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Chapter 7

RETURNING TO THE CENTRALITY OF RELIGION

The question of the origins of any ethnic group and, by extension, any nation is rarely if ever susceptible of a straightforward answer. Once they have achieved a degree of collective identity most social groups, including nation-states, generate their own myths of origin which offer one kind of straightforward answer.¹

The scholarly emphasis upon the centrality of religion (and the religious importance of the Jerusalem temple) ignores the more likely role that religion played in Yehud during the Persian period: providing a mechanism for paranoid self-preservation. *And isn't that in all religions a reflection of the conservative tendency?* Too often one finds in biblical interpretations and academic reconstructions an assumption that religion was the savior, that it reached victoriously into the heart of chaos and pulled from its clutches a remnant. That it alone withstood the throes of history by creating a bulwark, a defensive institutional structure capable of universal appeal and application. Put bluntly, this perception and its overly eager employment within academic and popular discourse is certainly a Western guilt, as much of postcolonial biblical criticism has already pointed out. It falls in that imperialist vein of, *You must change, become like me, to receive salvation*. Religion as the “savior” from without is nearly wholesale an idea from colonial discourse.² And all too often, it is posited as the institutional axis connecting the historical pathways of Israel, Judah, and Yehud. *One culture! One people! One God!* There is often a secret presupposition here, of course, that there exists a divine “big Other” capable of working through and within history. Or even more simply that the Bible innately holds unique historical value that transcends those historical and cultural values upon which it was created. One may see evidence of this not always

1. Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase*, 12.

2. Cf. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 41–47.

in a positive manner but at times in a negative one wherein monotheism is proclaimed a successful product of higher-order thinking or rationalism. Even academic histories of Persian-period Yehud all too often construct their arguments based upon a positivistic view of the biblical texts and the cult they portray. Perhaps in this there is an (un)conscious attempt to cover over monotheism's more disreputable past, where monotheism was not the savant of the religious world but its bully.

What if, on the other hand, one looked at the religious posturings portrayed in the biblical texts as those motivated by deeply held anxieties? That is certainly what this present work has done. What would that mean for our understanding of the historical social-political context of Yehud during the Persian and later historical periods? What would that mean for modern biblical interpretation? This chapter will provide some answers to those necessary questions.

The Problematic Dichotomization of Religion and Society in Ancient Israel

Here is an assertion that may find agreement with some readers: If we reject as irrefutable the proposed dichotomy between religion and society—such a dichotomy is the product of the modern, Western mind—then we must also reject the idea that the biblical texts were primarily concerned about a divine-human relationship. The Bible is not a story about God but a story about a people held together by a desire for “restoration” in the form of land and authority over it. In that sense, the texts that constitute the Bible are cultural artifacts. But let's be clear about our purpose here, this isn't an argument for the non-/existence of God; in fact, it can remain gleefully agnostic about the whole affair. *Let God exist; that's fine.* It does, however, assume that underlying assumptions about the social (and universal) distinction of religion unfairly isolate, to varying degrees, religious developments out of social-political changes—institutional, ideological, and otherwise—historical particularities upon which it desperately depends. In other words, religious beliefs and behaviors are not autonomous of the society that they benefit. What this means for us here is that we cannot talk about religion in Yehud without trying to account for the dominant social-political institutions and issues that drove the culture of the province and its material production. We cannot talk about religion without talking about the society that it benefits, and monotheism *always* depends upon the society it rejects.

An additional point must be addressed. Take an example from the late Robert Bellah, who wrote in his *magnum opus*,

Many scholars ask whether the very word “religion” is too culture-bound to be used in historical and cross-cultural comparison today. I cannot avoid the question, but for practical purposes I will use the term, because for the philosophical and sociological traditions upon which this book draws, the idea of religion has been central. The justification for its use will depend more on the persuasiveness of the argument of the book as a whole than on a definition; nonetheless definitions help to get things started... I will begin with a simplified Durkheimian definition...: Religion is a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those who adhere to them in a moral community. Even this simple definition raises immediately a second definitional issue: What is the sacred?³

