition, are distorted in order to reach their theopolitical conclusions. These distortions are rooted in an *a priori* American exceptionalism, which guides both authors throughout their discussions, fomenting a selective and sometimes self-contradictory reading of both the American and biblical narratives, and determining in advance political theologies that in both their form and content amount to nationalist narratives.

Stephen H. Webb: American Providence

Having written on theologies of rhetoric and sound, compassion for animals, vegetarianism, and the role of theology in secular education, Stephen H. Webb can be considered an eclectic theologian.⁵ Perhaps his best known and most controversial theological treatment, though, concerns his political theology of providence. His work on the subject, and especially his book, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission*, is an argument for a recovery of the Christian doctrine of providence as a source for Christian influence in the political arena.⁶ He seeks to demonstrate that political theology dealing with nationalism, globalism, and ecclesiology

⁵ Stephen H. Webb is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Wabash College, a liberal arts college for men in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Some of his works on these subjects include *Blessed Excess: Religion and the Hyperbolic Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); *Taking Religion to School: Christian Theology and Secular Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000); *Good Eating: The Bible, Diet and the Proper Love of Animals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), and *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).

⁶ Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

requires a robust theory of providence, and that America cannot be understood apart from that theory.⁷ In particular, Webb is concerned about America's place in political theology in recent years—and especially since 9/11—when so much of political and theological discourse has disparaged American hegemony and international dominance. Webb sees American global leadership, which he and his critics alike refer to as “empire,” as both necessary and divinely directed—in a word, providential. America mediates democracy and capitalism to the world, which for Webb facilitates the mediation of American-style Christianity to the world, as a distinctive prefiguring of the Kingdom of God.⁸ He therefore undertakes the recovery of providential theology as a “reasonable theological assessment of the role that America, along with its particular brand of Christianity, plays on the world stage.”⁹ As I will demonstrate, however, Webb's is less an objective assessment of either the theology of providence or of United States foreign policy than an active rationale for American empire via an account of America's exceptional calling and mission. It is, in short, a nationalist narrative articulated via a political theology of providence.

A Political Theology of Providence

Webb makes a number of assertions about providence, both in terms of the content of the Christian doctrine as well as the doctrine's role in American history and identity. In terms of content, providence assumes that the biblical account of what God is doing in history is trustworthy, an accurate revelation of God's nature.¹⁰ The doctrine of providence is the attempt to discern history according to its end, with particular attention to “the continuities that connect

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ Ibid., 5, 145.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

the Bible's vision of the end to the vicissitudes of the moment."¹¹ A robust providential theology revolves around belief in a personal God.¹² It entails not just general providence, i.e., "God's uniform and regular guidance of natural and human affairs," but rather an account of God's special providence, i.e., "God's miraculous interventions into nature and history."¹³ Webb eschews the immanentism of the general, which perceives God as a "hidden cause" behind historical events, rather than history's "driving agent."¹⁴ Rather, "all of God's action in the world is special in the sense that it is based on the biblical history of Israel and the Father's care for the Son. All of God's action in the world is also personal in that a triune God, and not a distant superpower in the sky, guides history and nature alike."¹⁵ Providence is the foreseeing God's direct, ongoing, personal involvement in human affairs.

While recognizing God's *creatio ex nihilo*, special providence constitutes *creatio continua*, a "continuing creation" that is always bringing new things into being rather than simply preserving the past.¹⁶ Theopolitically, God continually creates the world by bringing new social forms into being over time. These social forms—political and economic—are "parables" of the coming of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷ As such, "how God acts in history cannot be unrelated to the ways in which humans organize themselves to achieve their own ends."¹⁸ More specifically, the doctrine of providence stipulates that God demands of a given nation particular duties in proportion to its divine blessings—including certain political institutions and practice—which means "providence asks Christians to get off the sidelines and into the game of history."¹⁹

Hence the centrality of the nation-state in Webb's theology of providence. While history progresses toward the Kingdom of God, that should not suggest that God is sidestepping earthly

¹¹ Webb, "Eschatology and Politics," *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 509.

¹² Webb, *American Providence*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ Webb, "Eschatology and Politics," 509-10.

¹⁸ Webb, *American Providence*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

kingdoms in the process: “the very notion of a divine kingdom suggests some kind of heavenly realm that transforms and thus is in fundamental continuity with the all-too-human political organizations of this world.”²⁰ As demonstrated biblically in God’s election of Israel, God works through nation-states to carry history to its conclusion.²¹ Webb therefore does not subscribe to claims of Israel’s theopolitical singularity, a model in the midst of the world of the alternative politics of the Kingdom of God. Rather, Israel as the foremost of nation-states is the “template” for understanding how God uses nation-states to accomplish the divine plan.²² While Israel is central to providential theology, “God also chooses other nations in order to accomplish the task God gave to Israel,”²³ working through these nations to implement the divine agenda.²⁴ Simply put, “God rules the world through the work of the nations,”²⁵ and any theology that does not give the nation-state its providential due in this regard risks being “romantic and abstract” in its eschatology.²⁶ Redemption within history requires national identity.²⁷

As I argued in Chapter 4, however, this is a profound misreading of Israel’s identity and mission. Called to be a communal sign of God’s reign and salvation in the midst of the world, Israel was, as God’s “treasured possession,” an utterly unique endeavor, quite in contrast to the “nation-states” of its time. An alternative to the power politics of the surrounding kingdoms and empires, Israel was to embody the social order of Torah. As it gradually accommodated to and adopted the political practices of the surrounding nations, it diverged from Torah, from its divinely appointed “task.” As Torah was fulfilled in Christ—whose role is all but absent in Webb’s political theology—the *church*, not the nations, was engrafted onto Israel’s covenant (1 Peter 2:9-10). As such—and contra Oliver O’Donovan, upon whom Webb in part relies—Israel

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ Webb, “Eschatology and Politics,” 510; Webb, *American Providence*, 7.

²² Webb, *American Providence*, 7, 23; “Eschatology and Politics,” 510.

²³ Webb, *American Providence*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁶ Webb, “Eschatology and Politics,” 510.

²⁷ Webb, *American Providence*, 5.

was never meant to be a “template” for earthly nation-states, except indirectly, insofar as they surrender their pretensions and give way to their inherent temporality in light of the reign of Yahweh. Biblically, their role in the “divine plan” has always been peripheral at best, so to ground an entire political theology in that role—especially a theology that positions the church and the Christian tradition—is to profoundly mistake the locus of God’s salvific activity in the world. Nevertheless, Webb locates God’s redemptive activity squarely in the identity, mission, and contemporary power of the United States.

Chosen Community: America as Providence Embodied

To appropriate again Anthony Smith’s nationalism rubric of “sacred foundations,” what Webb articulates in part is a narrative of America as God’s chosen community in the contemporary world for prefiguring and helping to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. America is “an idea, something like a hypothesis, or a laboratory for the strongest mixture of faith and freedom,”²⁸ and the key to American national identity is the theological notion of providence. Providence is a sort of “grammar” that enables a discussion of the meaning of America, and it acts in lieu of traditional cultural features of nations: “We are not a particular people, in terms of a shared set of rituals and beliefs, which makes us a people set apart from other nations, whether we like that status or not.”²⁹ America’s very lack of shared cultural traits distinguishes it from other nations, but then one must ask, “What (or who) has set us apart, and for what purpose?”³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 29. This notion of “idea” is what classifies Webb’s discourse as a progressive jeremiad, in Murphy’s schema.

²⁹ Ibid., 29-30. Cf. Bernard Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation,” *Theorizing Nationalism* (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press, 1999), 103-118. Webb’s is a sort of explicitly theological version of the civic nationalism claimed in some quarters of nationalism scholarship, though Yack dispels the notion that American liberal democracy is free from ethnocentric considerations.

Incidentally, it is on this note of chosenness that Webb gets closest to discussing the “sacred foundation” of *territory*: Just as America is not a people, defined in ethnic terms, “arguably, America is not a place. America’s geography was barely known as its borders kept expanding throughout the nineteenth and even in to the twentieth century” (29). Nevertheless, he writes on the next page that the open frontier in America was “radically new” in its wildness: “Nature was gift and promise but also burden and task, the sacramental conveyance of God’s grace and an object in need of investigation.” The natural features of the

In short, the God of the Christian Scriptures has set America apart for the purpose of prefiguring the Kingdom of God on earth. This America does by spreading “American-style Protestantism” via the vehicle of globalism, America acting as mediator between the two, projecting forth the “universal impulse” of Christianity.³¹ America and divine providence are inseparable in that “so much of the American dream comes from and continues to overlap with the Christian dream of the kingdom of God.”³² Webb calls American providence “prophetic, which means that it has a universal message. Providence is not for the benefit of America alone.”³³ In this sense, America carries forth biblical Israel’s own task of covenant, a mission on behalf of the world.

Providentially mediating globalism as the facilitator of Christian evangelism requires America to be the chief agent and guardian of democratic capitalism. Webb maintains throughout his work that democracy is a theological good, located squarely in Christian principles.³⁴ American democracy is so amenable to Christianity because it is “a universal political form that not only springs from the great Christian theme of freedom but also facilitates the global growth of the church.”³⁵ The expansion of both democracy and Christianity—particularly Protestantism—are tied together because proclamation of the gospel constitutes a “powerful speech act” that challenges societies without freedom of speech.³⁶ Such a “theology of free speech” is able to evaluate and safeguard the proper conditions for evangelism. In this

continent were reminiscent of Canaan as prepared for Israel, and “just as America was in the best position for a new covenant,” this nature was understood as the “setting for the drama of God’s work in history” (30). So paradoxically, America is not really a place, but its territory is sacramental. This mention of “sacrament” and “grace” is noteworthy, for as will become apparent, grace is decidedly unprovidential in Webb’s schema.

³⁰ Webb, *American Providence*, 29-30.

³¹ Webb, “On the True Globalism and the False, or Why Christians Should Not Worry So Much about American Imperialism,” *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities*, Wes Avram, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 125-126; *American Providence*, 5.

³² Webb, *American Providence*, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 117. Unfortunately, Webb never provides much by way of definition for “freedom,” so the reader is left wondering whether his univocal use of the term in both Christian and American contexts is appropriate.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

manner, Protestantism functions like the American constitution, “guaranteeing the conditions that make proclamation possible.”³⁷ And America must continue that twofold commitment to exporting Christianity and democracy—its “holy task.”³⁸ Christian support for America’s ability to “reshape the world in its own democratic image” is crucial, for “freedom is not a neutral value, and its export abroad cannot be separate from the work of the Christian church.”³⁹

While Protestantism is rooted in the priesthood of all believers, America is the political outworking of that priesthood. Such immediacy to God has a “democratizing effect” on the church, and this is nowhere better demonstrated than in the global explosion of American-style Pentecostalism.⁴⁰ Pentecostalism “reinforces the virtues necessary for democracy” by emphasizing indigenous leadership as well as the good of material prosperity. This is true to form, for Americans “prefer to use democracy, human rights, and open markets—rather than colonies and conquest—to achieve our ends.”⁴¹

Hence the central importance of capitalist globalization: “Capitalism, Christianity, and democracy are sufficiently intertwined that pulling one out of the equation might leave all three undone, to everyone’s detriment.”⁴² Webb suggests there are two globalisms at work, one economic and one religious. While there is tension between them, they are arguably quite complementary. On the one hand, the expansion of markets has enabled America to export its own Christian traditions, while on the other, that expansion of the faith has allowed Christians to challenge and shape global capitalism where necessary.⁴³ For this reason, Webb does not think

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 150 n.68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁰ This points to another of the many tensions in Webb’s work, for shortly thereafter he writes, “Pentecostalism...also represents a potential dead-end for Protestantism as a whole...the Roman Catholic church alone of all churches gives shelter to a theologically coherent and historically consistent principle of religious universality. Because Christian unity is integral to the gospel, the reunification of all Christian churches with Rome must be articulated as one of the primary goals of all evangelization” (*Ibid.*, 125). This concern for Christian unity, incidentally, is exclusively a spiritual concept for Webb that has little to no effect on his political theology.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 125.

there is much for Christians to be worried about. He justifies this biblically by arguing that rather than being a movement of the poor, Christianity was spread in apostolic times “by merchants and artisans, not beggars and outcasts.” Jesus preached the liberation of the poor and was often critical of the wealthy, but “‘poor’ and ‘rich’ were deeply metaphorical terms in his teachings.” For Jesus, poverty “was a teaching tool, not an ideology.”⁴⁴

Christian traditions like Pentecostalism can restrain globalism’s excesses, since by locating discipline in biblical principles, “Pentecostalism fights against global capitalism by shifting the ground on which prosperity rests,”⁴⁵ presumably locating its source in God. Of course, considering globalism’s unqualified providential role, it is unclear why Webb thinks Christianity should resist in the first place.⁴⁶ Indeed, Webb argues that “traditional societies” should embrace Christianity not only for their salvation “but also as a prelude to their entry into world markets.” Christianity is functional for their economic welfare. Conversely, Webb asserts that the success of Western missions can be explained similarly to that of American globalism: “Just as capitalism works not by selling what it thinks people should buy but by exploring and expanding their needs, Christianity works not by telling people what to believe but by cultivating, as well as questioning, their religious needs.”⁴⁷ It is not Christian truth claims per se, but inculcation of religious sensibilities, that is the church’s contributing to globalism.

