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Daniel J. Elazar, John Kincaid, eds. *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism.* Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2000. xviii + 327 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0026-4.

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Making Good Government from Calvin to Madison

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In 1975 the late Daniel J. Elazar, a professor of political science at Temple University, established two workshops to study the "covenantal tradition" of the respective histories of ancient Israel and the United States. The first workshop was the Center for the Study of Federalism located at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The second workshop was a joint effort between the Senator N. M. Paterson Chair of Intergovernmental Relations at Bar-Ilan University, and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs in Jerusalem, both in Israel. *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism*, is the workshops' latest publication in a series of monographs, articles, working papers, and bibliographies, in English and in Hebrew, concerning covenantal political thought.

The Covenant Connection consists of fourteen essays, most of which were first delivered as papers at the Center for the Study of Federalism. Several of them also have been previously published in various academic journals. The common theme of the essays is the emphasis of covenant in the American political tradition, with historical roots leading back to the Bible through the Reformed Protestant settlers of British North America. Four chapters open the book with discussions of the importance of covenant theology to Reformed Protestantism in Switzerland and the Netherlands. The next nine chapters discuss the literary and especially political influences of covenantalism from seventeenth-century Scotland and England to colonial North America, and eventually the new countries of the United States and Canada. These chapters give particular study to the role of the English Puritans, in both Old and New England. A final chapter discusses efforts by Dutch Americans to preserve European covenant traditions amid new-world challenges and changes to old-world religious and political practices.

The book argues that there are strong biblical and Reformation influences on the American founding. In ancient history, God entered into covenants, or, as Elazar defines them, "morally sustained compacts of mutual promise and obligation" (p. 5), with the Jewish patriarchs Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The Jewish people subsequently attempted to build holy commonwealths through their covenant with God and with each other, and transmitted the idea of these original covenants to mankind. Covenant theology entered European civilization through the Swiss, the English Puritans, the Scots, the Dutch, and the Huguenots of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who were seeking a basis for the construction of a new society based upon civil liberty, "the good commonwealth" (p. 7). The struggle for church reformation and political liberty combined to produce what became known as federal theology. (Federal comes from the Latin "foedus," which means covenant.) Federal theology subsequently had religious and political constellations in northern Europe and North America. It had its greatest triumphs in the United States, where the Constitution provided for both religious liberty and an extended federal republic utilizing separation of powers, checks and balances, and a bicameral legislature.

The Covenant Connection has many strengths to recommend it. It casts new light on the European as well as the theological background to the organization of American federalism. Especially in its implicit or explicit comparisons of the United States to other countries like Britain, France, Canada, or Russia, the book frames American history in an international context, an attribute increasingly vital to our historical understanding. The essays are organized in rough chronological order, so they provide something of a narrative structure to the topic.

Since the book is principally concerned with political science, each of the fourteen authors shows how covenantalism migrated from its religious roots to political application. The first three essays focus on leading lights of the Reformation in Switzerland. J. Wayne Baker

describes the seminal thought of Heinrich Bullinger in conceiving that God's people form a political society on the basis of covenant. Thomas O. Hueglin retraces the development by Johannes Althusius of "consociational federalism," wherein socio-political life must be organized in a diversity of smaller communities that retain original authority over any chosen magistrate or centralized authority–the supremacy of popular sovereignty. Johannes Cocceius, says Charles S. McCoy, conceived of history as an unfolding of God's creation of humans in covenant as incomplete creatures who are in process of moving toward fulfillment and consummation in God. Cocceius prescribed a federal theology that would expand the scope of political participation as a fulfillment of God's plan.

Bullinger, Althusius, and Cocceius led covenant theology in envisioning a Christian covenantal state during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But in the modern era society and government are hardly uniformly or even majoritarily Christian. Calvinists in the Netherlands, England, America, and Scotland provide examples of how covenant theology influenced opponents of traditional religious states, and paved the way toward religious toleration or even modern secularism. In the Netherlands, indicates James W. Skillen, a succession of Calvinists from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries derived a uniquely Christian covenantal view of the state as a realm of tolerant public pluralism. This state was one in which Christians in their capacity as citizens acted for the sake of public justice, thereby demonstrating their commitment to God[1]s covenant with creation. Likewise, according to Charles James Butler, nationalism and religious wars created the opportunity in England for separatists like John Robinson to reject the idea of a Church of England as a "popish device" (p. 108). Thus, especially in New England, the ideal of a "Corpus Christianum" gave way in the seventeenth century to Roger Williams's plan for religious liberty. Finally, observes James B. Torrance, John Knox relied on covenantalism to argue that the concept of the divine right of kings violated the concept of a covenanted nation under God, out of which flowed the social contract between the sovereign and the people. According to W. Stanford Reid Knox was the first monarchomach, or "monarch-eater," whose covenantalism prodded him toward outright resistance to Mary Queen of Scots.

