

Do we [Don. Dayton], or don't we [Jim Wallis], participate in worldly power as we live in alternative community? Some light here from my old Hebrew-and-Greek grader Norm Gottwald [RAD. REL., 3.1('76)], who also wrote the pertinent arts. in the new SUPPLEMENT VOL. TO IDB:

THE GOD-PEOPLE CONNECTION IN  
THE THEOPOLITICAL ANALOGUES

A. The God-People Connection in Israelite  
Society

In Israelite thought, the relation between Israel and God was structured broadly in the following ways:

1) God created Israel midstream in history by delivering the people from subjection to other peoples and setting them free for a life of their own (election; deliverance; national independence).

2) God and Israel entered into a structured reciprocal relationship in which both participants made commitments, but not symmetrical commitments, since God as superior party--while dependable--was not subject to criticism or sanction by Israel (covenant).

3) Israel committed itself to rightly ordered inner-societal relationships and religious obligations which were immediately sanctioned by law and ultimately sanctioned by God; these obligatory relationships coincided with egalitarian tribal social organization (tribal social structure and law).

4) The structured reciprocal relationship between God and Israel held the people under the fundamental obligations of tribal equality even after tribal social organization was undermined and destroyed by a limited monarchy and only very partially retained among small conventicles of Jews in exile and in a semi-autonomous community restored to the land (monarchy; exile; restoration; prophetic judgment).

5) God assured that the just relations begun falteringly in Israel according to tribal norms would one day be realized in Israel and among the nations, either through Israel's agency or in other ways (national eschatology; world judgment and salvation).

The above scheme is a simplification of a wide variety of paradigms of election and covenant, of mission and destiny. Such a catalog must be viewed historically so as not to overlook the mounting tensions in self-understanding as the original tribal homogeneity gave way to layers of monarchy and social stratification and to eddies and rip-tides of political collapse, dispersion and partial restoration. The connection of God with Israel was historical, social, dialectical in support and judgment, revolutionary and evolutionary, unmitigated in its insistence that just and equal human relations are the sine qua non of the humanly fulfilling presence of God.

B. The God-People Connection in U.S. Society

The relation between the United States of America and its God has been structured in ways broadly analogous to biblical theopolitics, although post-biblical elements of thought and post-biblical historical developments have strained and altered the analogy in noticeable ways:

1) God created the United States by separating it midstream in history from oppressive and corrupt European nations in order to free it for a life of its own (national independence).

2) God sanctions the U.S. on the principle of republican or democratic government (considerable differences of interpretation here), as embodied in the Constitution, likewise thought to epitomize the justice and freedom of biblical society and of the best Graeco-Roman and/or British traditions and forms of government (constitutionalism rooted in tradition and ethico-religious consensus).

3) God guarantees the national independence and integrity insofar as the nation empowers free and just relations among all its people by providing equal opportunity and legal enforcement of the norms and procedures of republican/democratic government = biblical societal norms (equal opportunity; equality under the law).

4) God upholds the U.S. through an unbroken continuity of adherence to the constitution amid all the changes from limited republican to more mass democratic government, from agrarian to industrial economics, and from continental isolation to worldwide expansion (national continuity and optimism).

5) God assures that the high material and political standards of the U.S., although periodically threatened, will be repeatedly renewed in the nation and will be spread to other nations through U.S. agency--directly or indirectly--by teaching or conquest, or by the contagion of moral example (national triumphalism).

This attempt at a rationalization of American theopolitics may seem even more problematic than the Israelite theopolitical reduction. In any case it serves as an exercise in clearer thinking than when we leave it all unsystematized and unreflected upon.

... Finally the norms of U.S. theopolitics rest in a constitution and a tradition of government which only formally and indirectly touches on social organization. Israelite theopolitical norms touched the very substance of social structure, whereas U.S. theopolitics does not touch on property relations and thus capitalism can be legitimately understood as that form of political economy which the U.S.'s God mandates. The formal silence or ambiguity on the point, however, leaves the matter in suspension.