This is Webb’s tale of two globalisms, one economic and tied to American interests, the other religious and shaped by American strands of Protestantism. The former is a “necessary prerequisite” of the latter. American commerce serves the advancement of the Gospel today in the same way Rome facilitated early evangelism: “America, as the defender of free markets and democracy, represents the best hope for the triumph of political forms congenial to Christianity

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁶ As he posits shortly thereafter, “There is no immediate need to choose between these two globalisms, though ultimately it is possible that their trajectories will diverge if they begin competing with each other” (Ibid., 145).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 142.

and therefore indicative of the kingdom to come. Capitalism and democracy are paving the way for global Christianity today just as the Roman roads enabled the spread of the church in the ancient world.”⁴⁸

This treatment of American globalization confirms the nationalist nature of Webb’s account, which reads the theological doctrine of providence through the lens of contemporary American power. Webb construes this power as both the result and confirmation of America’s divinely directed mission in the world. Indeed, it is safe to say that Webb’s account of providence is really a theological rationale for American exceptionalism: “America is a nation whose very being is providential. The American experiment, because of its fragile nature, requires a providential reading of history.”⁴⁹ It is the nature of America that thus determines theological reflection. While Webb ostensibly undertakes a treatment of providence using America as a case study, he actually never provides any systematically theological account of the doctrine itself. He makes frequent assertions about providence as a doctrine, and he alludes to the biblical text at points, but never actually constructs a theological case. Rather, his starting point is America’s economic and military dominance in the world, which he chooses to reflect on only after presuming that it is good. Webb’s chief concern is America, and his work has the effect of asking what America has to teach us about providence, rather than determining whether or how America is providentially empowered. As Tim Beach-Verhey nicely puts it, “Webb argues that American religious, economic, and political institutions and values are dominating the world, which could not happen apart from God’s will, which means it must be in accord with God’s good and benevolent intentions for the world.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Webb, “Eschatology and Politics,” 508. In *American Providence*, Webb makes this exact analogy between American globalization and the road system of the Roman Empire (145), even though there he states in criticism of Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank that comparisons between America and Rome are nonsensical and “obnoxious” (124).

⁴⁹ Webb, *American Providence*, 13.

⁵⁰ Tim Beach-Verhey, review of *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission*, by Stephen H. Webb, *Political Theology* 10, no. 2 (2009):377.

As a result, Webb's political theology requires not only an account of the doctrine of providence, but a providential reading of history that "must account for America's miraculous rise to world power" and provide "an interpretation of God's blessings for America as well as America's responsibilities for those blessings."⁵¹ He writes that "America is so determined...by the conviction that we have a special destiny in world history that only a careful account of the doctrine of providence can shine a clear light on the course that lies ahead." This "course" is not that of a theological evaluation of the conviction of special destiny, but rather the outworking of that conviction in US foreign policy. The conviction itself remains unquestioned throughout Webb's work. As he continues, America's dominance in the world is "the Great Fact of our day," rendering "pernicious" any attempt to deny providential import to "America's shaping of the globe."⁵² Note that America's dominance as personally actualized by God is presupposed in this discourse, governing all subsequent considerations of providence. Note also America's power as "miraculous," a descriptor tying the nation's status directly to Webb's understanding of special providence, "God's miraculous interventions..." While Webb denies that America is uniquely providential,⁵³ the fact that "America is doing more than any other nation to spread the kind of political structures that can best prepare the globe for God's ultimate work of establishing the final kingdom is not theologically insignificant."⁵⁴ Many countries view themselves as providential, "but America's providential theology came together at a propitious time."⁵⁵ Not only is America providential, but the very narrative of American providence is itself providentially formulated and propagated.

As Webb portrays it, the doctrine of providence recognizes that all theology is socially located in space and time, requiring responsible contemporary theologians to read providence

⁵¹ Webb, *American Providence*, 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

through American history, given its prominent status.⁵⁶ Neither political theology nor ecclesiology can afford to do otherwise, given that any discussion of the church's destiny requires reflection on "how God is using the most powerful nation in the world."⁵⁷ Christianity has been central to America's role in the world, precluding for Webb any sharp distinction between America's global agenda and the Puritan notion of "a nation conceived as the vehicle of God's will."⁵⁸ The Puritans borrowed the theology of covenant from John Calvin, seeing themselves as the instrument of God's will in the world, in line with Israel.⁵⁹ For this reason, "America cannot be analyzed apart from the way providential theology has shaped its understanding of foreign affairs...."⁶⁰ The doctrine of providence lies at the heart of American history and the discernment of America's role in the world; "the further back you go in history, the clearer it becomes just how habitual and ordinary are claims about an American providence."⁶¹

Of course, Webb rightly notes the prevalence and role of various theologies of providence in American history, but like the work of Marshall and Manuel (work which Webb affirms for its "meticulous" research, and thought provoking findings⁶²), Webb conflates the role of the *doctrine* of providence with that of *actual* providence in American history, as though the prevalence of the belief makes real its content. For instance, he writes that "a providential view of America is dependent on the covenantal theology of the Puritans."⁶³ No doubt his claim is correct in strict terms of the genealogy of the idea, but it remains unclear why the historical fact of the belief justifies theological commitment, i.e., why the Puritan theology should be taken for granted as *true*, then or now. Webb makes no clear distinction between the historical occurrences

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁶¹ Ibid., 20.

⁶² Ibid., 47.

⁶³ Ibid., 84.

of doctrine on the one hand, and its theological truth on the other, and he vacillates between them throughout this work.

Decline: The Eclipse of Realism

Webb's account of decline is even more enlightening for his nationalism and political theology than his account of America as chosen community. This is one of the more intriguing aspects of his argument, for the primary decline he cites is only indirectly that of the national culture. Post-9/11, he laments church conflict over US foreign policy, which is "particularly disheartening for American Christians who want the church to take a stand on issues of national importance."⁶⁴ He locates the contention in a decline—originating in the 1960s—in "providential rhetoric," particularly within academic theology. The main agents responsible for this decline are "professional theologians and other intellectual elites," whom Webb calls "anti-providentialists."⁶⁵ In Webb's nationalist discourse, these theologians fill the role of "status elites," akin to those secular elites in Christian Right discourse who control "public symbol production" in government, the media, and education.⁶⁶ Here, the symbol at issue is America providence, and the problem is that these theological elites are creating doubt among Christians as to the nation's divinely ordained role in the world. Against these elites, Webb pits his own, self-described populist theology: "I have come to my own understanding of providence only by trusting in the basic wisdom that has guided most Americans on this subject. Most Americans believe that God acts in history, and they believe that one of those acts is the choosing of their nation for a special mission in the world." This claim by "ordinary American Christians" seems like "common sense" to Webb.⁶⁷ Hence his approval of Marshall and Manuel, whose work he

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Heinz, "Clashing Symbols," 156.

⁶⁷ Webb, *American Providence*, 11.

describes as “grassroots history...with a populist edge.”⁶⁸ Where some elites may eschew the doctrine of providence for its disputable notion of divine favoritism, “popular Christianity in America has been unmoved by such metaphysical constraints. American Christians know better than to think that the inscrutable ways of providence can be reduced to the idea of fairness.”⁶⁹ Thus, Webb champions the theology of the common people against the efforts of the theological academy to relativize America’s place in the narrative of global salvation.

His chief “elite” target of critique is Stanley Hauerwas, whose ostensible dismissal of providential theology goes hand-in-hand with his “anti-Americanism.”⁷⁰ Indeed, insofar as America is essentially providential in Webb’s conception, to reject providence is to reject America itself. For Hauerwas, America represents “the opposite of everything Christianity must defend.”⁷¹ But as such, Hauerwas addresses America as a mere idea, rather than “anything concrete and real.”⁷² Indeed, what Hauerwas and like-minded scholars are guilty of is a decidedly *unrealistic* politics. Hauerwas’s advocacy of pacifism “is powerful rhetoric rather than clear-eyed politics (or theology). Only if Christians have no investment in any secular order can Christians embrace an absolute pacifism.”⁷³ Webb is concerned that a Christian status as aliens

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁰ Webb, “The Very American Stanley Hauerwas,” *First Things* no.124 (June-July 2002):15. Webb charges that Hauerwas “urges the cultural elite to take traditional theology more seriously while at the same time assuring them that their left-leaning cultural and political assumptions can remain untroubled” (*American Providence*, 69). Paradoxically, Webb portrays Hauerwas as a vociferous member of the liberal academy (71, 76; “On the True Globalism,” 122), while simultaneously attributing to him the now worn designation of “sectarian” (*American Providence*, 124). This brings up a point by Dan Bell, who has remarked upon Webb’s frequent use of “leftist” or “liberal” to describe almost every opponent of Webb’s position, “from Hauerwas and Milbank to open theists and process theologians.” See Daniel M. Bell, Jr., review of *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission*, by Stephen H. Webb, *Journal of Church and State* 48, no.1 (Winter 2006): 228-30. Webb even mistakenly categorizes Bell as a liberation theologian (Webb, *American Providence*, 65).

⁷¹ Hauerwas and his ilk ostensibly deny providence, but their own critiques of America rely on it, or at least a one-sided presentation of judgment as divorced from blessing. Hauerwas in particular “appears to be cheered by the idea that God will judge America with unreserved harshness” (Webb, *American Providence*, 74-77, 77). Webb overstates Hauerwas’s sentiment, to be sure, but even Webb’s critics credit this general point on covenant one-sidedness as Webb’s most substantive. See Bell, 229 and Beach-Verhey, 376. Unfortunately, they argue, he fails to carry this point through in any robust theological fashion.

⁷² Webb, *American Providence*, 71.

⁷³ Webb, “On the True Globalism,” 120.

precludes contribution to foreign and domestic policy discussions.⁷⁴ Contra Hauerwas's idealistic pacifism, providence teaches that God works through human endeavors, including war, to accomplish the divine intent.⁷⁵ While the theology of American providence requires that "America's wars abroad should be for the sake of spreading freedom, not spreading the faith," Webb posits that "political freedom is both an appropriate expression of Christian faith as well as a mighty means of enabling Christians to spread their faith."⁷⁶ It would seem then that for Webb, aggressive military policy is useful for spreading Christianity after all, quite in line with his providential understanding of the nation; Hauerwas's pacifism is therefore anti-providential. Consequently, since American hegemony is so tied to providence, Christians cannot be resident aliens in America but must be "residential advisors,"⁷⁷ ensuring the nation stays true to its providential course.

According to Webb, the central problem of Hauerwas's theology is that "he does not believe in politics."⁷⁸ He is unable to imagine a "constructive political correlate to his ecclesiology."⁷⁹ This claim is helpful for getting closer to the core of Webb's thought. Rather than acknowledging, even if to challenge, Hauerwas's notion of the alternative politics of the church-as-polis—i.e., ecclesiology as political theology, as constructive politics—Webb must dismiss Hauerwas and like theologians as being apolitical. Scripture must be rendered apolitical as well: "the New Testament does not address its audience in terms of a nation or a polis," this despite 1 Peter 2:9-10's appropriation of Exodus 19:5-6, calling the church a "nation" and a "kingdom" in a certain continuity with Israel, or the language of "citizenship" or "commonwealth" in Philippians 3:20. Webb makes these moves because he has tied politics exclusively to the nation-state, and to the extent that the Kingdom of God is a political notion,

⁷⁴ Webb, *American Providence*, 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 70. Again, one wonders how Hauerwas can simultaneously reject politics, yet be part of the "political left."

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

only the nation-state, not the church, can prefigure it. Indeed, “without a reading of the constructive role that nations play in global history, the kingdom of God becomes an oppositional force, the arrival of which will destroy the powers of this world.” Webb resists this understanding, because it means that “God is not using nation-states to further the divine plan. Instead, God is exercising patience with the nations, while planning for their complete removal.”⁸⁰ In part, this arguable tautology is a function of his aforementioned logic of special providence, wherein God moves in the world directly through human socio-political orders to achieve the divine aims and to rule the world. For this reason, eschewing the nation-state is unfaithful, for “to be alienated from political authority is to be alienated from ourselves and God.”⁸¹

However, this is also because Webb views the nation-state as the main agent of “significant historical change” in the world. God moves in the world primarily through nation-states, and “God moves nations by working through history, not against it,” i.e., not in contention with national politics. His critique of liberation theology is illustrative. Here, Webb asserts that “by definition, the poor are not effective agents of significant historical change,” presumably because they are not carriers of historical power like states are. “The poor *are* agents of God’s grace,” however, “as opposed to being agents of significant historical change.”⁸² This point is key, for here Webb clearly implies that God’s grace is not an agent of significant historical change. This directly repudiates the notion discussed in Chapter 5 (referencing Douglas Harink) that grace is a form of divine power in which the church shares. According to that principle, it is not in the actions of the earthly nation-state but in the suffering and glorification of Jesus Christ that “God’s way of making history” is revealed.⁸³ Thus for Webb, no political theology governed by orthodox Christology, by the cross of Christ as pivotal for human community and destiny, or

⁸⁰ Webb, “Eschatology and Politics,” 511.