Our answer to Bellah’s last question—What is the sacred?—has served as a motivation throughout this work. “Sacred” preserves the stability of the normative order. In other words, the productive desire behind definitions of “sacred,” if we are capable of finding any reason consistent across cultures and their religious expressions, is the desire for equilibrium or, more explicitly, a confident bulwark against anomy. Within that is found the preservation of legitimated morals and ethics that are consistent with the collective view of an orderly world. Support for that sentiment is found in sociologist Jeffrey Alexander’s work: “Norms provide standards for moral judgment. What is defined as evil in any historical period provides the most transcendental content for such judgments. What Kant called radical evil, and what I would call here, drawing on Durkheim, sacred-evil, refers to something considered absolutely essential to defining the good ‘in our time.’”⁴ Likewise, that something is found even in Mary Douglas’s summary of Durkheim:

So we find Durkheim insisting that rules of separation are the distinguishing marks of the sacred, the polar opposite of the profane. He then is led by his argument into asking why the sacred should be contagious. This he answers by reference to the fictive, abstract nature of religious entities. They are merely ideas awakened by the experience of society, merely collective ideas projected outwards, mere expressions of morality. Even the graven images of gods are only the material emblems of immaterial forces generated by the social process. Therefore they are ultimately rootless, fluid, liable to become unfocused and to flow into other experiences. It is their nature always to be in danger of losing their distinctive and necessary character. The sacred needs to be continually hedged in with prohibitions. The sacred must always be treated as contagious because relations with it are bound to be expressed

3. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, 1.

4. Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67.

by rituals of separation and demarcation and by beliefs in danger of crossing forbidden boundaries.⁵

The fundamental motivation behind projection as an act of defining the collective self is the fear of an ideological death, or the loss of collective identity.⁶ *I project upon an external object my bad experiences.* There is a similar motivation behind, for comparative example, more modern forms of nationalism and, in the case of the United States, the corresponding form(s) of civil religion that developed in its wake.⁷ Shared motivation led to a blending of ideological conviction, such as of “religious nationalism,” of which Roger Friedland wrote:

Religious nationalism is about both values and things, the one through the other. It is about both recognition of a new collective subjectivity and the redistribution of sources. Religious nationalisms are maintained by a family drama: they all center their fierce energies on the family, its erotic energies, its gendered order. This is because the institutional logic of religion centers on the order of creation, locating humanness in the cosmos, replicating cosmology through ritual, a practical metaphysics that necessarily points before life and after death.⁸

5. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 26–27. One might also see the work of M. Eliade, who maintains a similar understanding of “sacred” in *The Sacred and the Profane*.

6. J. Shields cites Gabriel Almond as describing the nature of fundamentalist religious groups, whose concerns are often primarily the preservation of stability, this way: “[Fundamentalism is] a discernible pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors” (*Democratic Virtues*, 12).

7. R. Beiner defines “civil religion” as, “a theme in the history of political thought that concerns the political unity of religion. Religion, from this view, is seen as supplying an essential basis for civic ties and obligations” (“Religion, Civil,” in *Political Philosophy: Theories, Thinkers, and Concepts*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset [Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001], 157). The strong link between national identity and religious identity in the United States was summarized thus by Hargis in 1960: “America is a Christian country. The men and women who braved an uncharted wilderness to carve out this Republic, were rich in faith. With a Bible under one arm, and a musket under the other, they were willing to fight for their faith and their freedom” (cited in Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, Digital [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 41).

8. Roger Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 134.

Note his observation that the institutional logic of religion centers on the order of creation and categorical actions, such as ritual and replication, that support that order. His use of “replication” of cosmology can be better clarified via Deleuze, who writes, “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it.”⁹ The reality of the object, in this case the order of creation as object, must be internalized within the mind of the individual for the sake of a stable social-political world. This is what Berger meant when he wrote, “Internalization, then, implies that the objective facticity of the social world becomes a subjective facticity as well. The individual encounters the institutions as *data* of the objective world outside himself, but they are now *data* of his own consciousness as well.”¹⁰

What we might take from this illustrative tangent is that when one says that the biblical texts preserve the cultural world, that statement is true to an extent. But what one should really say is that the biblical texts, especially those of the Persian and later periods, reflect an attempt to *create* an ordered world. This world is summarized in one word, “restoration.” The world that Ezra–Nehemiah, for example, envisions, where a radical distinction exists between insider and outsider and the Mosaic law is the primary system for governance, *is not one that existed*. It was a utopian ideal.¹¹ It is easy enough to accept that conclusion. It is more difficult to understand the impact of the surrounding social-political world upon the ideological formation portrayed in the biblical texts. The textual attempt to convince us that the land was empty, and to obscure the fact that the identities of the returnees were shaped by their interpersonal engagements with the people already in the land, is not convincing to the discerning mind.