In most cases, however, advocates of covenant theology rarely had as their goal the overthrow of political authority. As additional chapters in indicate, covenantalism spurred the Puritans and their descendants toward other goals instead. These included religious reform and popular literature in England, the "great migration" to America, and ultimately the system of government under the American federal constitution. Michael McGiffert traces how Puritans in Elizabethan England directed their zeal not against the monarch but toward general moral and spiritual reformation of the realm. Under the name of the covenant of works ("foedus operum"), Puritans attempted to bring the entirety of the nation, "every son of Adam and daughter of Eve," (p. 175) within the covenant of grace in Christ. The covenant of works would produce national virtue by advancing personal and public reform. Harold Fisch, who uses Shakespeare's plays to show the diffusion of covenant motifs in seventeenth-century English culture, suggests the effects of this crusade. *Measure for Measure*, for example, dramatizes the solemnity of the social contract and the susceptibility of a "precisian," that is, a Puritan, to the temptations of power.

A minority of Puritans decided that a holy commonwealth could be built only in the New World. John Peacock argues that the Puritan community of New England marked a transition from medieval to modern times. It did so by conceiving of a new body politic dedicated not to maintaining hierarchy, but to fulfilling conditions specified by members of the community to accommodate "every individual's pursuit of happiness" (p. 215). Thus, John Winthrop's *Modell of Christian Charity*, for Peacock, is a sermon that anticipates the New World's new need to reconcile commerce and charity, political freedom and divine commandment. That same ambivalence, according to Donald S. Lutz, was behind the political ideology of the early American nation. Lutz's research into the early state constitutions reveals that the first U.S. citizens were committed not to individualism but to communitarianism. They therefore reserved few rights, save the right to a free conscience and the right to self-government, from possible withholding by state governments acting, if necessary, in the name of the people. Civil society was conceived in terms of the federal covenant, with no room for interest-group politics.

This last statement reminds us that the federal framework for the U.S. Constitution was as much a transcendence of the political thought of the states as it was of European political thought. Daniel J. Elazar writes that the Constitution created "a number of permanent points of tension" (p. 251) that would limit the spread of interest groups or "factions." The Framers, most of whom were not particularly religious, utilized the covenant principle in terms of what we might call a "contract," that is, as James B. Torrance notes in his essay on Scottish theology, "a legal relationship in which people or parties bind themselves together on mutual conditions to effect

some future result" (p. 146). In modern political vocabulary, "federalism," defined as the relationship between the central and state or provincial governments, thus has come to have little to do with the original meaning of "covenant," which Torrance defines as "a promise binding people or parties to love one another unconditionally" (p. 146).

The book closes with two essays detailing situations where covenant theology has not prepared the way for a harmonious civil society. Filippo Sabetti writes about friction between English and French Canadians over Canadian federalism, especially as it relates to the latter[1]s fear of assimilation. He sees this friction as a legacy of the failure by British imperial authorities to truly embrace the idea of covenant in establishing the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Canada isn't a "success story" in terms of its covenantal framework providing the basis for a common political nationality. This makes the American political experience, Sabetti implies, more impressive. James D. Bratt indicates that the French Canadians' dilemma may have been replicated in the United States, if with less national controversy, among Dutch American communities in the mid-West associated with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the western sections of the Reformed Church of America (RCA). Bratt shows how Dutch Americans embraced "covenant living" (p. 292) as a shield against immersion in the American religious environment of liberalism and fundamentalism. Such "covenant living" served dual purposes. It provided means of dialogue between Dutch Americans and outside religious and ethnic groups, for instance, with fundamentalists over their shared belief in biblical infallibility, and with Eastern European immigrants over their shared emphasis on family values. Yet "covenant living" also provided a framework for the continuing cohesiveness of the Dutch American community.

There are some shortcomings to *The Covenant Connection.* The book's publication was originally scheduled for 1985, but was delayed for technical reasons until 2000. Because of this delay, it contains a few anachronisms and omissions. Donald S. Lutz uses a covenantalist argument to urge passage of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. The ERA was a compelling issue twenty-five years ago, but it isn't so now. Filippo Sabetti laments the state of Canadian federalism as of 1981, and so we are left to wonder what his opinion would be of the new 1982 Constitution and the 1997 Amendment giving Quebec authority to determine the system of education used there for the purpose of maintaining usage of the French language.

This reviewer is also left with the question of whether American federalism today is the continuing success story that Sabetti maintains it is. Daniel Elazar speaks of a covenantal hegemony in the United States: "The federal principle sets the tone for American civil society, making it a society of balanced interests with equalitarian overtones" (p. 252). But as the United States becomes more multicultural, its citizens have less political, ethnic, and religious connection with the Bible, the Reformation, and their covenantal-federal political legacy. The traditional relationship between the central and state/provincial governments is also changing. *The Covenant Connection* is a welcome contribution to the international and theological history of American federalism. It contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the theme of American "exceptionalism." But the extent to which it helps us understand contemporary American political culture is not certain.

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