⁸¹ Webb, *American Providence*, 105.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸³ Harink, 50-51.

by the church as the Body of Christ can be tenable, for none of these can in his mind produce effective, concrete change in the world order. As Cavanaugh succinctly puts it, for Webb, “Jesus’ nonviolence and death on a cross are peripheral to a providential reading of history.”⁸⁴ Rather, if the promise of the kingdom of God is to have present significance, “Christians must try to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit...in the political orders within which they find themselves.”⁸⁵

America As Global Sovereign: Carl Schmitt and the Politics of Exception

Webb does not leave his nationalist narrative at the point of decline, but specifies what is required for renewal. Here, the reader arrives at another, even more definitive strand of thought at work in Webb’s account of politics, providence, and America’s national narrative: the political theory of Carl Schmitt. By Webb’s own admission, Schmitt is the theorist “who has most shaped my thinking about the nature, limits, and future of democracy.”⁸⁶ Given that American democracy and its propagation constitute the center of Webb’s account of America’s providential mission (and thus of providence itself), and given Webb’s approving overview of Schmitt’s thought with only minor qualifications, it is reasonable to assume that Schmitt’s theory constitutes the center of Webb’s political theology of providence.⁸⁷ Given that Webb thinks of providence as a “grammar” to read the meaning of the American nation, Schmitt’s theory is crucial to understanding Webb’s account as nationalist discourse.

Two major aspects of Schmitt’s political theory are relevant here. First, only the nation-state is properly political:

⁸⁴ Cavanaugh, “Messianic Nation,” 271.

⁸⁵ Webb, “Eschatology and Politics,” 509.

⁸⁶ Webb, *American Providence*, 153.

⁸⁷ It is ironic that this “rather curious chapter,” as Jean Bethke Elshtain calls it in her approving review, falls at the end of Webb’s book. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, review of *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission*, by Stephen H. Webb, *First Things*, no. 150 (February 2005): 40. Elshtain even notes that “Webb might have done better to save this discussion of Schmitt for another day.” In fact, as I will show, its inclusion is not curious at all, nor could Webb put it off, since it underlies his entire schema. What is peculiar is its placement at the end of the argument. Considering Webb’s expertise in rhetoric, the reader wonders to what degree this was a conscious move by Webb, and if so, why Webb would choose to relegate such a critical discussion to an almost appendix-like status.

The political has to do with a basic distinction between friends and enemies. Only the state can determine who is the enemy, and only the state can decide to fight the enemy. Outside of the political sphere, there is no way to justify whether an enemy is actually a threat to a nation's way of life. The friend-enemy distinction is what gives meaning to national politics.⁸⁸

For Webb, this points to the central issue in the decline of theological treatments of providence, for “nearly the whole of political theology today is in denial of the friend-enemy distinction as Schmitt understands it.”⁸⁹ That central issue is political authority, and the current problem with certain political theologies is that therein, “the church wants to displace the political sphere with its legitimate determination of who is to count as the enemy.”⁹⁰ Authority, not ethics, is the central determinant of justice for Webb,⁹¹ and while Christians are taught to forgive their enemies (a manifestation of grace), the church has also historically recognized the need for political authority in the pursuit of justice. Since God works through history, God defeats those who would thwart the movement of providence in history. “God’s enemies are not necessarily our own,” Webb continues, “but to be a friend of God is to seek out God’s purposes in history, and those purposes are not unrelated to the struggle for freedom, a struggle that involves the tragic necessity of war.”⁹² Contra the theological elites against whom Webb pits himself, only a theopolitics operating free from the constraints of grace and grounded in the proper authority of the nation-state to determine its friends and enemies, and perhaps God’s as well, is a true politics, a producer of significant historical change, and thus, properly providential.

The other crucial element Webb appropriates from Schmitt is the notion of the “exception.” While the normal proceduralism of a democratic political order is usually sufficient for governance, from time to time threats arise to that order’s integrity and authority. These “exceptions” are emergency situations wherein “democracies need an external principle of

⁸⁸ Webb, *American Providence*, 156.

⁸⁹ This is why Webb rejects Hauerwas’s account of martyrdom as a political act: “Martyrdom...is not a political decision. It exists outside of the friend-enemy distinction” (Ibid., 159).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 156.

⁹¹ Ibid., 65.

⁹² Ibid., 156.

authority that can bring public debate to an end.”⁹³ This principle is that of the “sovereign,” which Schmitt defines as the entity or person who decides on the exception.⁹⁴ As Webb puts it, “the consequence of the exception is the need for someone to take charge.” Notice the circularity thus far: the exception—the emergency situation—results in the need for a sovereign, but the sovereign is the one who determines the exception in the first place. Webb goes further: “Legal systems can operate only under normal conditions, but the obligation of the sovereign is to determine what those normal conditions are by deciding how to deal with the exception.”⁹⁵ The logical converse of Schmitt’s definition, here the exception is the standard, according to which the sovereign determines what counts as unexceptional. Authority, which again is the ground of justice for Webb, “by definition is a transcendent and not immanent phenomenon.” When nation-states make life and death decisions, including war, sovereign authority is required, something liberalism cannot acknowledge.⁹⁶ Of course, a question begged by this theory is how to account for situations where the sovereign, who alone has authority to distinguish the ordinary from extraordinary in socio-political affairs, actually contributes to or even produces situations of crisis to maximize that sovereign’s opportunities to project power. Webb does not address this question, an ironic oversight considering Schmitt’s well known, albeit temporary, involvement in 1930s German Nazism.⁹⁷

Notice here how Schmitt’s theory of political authority is correlated with providence in Webb’s account. Webb argues that providence is best conceived as “always special and particular, not regular and general.”⁹⁸ What marks providence as Webb understands it is the transcendent and miraculous involvement of God in human affairs; any notion of immanentism is rejected. Likewise, the sovereign in Webb’s appropriation of Schmitt acts from outside the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁹⁴ Michael Hollerich, “Carl Schmitt,” *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 110.

⁹⁵ Webb, *American Providence*, 154.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁹⁷ Hollerich, 108-109.

⁹⁸ Webb, *American Providence*, 89.

normal procedural system; it, too, is transcendent. Like God, it alone determines those situations in which it must directly exercise its authority. In short, the sovereign is providential, even perhaps the personification of God's action in history.

What has this to do with nationalism? Webb's account is nationalist because he is authenticating over and against theologies marked by "anti-Americanism" a self-understanding of America as divinely ordained for hegemony. Recall his description of providence as a "grammar" for discerning the meaning of the American nation. For Webb, Schmitt's theory of politics and the exception constitutes that much needed "providential reading of world history" which provides a hermeneutics for American power and responsibility.⁹⁹ America has been chosen to fill the role of sovereign in the world today, as evidenced by its hegemony. America propagates its system of democratic capitalism, hand-in-hand with its own version of Christianity, throughout the world, setting the stage for the coming Kingdom of God. Yet, if Webb's account is nationalist, and Christian nationalism inevitably requires the selective—and thus distortive—appropriation of the biblical narrative, then Webb's account of providence becomes theologically suspect.

Lest American dominance be construed as traditional empire, Webb relies on the irony of Reinhold Niebuhr to point out the inherent safeguards of American integrity. The great irony of the contemporary situation is that the good America does for the world is due, in Niebuhr's terms, to American ignorance.¹⁰⁰ Americans are inherently naïve, so we are unaware of the dangers of empire: "Our innocence, in fact, keeps us from naming our ambition as a species of imperialism. Yet that very same innocence allows us to avoid many of the faults of empires of the past. We

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, Webb provides no specific references for Niebuhr at this point. He describes Niebuhr here as "the great theologian of irony, perhaps because Niebuhr had an appreciation for both the strengths and the limits of American providence." As a theologian of rhetoric, Webb explains that irony requires a great deal of sophistication, and is fitting for the providential discourse due to its "almost godlike view of events," which "sees the inevitable outcomes of which historical actors are unaware" (*Ibid.*, 84). This is as opposed to hyperbole, which he attributes to Hauerwas, and which he characterizes as "a seductive trope" which is "so excessive that you think you have done what it demands just by speaking it" ("The Very American Stanley Hauerwas," 15). Niebuhr is thus providential, while Hauerwas is anti-providential.

actually believe we can do good in the world.” American individualism saves the empire from doing more damage than it does, given that it prevents the formation of a socially coherent imperial vision. “Our very respect for freedom,” he continues, “both fuels our overseas endeavors and inhibits us from developing the kind of ideology that could result in global domination.”¹⁰¹

Yet a chief irony of Webb’s account is that America avoids the imperial pitfall only by acting as global sovereign. Within a globalized world order, there are threats to the system’s integrity. As such, “America cannot always act democratically on the world stage, even as it acts to increase the number of democracies in the world. Globalization requires management, and without some kind of world religion, global management will have to work through the imposition of power rather than the quest for consensus.”¹⁰² Thus, in today’s world, “the United States will have to make the difficult decisions in times of crisis as with the question of how to handle terrorist states.” Rather than patient international deliberation, the exigencies of the moment demand immediate action by the United States, the only power that can effectively deal with them. Of course, as that sovereign power, America alone determines what constitutes an emergency and what thereby necessitates its unilateral imposition of power. America has been set apart providentially as the instrument for prefiguring the Kingdom of God, for establishing the political structures that herald that kingdom,¹⁰³ and for dealing with any obstacles that might arise in the process of its establishment. America’s sovereignty, not merely as one member of an anarchic international system but actually *over* that system as empire, is for Webb the clearest case since biblical Israel of God using a nation-state to rule the world. Hence, for Beach-Verhey,

¹⁰¹ Webb, *American Providence*, 85. Bell characterizes this Niebuhrian reference as a rationalization for Webb’s going light on the judgment side of the providential equation (Bell, review of *American Providence*, 229). Webb’s is precisely the type of argument Cavanaugh seeks to repudiate in “The Empire of the Empty Shrine,” referenced in Chapter 1. See the interchange between Cavanaugh and Webb on this subject in Stephen H. Webb, “Response to William T. Cavanaugh” and William T. Cavanaugh, “Reply to Stephen H. Webb,” *Cultural Encounters* 2, no.2 (Summer 2006): 21-29.

¹⁰² Webb, *American Providence*, 114.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Webb's clear implication that "anything which stands in the way of American dominance, therefore, must be counter to God's will and, by definition, evil."¹⁰⁴ American *exceptionalism*, now with significant added meaning, simply *is* providence. And as such, remarks William Cavanaugh, "America itself becomes the criterion for locating God's activity in the world."¹⁰⁵

However, the exception-providence relationship brings up a potentially significant contradiction underlying Webb's argument, as demonstrated by two competing premises. First, providence, by definition, requires foreknowledge. Special providence as Webb advocates it—God's personal and direct involvement in human affairs, including the use of the nation-state—logically requires foresight into human behavior and the consequences of God's own miraculous intervention in order for God not to undermine God's own plan. While Webb does not address foreknowledge directly, he arguably holds to it as evidenced by his rejection of open theism, and because it is rather common in the American Christian understanding of providence, to whose "basic wisdom" he commits himself. However, second, Webb correlates special providence with political authority, making the sovereign analogous to God in transcending the system and acting upon it from the outside. This is precisely for Webb how America is providential. As Webb appropriates Schmitt, sovereignty is constituted by a determination of the exception, that "emergency" or "crisis"¹⁰⁶ in which standard rules can be suspended and direct, transcendent authority be exercised. Sovereignty, in its essence, requires the existence of the unforeseen and unexpected. And the emergency must be unforeseen, or the sovereign is nothing more than a tyrant, engineering artificial crises for its own aggrandizement, which would invalidate Webb's claims. But herein lies the contradiction: How can a theology of foreseeing providence be rooted in an account of sovereignty that requires the unexpected in order to be actualized?

¹⁰⁴ Beach-Verhey, review of *American Providence*, 377.

¹⁰⁵ Cavanaugh, "Messianic Nation," 270.

¹⁰⁶ Webb uses this term multiple times in his work in justifying exceptional American authority over the international realm. See "The Very American Stanley Hauerwas," 15; *American Providence*, 19, 78, 114, 168.

Leaving such contradictions aside, how does the church fit under America's global sovereignty? Clearly, the church is not political, since it possesses "its own authority, distinct from the political realm." The church, as apolitical, has nothing to say regarding the friend-enemy distinction. In times of war, it is not the place of the church "to vilify the enemy or to rationalize the conflict." Of course, "neither is it the role of the church to pretend that it can be the site of a politics that—this side of the coming kingdom—transcends the political altogether."¹⁰⁷ A politics alternative to that of the nation-state is impossible by definition. Thus, the church is not political, nor is it not allowed to render a judgment either way on the legitimacy of any particular nationalist pursuit or state projection of power. Paradoxically, as Webb appropriates George Weigel, "the very fact that the church is *not* a political institution is its greatest contribution to the realm of politics," for it limits the state by demanding of it "space to practice the ministry of word and sacrament."¹⁰⁸ The church as sacrament "symbolizes the future unity of humankind"; however, the *actual* unity of humankind "must be achieved on a political basis."¹⁰⁹ Note here the connection with the earlier discussion of "significant historical change": the grace manifested in sacrament is insufficient to accomplish genuine human unity; such unity can only be fully achieved by the politics of the nation-state.

Instead of a site of alternative politics, the church is "resident advisor" to the state. This is particularly true in America with its Christian history and the inherent overlap of the American dream with the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁰ As Webb puts it, "Christians can reside comfortably in America because their faith provided the foundation for the success and the shape of the new nation"; yet Christians must remember that they are obligated to keep the nation on its providential course.¹¹¹ However, this conception of the church limits the scope of ecclesial theopolitics according to the dictates of the state. The very fact that the church must "demand"

¹⁰⁷ Webb, *American Providence*, 159.

¹⁰⁸ Webb, "Eschatology and Politics," 507.