But let us return to the problematic dichotomization of religion and society within the ancient world. Perhaps this has been due in part to the colonial and some postcolonial discourse on the dichotomization of core and periphery. As Jon Berquist noted, that dichotomization has been useful and I would add will still be useful.¹² But we are reminded of Donati’s point regarding the simplest form of relation, the binary relation, discussed in the previous chapter. Gross reduction of relations into overly simplistic dichotomized categories sweeps the inherent complexities of any social

9. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70.

10. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 17.

11. See also my “Whispered Utopia: Dreams, Agendas, and Theocratic Aspirations in Persian-Period Yehud,” *SJOT* 24, no. 1 (2010): 53–70.

12. Berquist, “Constructions of Identity,” 61.

relation “under the rug,” so to speak. Reductions of this nature in biblical studies have resulted in scholarly analyses reconstructing the identity of those immigrating into Yehud (Ezra–Nehemiah’s *golah* community, for example) as primarily a religious community whose foremost desire, though with distractions (note Haggai), was reconstructing the religious cult and the Jerusalem temple as the central core of a restored nation. Thus, many have taken as a given that the primary concern of the biblical texts was, and is, about the divine–human relationship.

This explains, for instance, Morris Jastrow et al.’s position that “Deuteronomy marks the beginning of canon; religion becomes a book religion, an object of study, a theology. The people know what they may expect if they keep the Law. Religion assumes the nature of a covenant, a contract, and the doctrine of retribution becomes paramount.”¹³ The problem is with the centralization of the biblical text in the formation of religious identity. It did not, could not, become central *without* influence from without the community. Theology, whose object is the categorization of the abstract, has no inherent magnetism and no essential *raison d’être* in and of itself. The essential nature of theology is a response to uncertainties relative to the group or individual—that is why God and gods are so intimately linked with order and disorder, and why theology seeks to expose divine mechanisms for preserving social-political order. Deuteronomy does not represent the beginning of canon, as Jastrow et al. put it, as though it marked the basis of a theological enterprise as a fulfilling endeavor. The biblical texts became central because they offered a mechanism for alleviating anxieties. Along these lines, Blenkinsopp’s proposal, to which we will turn in a later section, was closer to the actual state of affairs in its argument that sectarianism was the driving force behind the prioritization of certain biblical texts and their ideals. Nevertheless, he too depends too much on the centrality of religion as something distinct and isolatable from more general social-political practice and behavior.¹⁴

13. Morris Jastrow Jr., et al., “Deuteronomy,” 2002. N.p. Online: http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_friendly.jsp?artid=292&letter=D.

14. A similar issue can be seen in J. Berquist’s argument: “This immigrant class eventually became the group that defined nascent Judaism and shaped its substance and practice over the next centuries. Because of this group’s political loyalty to and dependence upon Persia, it increasingly defined Yehud’s distinctiveness as a religious function; politically, Yehud was a colony within someone else’s empire; religiously, however, Yehud was separate and autonomous, connected in a special way to its God and through God to each other” (*Judaism in Persia’s Shadow*, 140).

What then of the development of the idea of canon? The primary motivation was not theological.¹⁵ Scribes did not create a Bible because they shared strong strictly theological motivations. The overwhelming emphasis upon divine selection of a particular ethnic group, which is increasingly refined throughout the text, betrays a more socially selfish intent of self-preservation.¹⁶ It reflected a fear of the loss of the distinctiveness of the community's collective identity. *If we cannot identify ourselves as the "remnant," then who are we?*

There is *always* an underlying motivation behind religious behavior—a point that is clearly seen in “fundamentalist” individuals and groups. Lisa van Houten of the American Decency Association, for modern example, decried President Obama's July 21, 2014 executive order barring federal contractors from discriminating against LGBT+ individuals by comparing Obama to Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who took Judeans into exile. “There is no good news in our government affirming a lifestyle that leads to destruction. As greater discrimination and even persecution comes, may you and I not bow to Nebuchadnezzar, but stand for what is faithful and true.”¹⁷ The underlying fear is the erosion of society through

15. C. Meyers, for example, writes regarding matters of gender outside theology, “It should not surprise us that the known female roles in Israelite religious life are the public ones, because the canonical source is largely concerned with public and institutional matters” (*Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 160).