¹⁰⁹ Webb, *American Providence*, 169.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10. As he states later, "the church dreams of America" (74).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

space from the state to practice its ministries suggests that rather than limiting the state's power, the church is subjected to the state, particularly if—following the theory of the exception—the state is a providential entity authorized to determine the scope of its power and the occasion of its exercise. More specifically, as Cavanaugh points out, the problem here is that “the political presence of the biblical God is mediated through the official discourse of America, and not through a distinctively Christian body that stands under the explicit authority of Jesus Christ.”¹¹² The church's political significance is only derivative of the nation-state's, and is so only insofar as it supports the nation-state's providential role. To participate in any politics, the church *in* America must be the church *of* and *for* America.

With regard to globalism, “only the church can play the role of globalism's *other*, precisely because the church is both inside and outside of Western capitalism.” Like a parent and child, “Christianity is the source of much of globalism's success, so only Christianity can be sufficiently inside this economic process in order to divert it away from its own most destructive tendencies.”¹¹³ Yet, this is no better an arrangement than that with the nation-state. For note how the church, to the degree that it is “inside” the process of globalization, becomes immanentized to that process, i.e., the church becomes decidedly *unprovidential*, in Webb's terms, which is to say, removed from effecting significant historical change. The church becomes a facet of ordinary human history, while the nation-state alone transcends that history and is able to determine whether that history is moving forward properly. It is unclear how the church can act as a check on any emergency produced by globalism's excesses. Again, only the nation-state can provide the necessary correction.

Webb's political theology of providence is thus a thoroughgoing nationalist account of America. In his process of authenticating the nation via his theology as “grammar,” Webb must rely on political theory that is quite antithetical to biblical theopolitics, in the process distorting

¹¹² Cavanaugh, “Messianic Nation,” 275.

¹¹³ Webb, *American Providence*, 112.

the biblical narrative itself and relegating central tenets of the Christian theological tradition to a secondary status at best. What results is a wholly domesticated (and thus unbiblical) church that exists to support the nation-state in its purportedly divinely ordained endeavors—in this case, America as global sovereign.

Richard John Neuhaus: Democratic Freedom and the Kingdom of God

Like Webb’s account, the theopolitics articulated by Richard John Neuhaus¹¹⁴ entails what can be considered, in Murphy’s terms, a progressive, rather than traditionalist, jeremiad. While Neuhaus is erroneously characterized by Murphy and others as a member of the Catholic wing of the Christian Right,¹¹⁵ and is therefore categorized by Murphy in the traditionalist camp, he is more accurately understood as a quasi-neoconservative public theologian. His jeremiad is progressive because it concentrates on recovering a fundamental idea of America, rather than certain historical practices and institutions. Indeed, he rejects a theology of “return,” a “renewal through regression or through the recapitulation of a past and presumably better time” in favor of a future-oriented approach concentrating on America’s destiny. As he puts it, “home is still ahead of us.”¹¹⁶

This section discusses Neuhaus’s nationalist discourse via an examination of his political theology, one that is undergirded by a theology of American historical particularity. The discussion references several of Neuhaus’s key works on the subject that are taken to be representative of his understanding over his entire career. While Neuhaus’s work certainly shifts over time in nuance and emphasis—changes that will be addressed where pertinent—his generally realist political theology remains constant. The following discussion is therefore not

¹¹⁴ Neuhaus (1936-2009) was a Lutheran pastor-turned-Catholic priest, a political theologian and prolific writer, and founder of, among other organizations, the journal *First Things*.

¹¹⁵ See Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Richard John Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home: The American Experiment as Revelation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 22.

intended to flatten out the development of his thought over time, but rather considers his understanding as largely continuous over time with respect to his fundamental theopolitical claims. As I will demonstrate, these claims constitute a nationalist narrative, an attempt to authenticate American national identity via a political theology of democratic freedom rooted in a dialectic of social contract and transcendent covenant. The covenant aspect is particularly problematic in Neuhaus, since his use of it requires a distortion of the biblical narrative. This distorted narrative is then interwoven with an American national narrative such that a syncretized identity is produced, one for which Neuhaus claims theological legitimacy. In examining Neuhaus's discourse, I hope to show that once again, nationalism arises as a crucial problem for ecclesial identity in a way that requires a robust biblical theopolitics to counter.

A Political Theology of Historical Particularity and Transcendent Hope

The nationalist narrative Neuhaus espouses is subtle and restrained compared to the preceding cases in this study, a product of a political theology carefully developed and reflected upon over time. It is therefore necessary first to deal with the general outlines of that theology in order to discern America's place within it. In his early work, Neuhaus unabashedly declares his belief in the "sovereignty of politics in the making of history." Politics is obviously conditioned by other forces, but it is the political—those deliberations and uses of power that determine how people order their lives together—that constitutes the Christian's primary venue of action.¹¹⁷ Politics is about "making the arguments and showing the ways in which interests can compete, overlap, and sometimes converge in serving the common good."¹¹⁸ The power entailed in politics is not self-legitimizing, but "requires a moral rationale."¹¹⁹ This moral rationale comes from religion, which lies at the heart of culture, of which politics is a function. Culture is the "motor

¹¹⁷ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, vii.

¹¹⁸ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 186.

¹¹⁹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 45.

force of history,” which “proposes or excludes the possibilities which are the subject of political decision.”¹²⁰ It is also something that is both formed by and a shaper of religion. Religion, on the other hand, is the “ground or depth-level” of culture, the heart of culture even as culture is the “form of religion,” religion’s tangible embodiment.¹²¹

Particularly in democratic politics, religion provides a “transcendent point of reference” that both provides a moral rationale for the exercise of politics and holds a nation accountable to that rationale.¹²² Public values, so necessary for democracy, emerge from religious traditions, the latter providing for most “the primary definition of what the world is all about.”¹²³ For this reason, “the religious phenomenon” must be defined in substantivist, rather than functionalist, terms; it must reference the content or truth claims of a tradition rather than being reduced to categories that are applicable to assorted other phenomena. Yet, it cannot be so “substantivist” as someone like Karl Barth, “who would remove Christianity from the category of religion altogether.”¹²⁴ In the Augustinian sense of *religare*—binding obligation—religion is what “holds the promise of binding together...a nation in a way that may more nearly approximate *civitas*.”¹²⁵ Religion keeps the state under transcendent judgment and affirms the rights of all persons in society.¹²⁶ It is thus a “limiting challenge to the imperiousness of the political,”¹²⁷ and it points to a “sacred canopy that brings all institutions and belief systems, and most particularly religion, under judgment.”¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Ibid., vii, 49-51, 206.

¹²¹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing co., 1984), 132.

¹²² Ibid., 76, 120.

¹²³ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 154.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 191-192.

¹²⁵ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 60. In this book, by contrast with *Time Toward Home*, Neuhaus’s understanding of religion takes on a more functionalist tone: “With greater and lesser degrees of reflection, we thus bind ourselves in friendship, in marriage, in vocation, and a host of other decisions. The obligation that we affirm most deeply, most daringly, and perhaps most desperately, that is our religion” (250).

¹²⁶ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 122-123.

Most importantly, religion provides ethical direction in the midst of a history that “has not yet got itself together.”¹²⁹ Existence in that history, for the Christian, is marked by the incompleteness of the Kingdom of God. Such an existence entails “dialectics and contradictions” that render untenable any claims to the presence of the Kingdom in the world today. Yet, history is still God’s project, the whole of reality that has ever been and will ever be, and God has promised to bring that project to completion. God is, in Neuhaus’s words, the world’s “Absolute Future,” in whom history is realized. History is therefore the “unfolding story of God’s purposes, culminating in the vindication that is the kingdom of God.”¹³⁰ This historical fulfillment is God’s plan of salvation, but it is neither here nor now. It is yet to come.¹³¹

The future Kingdom of God cannot be perceived apart from our own existence, so “God’s promise invites us to analogize from our experience.” While God’s kingdom is radically different from anything we know in this world, it must also be in continuity to some degree with that known experience. In the Incarnation, God “has made himself, so to speak, accountable to history,” an accountability in which he calls us to join. God therefore has personal concern in our own historical experience, including our political communities: “Thus it is that God has something at stake in the American experience.” And God must, for if he did not, “then we who seek our life’s purpose in doing his will have no stake in the American experience.”¹³² Note already the presupposed and unquestioned priority of Christians participating in American politics and culture.

All history is therefore one history, that history of redemption that does not distinguish between sacred and secular histories or between narratives of salvation and nation, a history to which God has committed himself. For Neuhaus, this has direct implications for identity: “When I meet God, then, I expect to meet him as an American.” While Neuhaus admits his humanity

¹²⁹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 25.

¹³⁰ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 61.

¹³¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 52.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 57-58.

and Christian identity are prior to American national identity, “I am not quite sure what the assertion means since I am inescapably an American human being and an American Christian.”¹³³ As he elaborates, “I look for the vindication of myself in my historical particularity, and of the American experience of which I am a part.” The American experience is vindicated because it is such a large part of this history, “or at least it is a large part of our limited moment in history.”¹³⁴ Indeed, “for those of us who are Americans, we are *as Americans* part of the story that is the story of the world.” America *as a nation* is part of that story, i.e., the story of God’s redemption of the world.¹³⁵ The alternative to those mistaken theologies that see America as a direct type of Babylon—an already divinely condemned center of illegitimate power in the world—is to “meet the judgment of the future in the full particularity of our historical identity” as Americans, discerning “a promise and hope within the American experience that are deserving of our devotion.”¹³⁶

American Covenant and Public Piety

Neuhaus’s account of America is a form of Christian nationalism, a narrative authenticating American national identity as a signal or prolepsis of the kingdom of God by means of democratic freedom. This narrative is tied directly into his Christian theology of historical particularism. Neuhaus is concerned about reviving the “American experiment,” and seeks “models for reconstructing the American reality.”¹³⁷ As I mentioned above, Neuhaus sees the most promising course of action for American renewal in the “interplay between explicit

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64. As he argues earlier, “The American experience is an important part of the history whose fulfillment is promised...In a larger sense it is important because America is such a large part of this historical epoch. If the fulfillment of history bypasses the hundreds of millions of people whose lives have, in one way or another, been shaped by the American experience, it is not a very interesting fulfillment” (52).

¹³⁵ Neuhaus, *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 30.

¹³⁶ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 56.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

biblical religion and the American tradition of public piety.”¹³⁸ Note immediately the nationalist project of authentication: Neuhaus is concerned, beginning in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate but continuing through the 1980s and 1990s and intensifying after 9/11, with formulating and propagating a particular vision of American national identity. He hopes to persuade Christians that Christian truth claims “contain the resources by which the American experience can be creatively redefined.”¹³⁹ This vision involves the deliberate interweaving of biblical and national theopolitical narratives, an endeavor that, as I will demonstrate, ends up distorting the former in favor of the latter.

“Public piety” is Neuhaus’s preferred term for civil religion.¹⁴⁰ American public piety and the biblical tradition exist in “symbiotic relationship, each supporting and, to some extent, checking the other.”¹⁴¹ Within public piety, America is considered a radical experiment contingent upon a future promised fulfillment, namely the kingdom of God.¹⁴² As such, “patriotic piety” cannot sustain itself, but requires a robust moral account of America’s purpose and mission, combined with a concerted reassertion by churches of “the gospel of the Kingdom from which America and all human enterprises derive their religious significance.”¹⁴³

Neuhaus’s account of America’s public purpose is located primarily in covenant.¹⁴⁴

Covenant is what provides in the American context the transcendent point of reference to God as

¹³⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 190.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴² Ibid., 26.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 196. By “churches,” Neuhaus here means more generally “institutions of religion,” with preference given to Christian churches and Jewish synagogues (207). However, post-9/11, his references tend to be more sharply directed at institutions of Judaism and Christianity over against those of Islam. See, for example, *American Babylon*, 188-189, as well as “Contract and Covenant: In Search of American Identity,” (2007 Bradley Symposium; April 16, 2006). Available at <http://www.bradleyproject.org/bradleyprojectessay3.html> (accessed January 18, 2010). There he writes, “The Judeo-Christian factor in American identity is reinforced by the challenge of Islam, which believes it has displaced both Judaism and Christianity in the purposes of God, and by a violent jihadist ideology set upon forcing the submission of the world to Allah by any means necessary.”

¹⁴⁴ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 130.

Absolute Future, as the one who will bring to completion his cosmic covenant with creation.¹⁴⁵ American covenant must be seen in light of God's covenant with creation and as a specific manifestation thereof, just as individual moral accountability must be worked out within the social reality of America.¹⁴⁶ For Neuhaus, covenant is profoundly meaningful in the contexts of both the biblical narrative and American history. It assumes that human beings and society are disordered, less than what they should be in light of the transcendent reality of Absolute Future. It therefore maintains the proper tie between the present and the future that judges it, as well as the attendant need for repentance and forgiveness.¹⁴⁷ While Neuhaus is convinced God has made a general covenant with creation and a specific covenant with Israel and the church, the American covenant is less certain, for it is not clear whether God has entered into such a covenant. Yet Neuhaus risks trusting that God has done so, making his theology vulnerable to "repudiation by the future."¹⁴⁸ American covenant is "derivative, to be accepted insofar as it conforms to the 'revealed' intentions of God in history." It is a gamble, but "such a risk should not scare off people who are prepared to bet their lives upon the unlikely proposition that an itinerant rabbi who was executed in the boondocks of history almost two thousand years ago will be revealed as Lord of the universe."¹⁴⁹

Covenant is inextricably tied to social contract. As Neuhaus portrays it, "covenant makes possible the vision without which the people perish" while "contract keeps this vision always vulnerable to challenge and revision."¹⁵⁰ Covenant and contract therefore help preserve each other, and as such, are part and parcel of American national identity. As a "nation under law by

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 168.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 54. This seems to be in conflict with his statement "God has made no special covenant with America as such. God's covenant is with His creation, with Israel, and with His Church" ("Christianity and Democracy"). However, if he is speaking in terms of what has already been revealed over against what has yet to be seen—one of his underlying themes—then the two assertions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, most of his political writings presuppose American covenant, so it is inconceivable that he rejected it in this document.

¹⁵⁰ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 169.

constitutional contract—a contract presupposing covenantal accountability,” to say America is constituted by said contract is to say it is a nation “under God,” i.e., under both promise and judgment. It is a nation constituted by “contract tied to covenantal aspiration and covenantal aspiration restrained by contractual agreement.”¹⁵¹

From this dialectical interplay between covenant and contract emerges “one of the great achievements—maybe the great achievement—of the modern era,”¹⁵² the principle of democratic freedom. Democratic freedom performs a prophetic role within the American covenant context, in response to the “biblical and prophetic urgency of protesting idolatry.”¹⁵³ It enforces a modesty within the social order that is reflective of the Gospel, and is therefore essential to keep the state in check.¹⁵⁴ For this reason, sustaining and defending democracy are religious imperatives, as said freedom is the commonweal, the good of the country, and a “good” fostered in relation to Absolute Future.¹⁵⁵

Neuhaus values democracy because it reflects his theology of historical particularity and contingency: “democracy is the process of keeping options open, of opening ever new options, so the present can be brought under the judgment and healing of the future.” Democracy is key to properly orienting human politics—and thus history—to its proper end, and is therefore an “absolute value...not unlike ‘the Will of God.’” It is not self-contained or self-sustaining, but contingent upon “*the* absolute which is the Power of the Future.” For this reason, democracy has theological import as a “necessary expression of humility in which all persons and institutions are held accountable to transcendent purpose imperfectly discerned.”¹⁵⁶ Democratic government is premised on acknowledgement of that transcendent truth, and it assumes interaction by people

¹⁵¹ Neuhaus, “Contract and Covenant.”

¹⁵² Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 170.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 170. “Resistance to the apotheosis of any social structure, especially that of the State, is the theological and moral foundation for pluralism, voluntarism and individual rights” (169).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁵⁶ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 116.

acting out of values grounded in religious belief.¹⁵⁷ Neuhaus admits that some might argue an absolute commitment to democracy is itself a type of idolatry, but that would only be true, he claims, if the commitment was to one particular method or structure of democratic governance; there is no method worthy of such commitment. Christian commitment to democratic freedom can be absolute because “it is implicit in the very gospel of the kingdom.” In view of the kingdom, every earthly order is relativized. In light of the covenant-contract dialectic, democratic freedom is such a relativizing instrument, and “the value of the relativizing function itself cannot be relativized. It is absolute. It is revealed.”¹⁵⁸ It should be noted here that Neuhaus has conflated function and instrument, such that the mere *tool* of democratic freedom is made indispensable from the standpoint of Christian theology. What is precluded is the possibility that a different sort of community altogether, such as the Christian church, might sufficiently perform that relativizing function.

With the principle of democratic freedom, one notices how Neuhaus’s discourse slides in and out of American exceptionalism. As he claims, democratic freedom is “a peculiarly American, or at least modern Western” idea.¹⁵⁹ While for Neuhaus this requires “constant judgment,” it in no way mitigates against the portrayal of democratic freedom as a uniquely Western, and primarily American, project. For Neuhaus, America is the “primary bearer of the democratic ideal today.” While it embodies the democratic ideal imperfectly, America nevertheless has a “singular responsibility” in this regard.¹⁶⁰ It is this singular responsibility that makes America such an unprecedented “experiment,” a term used throughout Neuhaus’s work. But it is also America’s unique construction. America has been “fabricated...by ideas and beliefs,” deliberately constructed under the “sacred canopy” provided by religion. Its democracy

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁵⁸ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 171.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁰ Neuhaus, “Christianity and Democracy.”

was possible only because the “values and virtues that the polity assumed” were already there.¹⁶¹ America as an ideal is premised on its “promised benefits to all of humankind”¹⁶²; as a nation, it is conceived to “signal a new birth of freedom for mankind.”¹⁶³ Indeed, “the American experience is an inescapable factor in our moment of history’s yearning.”¹⁶⁴ While God is impartial to nations, this does not mean he never singles out a nation for particular use. Suggesting America as a “sacred instrument of divine purpose” may seem scandalous, but “it is but a small part of the scandal of God’s becoming man,” wherein God threw his very existence into doubt until it is definitively demonstrated in the coming kingdom of God, “in the creation finally fulfilled.”¹⁶⁵ People balk at the notion of “universal mission,” but it is not inappropriate if it is understood that any particular social order, no matter how superior, is promising only insofar as it signals “a new and more universal unity” in which that particular is fulfilled.¹⁶⁶

Both the notion of “signal” and this particular-universal relationship are integral to Neuhaus’s account of America’s special role. America is “at its best a signal or prolepsis of future possibilities,” which when fulfilled, will transcend America itself.¹⁶⁷ American democratic freedom, as an outworking of the covenant-contract dialectic, is an “intuition of the ultimate,” of the future. It is therefore of “revelatory significance,”¹⁶⁸ indicating America’s “revelatory and instrumental role” in the coming of the kingdom.¹⁶⁹ As the church is a “signal community” of how human life can be ordered by grace, America can be seen as a community signaling “the universal future of democratic freedom.”¹⁷⁰ America signals a universal future, but only to the extent that it signals “the promise of freedom” in its own life.¹⁷¹ When it is at its best, America is

¹⁶¹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 140-141.

¹⁶² Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 41.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷⁰ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 115.

¹⁷¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 170.

the trustee of democratic freedom for the whole world, “an ultimate value that proleptically participates in the future confronting the whole of humankind.”¹⁷² Again, America’s signals are not derived from its own essence, but rather from the religious traditions of its citizens, which provide the content of America’s piety: “during most of American history, the churches have been a ready lender of the signals of transcendence.”¹⁷³ Thus, not only does Neuhaus’s nationalist account entail a syncretism of biblical and national narratives, but such a fusion constitutes for him the content of the authentic American national identity. Public piety is inherently and properly syncretistic.

The covenant-contract dialectic is a “distinctly American way of joining the particular and the universal.”¹⁷⁴ Neuhaus rejects the claim that America, as the “first universal nation,” is constituted not by ethnic or cultural identities but by universal principles, and is therefore open to any person subscribing to those principles. In fact, he argues, America is inextricably tied to the story of “a particular people who joined contract and covenant in constituting this *novus ordo seclorum*,” people who identified in different ways and to different degrees with Judeo-Christianity.¹⁷⁵ This phrase, *novus ordo seclorum*, recurs throughout Neuhaus’s work.¹⁷⁶ Appearing, among other places, in the Great Seal of the United States, it indicates the “new order of the ages” America was founded to initiate: a bulwark of democratic freedom that, guided by covenant, would reveal universal truths to eventually be realized throughout humanity.¹⁷⁷ America’s ethnic heritage or historical particularity do not detract from this universal significance: “while our idea of the universal may not be universal, that does not mean there is

¹⁷² Ibid., 175. It is interesting to note that Neuhaus’s use of the word “prolepsis,” which in his early work is used for both the church and American democracy, is limited in *American Babylon* only to the church and its sacraments. This may or may not reflect his move to Catholicism and the priesthood in the early 1990s, but as I will demonstrate, it seems to make only a little difference in his appreciation of the theopolitics of the church as alternative to the nation and state.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 195.

¹⁷⁴ Neuhaus, “Contract and Covenant.”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ In addition to “Contract and Covenant,” see *Time Toward Home*, 30; *The Naked Public Square*, 94-95; and *American Babylon*, 40-4, 107-115.

¹⁷⁷ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 115; *Time Toward Home*, 30.

nothing of the universal in it.” For this reason, Neuhaus declares that “the intuitions that inform democracy and its ideal of freedom are universally valid and of revelatory significance. That is, they are a part of the future that God intends for all people.”¹⁷⁸ America’s particularity is itself a signal of the universal. America’s political institutions and its “political ethos” are both marked by this heritage, “making America still today a derivatively ‘sort of’ Christian nation.”¹⁷⁹ Indeed, where the modern state has typically attempted to subsume spiritual authorities rather than suffer competition, the United States is the exception as evidenced by the First Amendment; this is an “American exceptionalism” that must be “vigorously defended.”¹⁸⁰

Discussion of America and the universal-particular conjunction brings up the question of empire. Throughout his work, Neuhaus harbors little doubt that the United States is a sort of empire.¹⁸¹ The question is not whether that status in itself is problematic. While it is troubling, it is simply fact, part of the historical condition in which America currently finds itself. The question is how America uses its imperial power, its “imperial ethic,” which depends entirely on how the American experience is defined, i.e., the nature and condition of American public piety. A proper imperial ethic should aim toward a global network of mutual acknowledgment and accountability among human persons; while this may seem antithetical to empire, “the language of empire is necessary...precisely because it underscores both the scandal and the responsibility implicit in the fact of American *imperium*....There can be no equation between the historical obligations of the United States and those of Equatorial Guinea.”¹⁸²

Of course, it could be that American empire is simply the newest incarnation of Babylon. If so, then Christians must come out of it and “be anti-American for the sake of the kingdom.” Yet this is not presently apparent; only the future will tell.¹⁸³ It is an irony of Neuhaus’s writing

¹⁷⁸ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 170.

¹⁷⁹ Neuhaus, “Contract and Covenant.”

¹⁸⁰ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 35.

¹⁸¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 38-39, 42-44, 184-186.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 53.

that if America is Babylon here and now, it is not particularly Babylon relative to other nation-states, but, like all other nation-states, only in comparison with the coming order of justice in the kingdom of God.¹⁸⁴ This, over against its positive exceptionalism: its greater power and responsibility relative to others and its singular achievement and responsibility for democratic freedom. Even where it is Babylon in the sense of a “foreign country” of exile for those awaiting their final eschatological homeland, “it is not just one foreign country among others.”¹⁸⁵ Neuhaus’s depiction in America is largely tempered relative to the authors previously examined, but America is nevertheless the best Babylon has to offer, and its public piety must sustain that condition.

Decline and Renewal of Public Piety, and the Role of the Church

As much for his realism is Neuhaus known for his narrative of national decline. His concern throughout most of his work in political theology is a decline in American public piety, specifically in the form of marginalizing religion from discussions of politics and public policy. This marginalization is what he has so famously referred to as the “naked public square.” It is the effect of actions by both a secularized elite in academia and culture, as well as the elite of Protestant liberalism. Since at least the 1960s, “Americans have largely lost their story and its place in the story of the world.” This includes “religious thinkers” who have been taken in by “the false-consciousness of having transcended the American experience” and now display a

¹⁸⁴ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 2, 26, 37, 55.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 49. Cf. *The Naked Public Square*, 115: “Yet, whatever the virtues of the American experiment, it is a society among other societies. It is part of the temporal order; it is in time as far short of the kingdom as is any other earthly kingdom. Its life is ordered primarily by power rather than by grace and love. And power—no matter how just or democratically limited—is by definition ‘power over’ others.” Unfortunately, this careful and insightful qualification is overshadowed throughout his work by a dominant narrative of American prominence, if not exceptionalism.

marked anti-Americanism. In short, too many Americans are “not sympathetically engaged with the story of their country.”¹⁸⁶

The naked public square strikes at the heart of Neuhaus’s notion of transcendent covenant, for within it, no agreed-upon authority exists above the community itself.¹⁸⁷ This is to deny America’s proper identity, according to which the American experience is derived from religious belief. The denial is in large part the responsibility of “secular historians and social theorists,”¹⁸⁸ those elites overseeing the “control centers of our cultural self-consciousness,”¹⁸⁹ who are seeking a different source of social cohesion. They reflect a “style of liberalism that, in its ‘pure’ form, has neither need nor use for religion.”¹⁹⁰ They manifest a “secular prejudice against Judeo-Christian truth claims because they are thought to be nonrational or even irrational.”¹⁹¹ Neuhaus, concerned about maintaining a proper dualism between politics and religion that allows religion to act upon society, complains particularly of the “secular monists” who create the naked public square by limiting reasoning to one sphere alone without interference from other authorities. This results in division from the larger populace, who “heedless of the wisdom imparted by their presumed betters,” continue to participate in religion in socially significant ways.¹⁹² For so many Americans, the primary definition of reality is derived from and articulated in “explicit religion.” Yet, “by their virtual monopoly on intellectually respectable public discourse,” these “religiously emancipated” elites preclude the larger American population from including their religion in the political process. As a result, “discussion of public policy has

¹⁸⁶ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 31. Throughout his work, Neuhaus is respectful of the pacifist positions articulated by thinkers such as Jacques Ellul, John Howard Yoder, and Stanley Hauerwas, among others, even while he sharply disagrees with them. Unlike Webb, he believes that while they are wrong, these thinkers nevertheless “are taking history seriously” and are being “historically responsible” (*Time Toward Home*, 56). As he puts it, “The burden of the argument is not against those who try, as best they can, to come out from among the condemned of the American Babylon. The argument is rather with those who partake fully in the glories or abominations, as the case may be, of the American experience yet accept no religious responsibility for that experience” (54).

¹⁸⁷ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁹ Neuhaus, “The Ambiguities of ‘Christian America,’” *Concordia Journal* (July 1991): 286.

¹⁹⁰ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 137.

¹⁹¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 50.

¹⁹² Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 96.

been enfeebled by a dishonesty that refuses to be explicit about the religious dimensions that are in fact in play.”¹⁹³

Despite their relative power, these elites are not so disturbing to Neuhaus as the Christians, mainly liberal Protestants, who acquiesce to them. These Christians, although concerned about society, have “lost their confidence in the explicit traditions that gave religious pertinence and plausibility to their witness.”¹⁹⁴ They support an understanding of liberalism in which “religion can impinge upon, but never really belong in, public space.”¹⁹⁵ As a result, since the 1960s, “the churches that had been a primary bearer of the American story have been of little help in restoring a politics of democratic deliberation about how we ought to order our life together.”¹⁹⁶ Note here the primacy of the church in propagating the American narrative, a task whose abandonment Neuhaus laments.

In Neuhaus’s view, these Protestant churches lost confidence in their doctrine. Eager to accommodate modernity in the early twentieth century, they gradually acquiesced to doubts about the truths they proclaimed in return for maintaining “usefulness to the world, as others defined the world.”¹⁹⁷ From this emerged a more leftist, “radicalized” approach to politics, as Protestants found it advantageous to join with the “liberal, progressive, avante-garde.” As the left became more radical, Protestant leadership followed suit.¹⁹⁸ When America failed to change accordingly, they lost confidence in religion. Their reliance on the secular elite “to provide the terms of discourse, to produce the good causes to which the church hopes to be helpful,”¹⁹⁹ has made American Protestantism impotent to address the moral and political crises of the nation, and especially to preserve American public piety.

¹⁹³ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 154.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹⁵ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 137.

¹⁹⁶ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 54.

¹⁹⁷ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 215.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

What is required then, is “an imaginative reappropriation of its own tradition,” in conjunction with a recovery of courage and confidence in “the distinctiveness of its own truth claims, a new courage to live in dialectic with a larger culture, an unembarrassed readiness to affirm the scandal of its particularity.” As he notes, “Only such a church can ‘save its own soul.’ Only such a church can contribute significantly to renewing and reshaping the public piety.”²⁰⁰ After all, the church’s mandate is to be a type of “‘signal community’—a model of how human life can be ordered by the redeeming grace of God.”²⁰¹

In short, the nation needs a reorientation of democracy by means of a renewal of public piety. Public piety, as we have seen for Neuhaus, is in dialectical relationship with “biblical religion.” The Christian church is that community of biblical religion which “signals, anticipates, celebrates and supports” the coming kingdom of God. Those within the church concerned about its social witness have an opportunity in public piety, for “there is a meeting point between that hope for the Kingdom and America’s constituting vision.”²⁰² The church’s prominence in cultural formation was created by a faith community grounded in distinctive truth claims; it can only be recovered by such. Neuhaus thus proposes retrieving the model of “the church militant,” the church that is “against the world for the world” in which “the church’s significant contribution is to significantly challenge.” Such challenge means “throwing all positions into question.” Such “againstness” is a “yes” to the eschatological hope of the kingdom, and a “no” to “all lesser hopes of influence.” Herein lies the church’s influence in the here and now. Alluding to H. R. Niebuhr, it is “‘Christ transforming culture’ by pointing the culture to a transformation that is beyond its own means to attain or even imagine.” This is the church’s mission: to “proclaim the revolution of the coming kingdom” that will bring all existing institutions “under divine promise and judgment.”²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 209.

²⁰¹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 115.

²⁰² Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 21.

²⁰³ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 225.

Indeed, the churches are indispensable for this endeavor. In his early work, Neuhaus refers to such entities (which he here calls “churches” but means “all religious institutions”) as “mediating structures”: small groups or associations of kinship or common interest that provide personal contact with people, shaping and supporting personal values. Such mediating structures provide a link between the governing institutions of society and the everyday values and value communities of people.²⁰⁴ Those values generated are “inseparably related to specific religious traditions.”²⁰⁵ Hence religion is the “motor force” of culture, which then drives politics, and thus history. Such a project “should have a major claim on the energies of churches, synagogues and other voluntary associations in the country.”²⁰⁶ While social influence is not those institutions’ primary mission, but rather a direct byproduct of their witness and service,²⁰⁷ mediating structures are nevertheless the primary “value-generating and sustaining institutions” in a given society. Since they are the only ones expected to define the religious values so central to culture, they have in the formulating of public piety “a singular role in filling in the whys and wherefores and warrants for what otherwise remains an empty transcendence.”²⁰⁸ And since the judgment of substantive transcendence is the means by which the nation-state is held accountable, these structures offer “heightened vigilance toward the limitations of the state with respect to society and, most importantly, with respect to that part of society that is the church.”²⁰⁹ This means public policy should utilize them and for purposes determined by those structures’ members.²¹⁰ While certainly there will be tension between church and state in this regard, such tension is both necessary and constructive for reorienting American politics.²¹¹

²⁰⁴ Theodore M. Kerrine and Richard John Neuhaus, “Mediating Structures: A Paradigm for Democratic Pluralism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 446 (November 1979): 11.

²⁰⁵ Kerrine and Neuhaus, 15.

²⁰⁶ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 44.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁰⁹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 117.

²¹⁰ Kerrine and Neuhaus, 12. This principle, the authors note, is similar to the Catholic theory of subsidiarity, by which “decisional authority affecting the individual should be located in that collectivity nearest him in knowledge, sympathy, and responsibility.”

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

This is the church playing its “culture-forming role,”²¹² a direct role in the shaping of public piety, in the formulation and propagation of the narrative that defines national identity. Covenant is central to this role, since insofar as a theory of covenant can be reinvigorated in Christian theology, it can significantly affect the church’s role in “shaping the general consciousness and public piety of America.”²¹³ This is the first step in recovering “an ethic that is serviceable in public discourse.”²¹⁴ “Particular religion,” especially the church, serves to criticize and enrich the American experiment. Public piety, therefore, is “symbiotically related to, and inexplicably apart from, the explicit religious traditions that give it shape and life.”²¹⁵

Central to the Christian religious tradition are its liturgies. In his earlier work, Neuhaus states that Christians partake in Christ’s spiritual prolepsis of the kingdom via sacramental and perhaps other means.²¹⁶ However that participation is accomplished, though, the kingdom of God cannot be sought apart from the world. While Christian commitment is to the world that is to be, it must nonetheless be oriented to the present world, “which is the world that is to be in progress of becoming.” While there is a sense in which the world is left behind in pursuit of the kingdom to come, “it is *this* world that is to be transformed.” All that is done is for the sake of the present world. So in liturgy, Christians enact in the present the hoped-for future, symbolically setting “against all present definitions of reality a reality that, we believe, is yet more really real.” The liturgy acts as an “eschatological sign” relativizing the present order in light of the kingdom of God,²¹⁷ “an acting out in present time the meaning of the future for which we hope.” As such, it is a celebration of what is to come: “the triumph of good over evil, the realization of perfect

²¹² Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 51.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹⁶ In *Time Toward Home*, Neuhaus mentions specifically the “aesthetic and the sacramental”—“in worship, in the arts, in music, in mystical experience, in the anguish of love”—as chief means of experiencing the hope of the kingdom to come. In some of his later work, he concentrates much more specifically on Christian liturgy and particularly the Eucharist. See *American Babylon*, 14, 50, 184.

²¹⁷ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 162-163.

community, the defeat of suffering and death.”²¹⁸ For Neuhaus, this reenactment is a means by which churches provide religious content to American public piety, enriching culture and social capital while restraining the pretensions of the state.

In later work, Neuhaus refers specifically to the Eucharist as “the supreme act of prolepsis” for Christians, “the ‘source and summit’ of the Church’s life.”²¹⁹ Here, liturgy becomes more directly political than in his earlier formulations. He writes that the Eucharist is “a supremely *political* action in which the heavenly *polis* is made present in time.”²²⁰ For this reason, contrary to discourse by American evangelicals, “the Church is not the soul of Christ but the *body* of Christ. It is a distinctive society through time—a society distinct from the societies in which, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, she is compelled to live through time toward the End Time.”²²¹ Neglect of this truth has led to an “ecclesiological deficit” in American theology, “leading to an ecclesiological substitution of America for the Church through time.”²²² Rather, robust Christian liturgy is a foretaste of the promised Kingdom of God, the Feast of the Lamb, and relegates the “American Proposition” to its properly provisional status.²²³

Eschatology, the Church, and Biblical Theopolitics

One wonders, though, whether Neuhaus’s later view of liturgy as political actually translates into a more robust biblical theopolitics for the church. In fact, it does not seem to escape Neuhaus’s understanding of national historical particularity. Such historical embeddedness resists any theology of “realized eschatology,” which Neuhaus defines in his early work as “saying that the Kingdom has come if you only believe it has come.” This is talk of “salvation history” in which “God has kept all his promises and the plan of salvation is neatly

²¹⁸ Ibid., 163.

²¹⁹ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 14.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 37.

²²² Ibid., 41.

²²³ Ibid., 50.

wrapped up.” We are to pay no heed, argues this theology, to “ordinary, secular history” in which people suffer here and now. This theology is contrary to the kingdom described by Jesus: “he knew nothing about a spiritualized Kingdom that drew back from the itching, sweating particularities of historical experience.”²²⁴ Believing God’s promises have been fulfilled when they have not does not glorify God.²²⁵ Jesus preached that the kingdom of God had arrived for those who received him, and he spoke often about the social, political, and economic changes that would result. Yet he also said his kingdom was not of this world. For Neuhaus, “herein lies the notorious ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ character of Christian thinking about the rule of God and all its relation to earthly government.”²²⁶ Where Jesus declares to his audience that the kingdom of God is in their midst (Luke 17), “he is telling them that *he* is in their midst”; wherever he speaks of the kingdom at hand, writes Neuhaus, “the Kingdom is always future,” yet Jesus is declaring himself personally to be a “prolepsis” of that future in the here and now.²²⁷ While the Christian hope is political in the sense that it aims at “the *polis* of the New Jerusalem,” the means of experiencing that hope are “not exclusively, nor even primarily, in the realm we call political.”²²⁸ By contrast, a theology of realized eschatology would “relieve the tension between the Now and the Not Yet,” and as such constitute a “premature synthesis” that is tantamount to idolatry. In fact, “there is no relief short of the Kingdom Come,” and it has not come yet.²²⁹

In fact, despite Neuhaus’s later Eucharistic thought, his political theology is still bound to an understanding of a purely future judgment and resolution of our inescapably dialectical existence. To put this in perspective, William Cavanaugh writes that prior to the modern era, the *saeculum*—in contrast to modern notions of the “secular”—was understood as the time between

²²⁴ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 52.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63. As Neuhaus analogizes, it is like a friend who has promised to do something and defines himself by that promise. It is unfaithful friendship to tell him he has fulfilled it when he has not: “Far from honoring him, you have patronized him with your patent lack of trust in his purpose. Thus we patronize God when we do not take with ultimate seriousness the covenant that is contingent upon the coming of his promised Kingdom.”

²²⁶ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 168.

²²⁷ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 66-67.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

the fall of humanity and the Second Coming of Christ during which various institutions of power, providentially directed, existed to restrain sin.²³⁰ Here, to be clear, the definitive underlying narrative is that of Christian salvation history, ultimately the reign of God in Christ and Christ's subjugation of the powers through the cross (Colossians 2). Christian liturgy celebrates and participates in this Messianic Age, an outworking of Messianic theopolitics. Within this age, the kingdom is not yet consummated, so institutions of authority exist to restrain sin and maintain peace. Institutions that absolutize themselves, such as the nation when it claims elect and salvific warrant or the state when "secular" is turned from contingent temporality into autonomous space, are not reflective of this order of time but are rebelling against its divine arrangement. Here, liturgy reflects the norm, the reality of the situation; the rebellious powers reflect the exception, attempting to overturn that reality.

Neuhaus understands things differently: "liturgy is time in parenthesis, a blocked out time. We return to the tasks of a world in which the glorious truths we had celebrated in liturgy seem at best ambiguous and partial, at times even preposterous."²³¹ For Neuhaus, Christian celebration of the reign of God in Christ is exceptional to time, indicative not of present realities but of future ones, realities that condition the church's current political practice not so much by prior vocation and expectation as by prospect of future judgment. While this understanding is expressed early in his work, it is confirmed in his most recent. In *American Babylon*, Neuhaus defines Babylon as "the sphere of idolatry and worldliness under the temporary control of Satan, a worldliness in opposition to the people and the work of God, a worldliness epitomized first by Babylon and then by Rome. Babylon...is the antithesis of the Church as the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of God." It is a self-absolutizing institution of power in direct rebellion against the Messianic order. The book then takes up the question of to what extent

²³⁰ William T. Cavanaugh, "God Is Not Religious," Chapter 5 in *God Is Not...Religious, Nice*, "One of Us," *An American, A Capitalist*, D. Brent Laytham, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 104. See also John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 9, as well as Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 9-52.

²³¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 163.

America can be considered Babylon, a discussion to be addressed below. What is important here is to note the key move Neuhaus makes midway through the book:

We have no alternative to this moment of time that is Babylon. More accurately, we have no *presently available* alternative. Babylon is for all time short of *the* alternative which is the promised New Jerusalem. Babylon is life in the realm of what Saint Augustine calls *libido dominandi*—the realm of the earthly city ruled by the lust for power and glory. For centuries Christians have prayed, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” And it is possible Christians will be praying that prayer for centuries more.²³²

Note here that Babylon is no longer merely an entity in rebellion to the Messianic order of time, but rather constitutes *its own order of time*, however “momentary.” It is “life” here and now, the inescapable configuration of disordered theopolitics that marks our existence, wherein Christian worship is parenthetical, the exception to the rule, but something less than a full alternative. Therefore, as framed by Neuhaus’s prior work, Babylon *is* history, to which God has made himself accountable, calling us to do the same. God is invested in the political communities of Babylon-as-history, since he is redeeming the world through it. Thus, for Christians here and now, Babylon is the current form of *salvation* history. There is no alternative but to participate in its imperfect systems, even while by their very insufficiency they make us long for the fulfillment of the Kingdom. In the end, eschatology for Neuhaus is arguably more about how the *telos* of the kingdom of God points theologically to the incompleteness and inadequacy of our contemporary situation, than how that *telos* disciplines our present participation, much less breaks into it as alternative. While throughout his work he emphasizes the “now”/“not yet” dialectic—“we live ‘between the times’”²³³—his political theology overwhelmingly favors the “not yet” over the “now,” such that the present age is marked by the incomplete victory of Christ.

I distinguish between “incomplete” and “unconsummated,” which as I use them here correspond respectively to degree and scope. Christ’s victory over the powers is complete, as stated unequivocally in Colossians 2:15. At the same time, God’s reign in Christ is not yet

²³² Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 119. Emphases in the original.

²³³ *Ibid.*

consummated in the sense of being globally present in its fullness, nor will it be until Christ's return. That said, while the powers still exist and operate in their disordered state, it is not their rebellion but their rebellion *defeated* that marks the present Messianic age. It is worth recalling Harink to the effect that messianic time, characterized by God's decisive reign, is not yet consummated, but it is present here and now in the world. And especially apropos in light of Neuhaus is Harink's statement that, "In the face of often seemingly powerful evidence that the powers are victorious ('Be realistic!' as they say), what is called for from the church is an act of hopeful resistance, an act of disciplined 'counterintelligence,' in which the already present and coming messianic age is grasped in thought and action as the all-determining truth of the church's life, and indeed of the life of the world."²³⁴

The upshot of this is that while one should not expect to see the nations, states, markets, and other powers of the world cease their rebellion against the Messianic order at this point, there does exist the possibility of full-fledged alternative theopolitical communities in the world, ones that, empowered by the Holy Spirit, embody biblical theopolitics faithfully at different times and places. In the Christian salvation narrative, therefore, Christ's victory is the rule celebrated in Christian worship, to which Babylon is the limited and temporary exception. This suggests that the Christian church, by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the degree it is faithful in proclaiming and practicing its proper narrative, is in fact able to embody a theopolitics of the Kingdom alternative to, and in the presence of, the politics of nations and states. Certainly sin abounds, and the church is no exception—far too often, it too has acted as a power in this sense. But an inability to act in its proper theopolitical capacity is not, biblically, a foregone conclusion, as Neuhaus's realism would make it seem. Rather, any failure is, by virtue of the church's calling and empowerment, an exception to the rule of the Messianic order. This is the "history" of the theopolitics of Scripture; even as it resides within it, the church is not bound to the history over which disordered politics is, in Neuhaus's understanding, sovereign.

²³⁴ Harink, 53-54.

However, given Neuhaus's eschatology, which is key to his political theology, the ecclesia-as-alternative is difficult to find in his work. Short of the consummation of the kingdom, i.e., in the time that is Babylon, "we live not in true community but in society."²³⁵ There, our submission to the transcendent "is always premised upon the promise that God's will is to vindicate the human struggle of which we are part."²³⁶ And that human struggle God wills to vindicate is inevitably marked by violence. Neuhaus recognizes and respects the various theologies of pacifism and power critique that question "whether God necessarily works through power, and systems and laws, and even tragedy and violence to achieve his redemptive purposes," but for Neuhaus, this question is really "whether the promised redemption is through history, apart from history, or even against history."²³⁷ Here the reader recalls his initial declaration of the sovereignty of politics in historical development. If salvation is going to work through history, as the Incarnation requires, then redemption is thereby intertwined with such power and tragedy; it cannot help but be if it is to reflect God's stake in our historical, especially political, experience. As he explains, "the political tasks of determining public purpose and policy are part of the reality for which we seek redemption." These can either 'welcome or resist the coming of the Kingdom' that is itself beyond politics. A "public ethic" is therefore necessary, consistent with the view of reality expressed in the faith—i.e., Babylon—lest there be an artificial division between private religion and public politics.²³⁸ Such is the "ethics of responsibility," which takes upon itself "the risks of participating in a compromised political order." While Christians of this approach do not compromise on central doctrine or the community that espouses it, they are "realistic" about the larger world, aware that "in the games of power politics they may end up with 'dirty hands.'"²³⁹

²³⁵ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 184.

²³⁶ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 61.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

²³⁹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 119.

This public ethic—which Neuhaus defines as “the interplay between explicit biblical religion and the American tradition of public piety”—is necessarily a gamble²⁴⁰: “All bets are made in the name of him whose power of forgiveness is greater than our errors.” Christians in the United States may therefore act with courage in the face of uncertainties. While one may be a pacifist, challenging the false claims of power politics, perhaps condemning the American dream as a false hope, another reluctantly uses force to defend his neighbor, uses politics to aim for the lesser rather than greater evil, and embraces the American dream for its foretaste of the kingdom. Each one, uncertain, decides on faith: “As to who is right, ‘Let no man judge before the time’ (1 Cor. 4).”

The church’s politics, then, is a “politics for the time being,” which for Neuhaus’s schema means a politics for Babylon. Referring to the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, as well as recalling Jeremiah, Neuhaus reminds Christians that as exiles in a foreign country, they “treat that foreign country as their homeland—for the time being, as everything is for the time being.” Not confusing that country and its gods with the New Jerusalem, “they accept the opportunity to play their part as citizens, albeit as dual citizens.” As such, they take part in the politics of their temporary homeland.²⁴¹ At the same time, they experience in the life of the Church a “prolepsis” of the coming kingdom, that “genuinely ‘new politics’ of the new *polis* that is the City of God.” Yet even that is “only a foretaste that whets our appetite for, and sacramentally sustains us on the way toward, that final destination.”²⁴² Hence Neuhaus’s “destination ethics” which “reaches toward the good, the hoped-for good, the good that is not yet but may become.” That good, the promised reign of God, cannot be sought apart from the world, that is, apart from history.²⁴³ But as I have demonstrated, for Neuhaus “history” is Babylon-as-history, over which disordered politics is sovereign. Any public ethic or political theology,

²⁴⁰ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 19.

²⁴¹ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 183.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁴³ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 159-162.

subject to future vindication or repudiation, must therefore begin with and operate from within that distorted order. This includes Neuhaus's own, which revolves around authenticating the American covenant. Thus, Neuhaus's project of authenticating American national identity necessarily contradicts the Messianic order the church proclaims in liturgy and practice.

Finally, Neuhaus's appropriation of the biblical narrative must be considered. Neuhaus often eschews direct appropriations of Israel for America's self-understanding (though he acknowledges their prevalence in historical discourse²⁴⁴), preferring to argue for covenant within the more general context; in fact, Israel rarely enters into the discussion. If America has a covenant, it is because America is a part, and a significant part, of creation, which in conjunction with its religious freedom—where the church is “vibrantly free to live and proclaim the Gospel to the world”—means that “America has a peculiar place in God's promises and purposes.”²⁴⁵ Yet Neuhaus makes no direct allusions to the Adamic or Noahic covenants, those usually interpreted as involving all of creation. The only covenant Neuhaus specifically alludes to is Israel's.

For instance, Neuhaus cites the Israelites as a model for America of the complementarity of self-interest and faithfulness to God: “God had inextricably tied his glory to their vindication.”²⁴⁶ And even though he is reticent to tie Israel and America directly together, he suggests any construction of American public piety is inadequate if it does not consider the covenant imagery of “the other great model in America's historical self-understanding, namely, Israel in the wilderness.”²⁴⁷ He even goes so far at one point to state that the covenant at the root of American nationhood is “the narrative of God's dealings with the People of Israel, a narrative borne through time by a society that is incorrigibly, however confusedly, Christian America.”²⁴⁸ He refers approvingly in the same work to “Lincoln's fine phrase, America is ‘an almost chosen people’”; however, three years later, he writes that “we should be uneasy even with Lincoln's

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

²⁴⁵ Neuhaus, “Christianity and Democracy.”

²⁴⁶ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 62.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 201.

²⁴⁸ Neuhaus, “Contract and Covenant.”

sharply modified claim that we are an ‘almost chosen’ people.’²⁴⁹ There, however, he is not reticent at all to draw allusions between the Christian experience in America and Israel’s experience of exile in Babylon, attempting to use Jeremiah’s instructions to seek the welfare of the city as normative for the relationship between the church and America.²⁵⁰ These passages suggest some ambiguity in Neuhaus’s understanding of America’s relation to Israel, and in the nature of the covenant connection between them. That said, to argue for a public ethic within the context of Babylonian exile necessarily entails a substantive tie to Israel’s own covenant narrative. To argue that American democratic freedom prefigures or signals the kingdom of God in a singular manner suggests a continuation of Israel’s own singular identity and mission. Like Israel, America is to signal the kingdom of God in its own, intra-communal life. And like Israel’s, American covenant is conditional, which means that “covenant does not confirm us in our righteousness or chosenness but calls us to accountability”²⁵¹; American covenant is America under transcendent judgment.²⁵²

It is this conception of divine covenant, particularly in relation to Israel, that brings up one of the most significant problems in Neuhaus’s political theology and his nationalist account of America. To put it simply, Neuhaus appropriates covenant without election. Granted, he eschews notions of election in order to resist the temptation toward American chosenness, i.e., America as the elect nation of God in direct continuity with Israel. In this, he commendably stands apart from all other cases studied in this project. However, in so disconnecting covenant from election, the latter which never enters into his political theology, he detaches covenant from its biblical moorings. It becomes an abstract and overly malleable concept, able to be fitted to

²⁴⁹ Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 24.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26, 55-57. His appropriation here is suspect, not least because he equates “city,” which in Jeremiah refers to the immediate communities in which the exiled Israelites might find themselves, with the Babylonian empire as a whole, including, presumably, its political interests. That “city” and “empire” might not constitute the same set of priorities for Israel—and thus for the church—is a possibility Neuhaus never entertains.

²⁵¹ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 169.

²⁵² Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, 24.

contexts arguably foreign to the theopolitics of biblical salvation history. Covenant becomes a product of human initiative—part of the human struggle to which God commits himself²⁵³—rather than a product of *God's* own initiating act, calling for the *people's* commitment.

A chief manifestation of this problem is Neuhaus's rejection of the past in favor of the future as judgment. The biblical notion of covenant, as explained in Chapter 4, is anchored in a historical prologue by which God's acts of deliverance were recounted in order to justify the people's allegiance. Covenant was thus a response to God's *prior* action, an affirmation of a specific calling (election) made within a specific context. As a blueprint for social order, which in Neuhaus's terms means a politics, this covenant (Torah) existed in order to spell out the manner in which election was to be embodied. The prophets appeared to Israel, not to suggest that Israel's actions may or may not be vindicated in the future, but rather to indict Israel for failing to live up to its identity previously established in election. Neuhaus effectively reverses this sequence in his political theology, appropriating covenant with no prior calling—that is, no prior warrant or mandate—as the form of America's prominent place in the Christian salvation narrative. Rather than the biblical narrative of election and covenant acting as the standard for this move, Neuhaus hopes for future vindication when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness. Advocating the American experience as covenantal is risky, vulnerable to future judgment. Yet this intertwining of narratives is for Neuhaus “the most promising gamble.”²⁵⁴ In the meantime, democratic freedom, as a sign of the future kingdom of God, prophetically safeguards covenant integrity. Those like Yoder, Hauerwas, and their students, who sharply critique defining America in this manner, “have chosen a radically different option, and only the future will reveal if they are right.”²⁵⁵ Yet the biblical text suggests the criteria of evaluation are already present.

Directly implicated in this problematic reorientation from election to an uncertain eschatological judgment is Neuhaus's realist approach to politics. As I argue in Chapter 4,

²⁵³ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 61, 164.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

Israel's election and its covenant outworking in Torah prescribed a particular theopolitical orientation over against that of the powers of its day, the power politics of the surrounding kingdoms and empires. The operative political understanding was the reign of Yahweh, which entailed its own sovereignty over the international order and was to be embodied in Israel's communal life. Upon establishing the monarchy in spite of Yahweh's reign, and upon the state centralization inherent in such a move, Israel became something *other* than what its covenant specified. Upon its own (often inept) practice of power politics, Israel was prophetically indicted precisely for that. The significance of this fact for Neuhaus cannot be overstated: Israel was not exiled *into* the necessity of "realistic" power politics, as Neuhaus appropriates the Babylon metaphor, but rather for *having already participated* in power politics contrary to its identity and mission as constituted by election and delineated in covenant. Neuhaus, having disassociated covenant from election and then, in abstraction, applied covenant to the American ecclesial context, completely misses this concept, one that effectively undermines his political theology. So when he states that "covenant does not confirm us in our righteousness or chosenness," he is correct about righteousness; however, nowhere in the biblical narrative is there national covenant without chosenness. He is quite right to reject a biblical model of election for America, but then this must preclude covenant as well. True to form for nationalist authentication, Neuhaus's intertwining of biblical and American narratives has—even inadvertently—distorted biblical theopolitics to fit his vision of America.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have taken up the nationalist discourses of Stephen H. Webb and Richard John Neuhaus, as articulated via their political theologies of providence and historical particularity, respectively. I have explained how, by contrast with the more straightforward historical accounts of Christian Right nationalism, which focuses particularly on recovering lost

practices and institutions, Webb and Neuhaus each uses political theology to authenticate American national identity via a form of exceptionalism, specifically America's special role in prefiguring the kingdom of God as promised in the Christian Scriptures. I have shown how each must distort the biblical narrative in order to justify their *a priori* nationalist commitments, and how each schema ultimately produces a syncretized narrative or doctrine of salvation history. This is the product of their attempt to authenticate American national identity, which in view of their political theologies, amounts to a problematic theopolitical "holiness" before the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have examined these political theologies, as well as the nationalist narratives in Chapter 6, as case studies demonstrating the ways in which nationalism operates as a phenomenon or set of practices apart from state or market direction, emanating not as a force of co-option from outside the church, but as an alteration of theopolitical identity from within. I have further undertaken a theopolitical analysis of them using the theopolitics of the biblical narrative as my primary criterion of evaluation. In doing these things, I have attempted to demonstrate that the theopolitical scholarship surveyed in Chapter 1, while operating from a theological orientation I affirm, requires enhancement to properly appreciate and respond to contemporary challenges to ecclesial identity.

CONCLUSION

This study began by noting that theopolitical scholarship has in the past several decades accomplished a great deal in terms of identifying and challenging those areas where ecclesial identity and mission are being either co-opted by or accommodated to the ways of the powers. I surveyed this literature in Chapter 1 because it forms the theological background to this very study; those scholars have been my teachers, and I proposed this study as an advancement of their theopolitical work. However, I also noted certain oversights in that work: (1) no robust treatment of nationalism as a phenomenon and challenge distinct from operations of the state or market, and so far as it challenges ecclesial identity and mission, emanating largely from within the church; and (2) an inability to adequately respond to the nationalist challenge given the theopolitical literature's lack of emphasis—and in some cases, neglect altogether—of the theopolitics of the biblical narrative, and especially that of Israel, as normative for the church today. The present study is therefore aimed at supplementing existing scholarship.

As such, I undertook in Chapter 2 an overview of nationalism theory in order to establish the nature and parameters of the challenge itself. This also served the purpose of directly engaging William Cavanaugh's own appropriation of nationalism scholarship, which is overly one-sided and overlooks essential nuances and practices that make nationalism such a challenge to the church, emanating as it does from *within* the church. Referring especially to the work of Anthony Smith, I argued that nationalism requires a process of deliberate construction on the part of its agents, to appropriate and reconfigure key elements of a people's beliefs and practices in order to portray a particular vision of the nation as the core their social identity. In Chapter 3, I examined the work of several scholars who have paid closer attention to this process in terms of religious—and particularly Christian—roots of nationalism in the West. I noted their links between various elements of Christian beliefs, liturgies, and practices—including and especially the biblical text and its conceptions of election and covenant—and various nationalist

movements, showing how Christian nationalism ultimately amounts to a simulacrum of the Christian faith. Authentication, that process whereby the nationalists determine and propagate the “true self” of the nation, is their pursuit of national holiness; the biblical narrative is selectively interwoven with their version of the national narrative such that the nationalist message becomes a new gospel; and the nation takes on the role of the church, calling the world to holiness in the national image and thereby prefiguring the coming kingdom of God. However, I also noted where this same nationalism scholarship does not fully appreciate the theological moves at work in this process, and must therefore attend better to Christian theology to understand precisely what is occurring in nationalist projects.

By way of providing such a theological framework of understanding, and especially a theological criterion of evaluation for Christian nationalist discourse, I provided in Chapters 4 and 5 an account of biblical theopolitics. Chapter 4 attended to the theopolitics of biblical Israel, as it was delivered from the powers of its day in order to embody Yahweh’s alternative way of life in the world, centered around his proper worship, and thereby acting as a visible sign of salvation to the nations. I recounted how Israel eventually failed in this regard, adopting rather the political practices of the surrounding kingdoms and thereby altering its own theopolitical identity. I then related how Yahweh, ever loving of his people, then provided a definitive way for covenant to be fulfilled in the form of one person who would incarnate Israel and perform perfect *hesed*. Chapter 5 identified this person as Jesus Christ, in whom both Israel and Yahweh became incarnate together, enabling the perfect fulfillment of covenant, the complete embodiment of Israel’s election identity. In so doing, Christ, faithful in his suffering, reordered the powers of the world and opened the fulfilled covenant up to all of humanity. He inaugurated the church in order to be the specific embodiment of this fulfilled covenant, the herald and sign of the truly and perfectly established reign of God in Christ, in a world that has not yet fully conformed to that reality.

Chapters 6 and 7 then took up an empirical analysis of American Christian nationalism. Chapter 6 looked at nationalist discourse by the American Christian Right, which tends toward narratives portraying America as the New Israel, or less directly as the divinely elect nation of the contemporary world chosen to save the world via its politics, economics, and culture, as well as its own innate moral goodness, if only it stays true to its true self. These narratives tend to interweave elements of the biblical narrative with those of American history and myth, resulting in a syncretized nationalist narrative that equates faithfulness to America with faithfulness to Jesus Christ, thus making American national identity a gospel imperative. The discourse examined in Chapter 7 accomplishes the same thing somewhat more subtly, filtering this syncretized narrative through political theologies that make America part and parcel of God's redemptive project. Whether through a theory of providence or of historical particularity and transcendence, these theologies locate the heart of Christ's redemptive work in the world today—or at the very least the political outworkings of that work—in the nation America and in American liberal democracy.

The nationalist discourses of these two chapters contradict the theopolitics of the biblical narrative either by de-particularizing Israel as the singular covenant nation in whom God was making his theopolitics real in the world, as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and then embodied by extension in the church; or by missing key lessons in Israel's life by which imitation of the nations and their ways of political life are seen to be directly contrary to the communal existence called for by God in election and covenant; or by ultimately supplanting the church with America as the extension of Israel and the current community prefiguring the theopolitics of the kingdom of God on earth. In any event, these nationalist discourses—which, in addition to being at odds with the biblical narrative and Christian theology, is shown in both chapters to be marked by internal inconsistencies that in some cases undermine their entire projects—all demonstrate the distortion of the Christian biblical and theological traditions that is inherent in their attempts to authenticate a certain vision of the American nation that makes a normative claim on the political

identity of Christians. As such, these accounts must be considered inconsistent with Christian discipleship in view of the theopolitics of both testaments of Scripture.

Nationalism and Theopolitics

If the account I have provided in this study is correct, then it has implications for the theopolitical scholarship surveyed in Chapter 1. Nationalism, as distinct from forces of state and market, is a phenomenon that makes problematic claims on ecclesial identity by syncretizing elements of particular theological traditions with narratives of national history and myth in order to achieve popular acceptance of, and loyalty to, a particular vision of national identity. This demonstrates both the construction and the constraint inherent in the nationalist project, although those factors arguably vary relative to each other in specific instances.

In the case of Christian nationalism, nationalist elites utilize chiefly the biblical narrative, but also other theological beliefs and liturgical practices—elements that act as both external (in terms of available materials and the “wavelength” of the people) and internal constraints (in terms of the elites’ own prior formation in those traditions) upon those elites—in order to craft *from within the church itself* an account of the nation as inherent to, and thus indispensable for, God’s cosmic project of salvation through Jesus Christ. This often involves the nation in question as the New Israel, the present incarnation of the People of God through whom the coming kingdom is to be prefigured. The nation thus displaces the church, which according to the biblical narrative is engrafted onto Israel as the embodiment of Christ’s fulfillment of covenant and opening of the “new covenant” to the nations. This means that nationalism necessarily distorts Christian theology and ecclesial identity for the sake of imagining the nation; this results in a theopolitics that rather ironically necessitates the division of the church along national lines in order to perpetuate the gospel. Ergo, Christian nationalism cannot be considered orthodox.

The theopolitical scholarship of Chapter 1 must take more careful account of this phenomenon. Its focus on state (and market) tend to leave unaddressed how in many cases such loyalties are cultivated, not to mention that the loyalties of the people may not coincide with the political apparatuses over them, and may be rooted in other types of community that the state has failed to dissolve fully. Similarly, treatments of modernity as the primary challenge to ecclesial identity tend to overlook how alterations of that identity emerge often from within the church rather than being forced upon it from without. I believe Constantinianism as defined in that chapter is perhaps a better description of the situation, since it concentrates on the church itself as the primary agent of the problem, but even there, attention to the subtleties of nationalism as a distinct phenomenon is drastically underdeveloped. This scholarship must pay greater attention to the processes of identity authentication in national politics, the deliberate interweaving and syncretism of narratives that require, not amorphous transhistorical and transcultural notions of “religion,” but rather quite particular—and necessarily distorted—faith traditions.

Moreover, this scholarship must take a more robust account of the biblical narrative as the primary source and norm for contemporary Christian theopolitics and ecclesiology. Without attention to the theopolitics of biblical Israel, as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and as extended into the church, we cannot hope today to counter adequately the claims of nationalism to the ordering of communal life among Christians and beyond, especially where it appropriates that very text to justify its vision. The church must be able to identify and directly challenge those specific points at which nationalist discourse distorts the Bible and Christian theology for its own use, in order to both truly tell the salvation narrative we are called to proclaim (Matt 28:18-20) as well as to truly embody it before the nations. Thus, while I believe the various remedies for ecclesial renewal proposed by the theopolitical scholars of Chapter 1 are quite helpful for the problems they identify, they must be supplemented by more thoroughgoing attention to the matters discussed here if they are to be more completely faithful and effective.

Moving Forward: Questions for Future Study

The present study, while containing constructive elements, has been in a largely critical vein. This is so because I have merely aimed to establish the existence and nature of a present problem where I believe that problem has been misunderstood or missed altogether. However, the argument raises other questions of how the church continues to live day to day within various other communities of residence, and even identity. I have not called for the church to leave the nations, of course, for logistical impracticalities notwithstanding, that would nullify its mission. If the church is diasporic, i.e., sent out, then there are necessarily an array of relationships in which Christians quite normally participate. The question then arises as to the relationship between relationships, that is, how ecclesial identity interacts with other claims to identity: family, local neighborhood and community of residence, country of residence, occupation or professional guild, etc. If my account is correct, then it must be that ecclesial identity does not negate these other relationships, but in some way—and perhaps rather drastically in some cases—*redefines* those relationships as reflecting the salvation narrative presumed in the church's politics. What this looks like in its various, and perhaps messy, particularities—as well as how Christians would cultivate redemptive friendship in those various contexts—would be one natural next step in research.

This brings up another question begged in part by the theopolitical chapters of this very study, namely, to what extent and in what manner is the church itself a nation? The church is a named human community with shared stories, memories, symbols, values and traditions, and historical experience. Clearly, its own shared narrative and experience entail the very claim of nationhood in some fashion. As far as language is concerned, while the vernacular differs worldwide, commonly understood terms—while translated differently—are still central to the universal life of the church. Indeed, one might find that there is more similarity in the parlance and idioms of life between churches of different local languages, than between Christians and

non-Christians sharing the same vernacular; it may be that commonality of meaning and experience is more important than the form of verbal expression. Of course, a chief exception to a notion of church-as-nation would be the matter of territory. If the church is diasporic, then it is not so much that territory is not a consideration, as that territory is specifically relativized: on the one hand, the church has no specific territory as defined by geographical or political boundaries; on the other hand, its territory is properly the whole earth. This would not satisfy social-scientific analysis, no doubt, but then perhaps nationhood and national identity are not the exclusive purviews of the social-sciences. After all, the nature of the church is first and foremost a theological question, and if the church is to be the foremost model of human community, than its nature as determined theologically would be normative for social-scientific study, rather than the other way around. It may be, in other words, that the church has something to teach the social sciences about what nationhood actually means. The church is bound by baptism, and as it has been said, perhaps water is thicker than blood.¹

These are just two immediate questions raised by this study, and many others arise as well, such as to what extent biblical theopolitics—including and beginning with that of the Old Testament—are apocalyptic, in the sense of revealing in the midst of this world hidden realities of God and God's kingdom²; or to what extent orthodox doctrine, in this case teaching of the biblical narrative, matters for shaping and forming proper ecclesial identity as juxtaposed, say with liturgical practices.³ What is clear is that the question taken up in the present study is not definitive of all theopolitical considerations, but merely addresses one specific context. The state and market are still crucial and problematic influences upon ecclesial identity and mission; I

¹ See Jana Marquerite Bennett, *Water Is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Bennett's book concerns a theology of the household, where baptism takes priority over blood relations, but it takes no great stretch of imagination to see implications of this idea for ethnic and national identity.

² See, for example, Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

³ See, for example, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

make no claim to the contrary except to state that nationalism as a distinct phenomenon must be included in the discussion as well, and may in fact adjust our understanding of the former. The fundamental concern of this study is a faithful church, and to whatever extent it has contributed to that end, it will have been worthwhile.

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