16. J. Neusner and T. Sonn point out that in contrast to Christianity Judaism and Islam are both primarily concerned with social-political existence: “But Judaism and Islam tell themselves the story of origins within the framework of the godly state, the Israel called into being by God at Sinai through the prophet Moses, for example, being instructed about constructing courts and settling claims of damages for the goring ox, not only building a tabernacle and setting up an altar for offerings to God. Islam from the beginning understood itself as a political entity, with realization of the divine will through revealed law as its reason for existence. For its part, Christianity spent three centuries without thinking a great deal about law beyond the realm of Church order, paying slight attention, except as victim, to matters of public policy and politics. Then, from the time of Constantine, while aspiring to infuse politics with its vision, Christianity recognized a distinction between the state and the church that Judaism and Islam never contemplated and could never have conceived. That is why the halakhah for Judaism and Shari’a for Islam find no counterpart in a uniform legal code joining civil to canon law in Christianity” (*Comparing Religions Through Law: Judaism and Islam* [London: Routledge, 1999], 5).

17. In her online article, “An ENDA to Religious Liberty,” American Decency Association, July 25, 2014. Online: http://americandecency.org/full_article.php?article_no=2890, viewed 8/7/2014.

the breakdown of normative order and a corresponding threat to the Christian identity and way of life. It was a similar type of fear, though under different historical circumstances, that motivated the authors and editors of the biblical texts. Our point is this: the Bible was not written solely for the sake of the betterment of human beings. The discriminating reader will recognize how this conclusion will be different from those who hold a more conservative attitude regarding the Bible. It was a product of its cultures, groups that feared for the loss of cultural identity absent any control over the social-political context. Our approach to the relationship between the Bible and the social-political context of Yehud cannot treat the Bible as a central “pillar” of its historical social-political context. It is a cultural artifact that portrays a unique perspective on that context: a perspective of a minority driven by the concerns of a minority, which include overturning the dominant structures that define the minority as one marginalized (and not one in a position of authority). *We shall overcome.*

Problematic Reconstructions

[T]here has never been a single, unitary and linear Judaism.¹⁸

Likewise, there has been a number, and it continues to grow, of attempted sociological reconstructions of Yehud that have used some variation of a colonization model.¹⁹ It is an unburdened approach; it nods at a deeper sociological understanding but doesn’t commit. But arguments that the *golah* community colonized Yehud make problematic the assumption that the province was ripe for colonization—a fertile womb yearning for impregnation. One can’t help but be reminded of the old adage, if it seems too good to be true... Instead, it makes better sense to read the biblical texts as reflections of a collective anxiety—the reaction of an immigrating community despairing in its sense of place. Scholarly arguments that assume the existence of a colony established by the returnees must typically depend upon two presuppositions: (1) that the land was either empty, or devoid of any real unique social-political organization; (2) that the colonizers maintained direct relations and correspondences with the Judeans who remained in Babylonia, the latter who functioned as communal authorities.

18. Jacob Neusner, “Exile and Return as the History of Judaism,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 223.

19. Cf. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow*, 140; Bedford, “Diaspora,” 158. See also Kessler (“Persia’s Loyal Yahwists,” 99), who argues that the Judeans returning from Babylonia constituted a charter group.

Take, for example, Peter Bedford's statement: "[T]he community of repatriates is not in a position to develop an identity independent of its parent diaspora community. The repatriates do not operate independently of the Babylonian-Persian diaspora for the two form a single people, albeit in an unequal relationship of parent community and colony."²⁰ Even John Kessler's argument for a "charter group" is at heart no different from what many scholars consider the function of a colony. He builds off the work of John Porter while classifying the immigrant community as a "non-indigenous, enfranchised elite."²¹ "[John Porter] defines a 'Charter Group' as an ethnic elite which moves into a geographical region, establishes its power base, and creates a sociological and cultural structure distinct from that which already exists in that region."²²

This emphasis upon a charter group necessitates the possibility of what might be termed "free creation" within the social-political context. In other words, it assumes that within Yehud already existing social-political power structures were not integrated into the life of the province well enough to prevent being replaced easily by new ones. It assumes also that the social-political vision of the community could be imagined without having to develop strategies (revolutionary or otherwise) of restructuring the dominant normative order and its concomitant sphere of social-political institutions. This is precisely the point where many academic arguments ensnare themselves: the assumption that even if people were already in the land that the removal of past members of the aristocracy with the Babylonian exiles crippled the land, leaving it panting for the glorious return of its "real" aristocracy.²³ Even those scholars who use the

20. Bedford, "Diaspora," 158. Berquist argued earlier than Bedford that the colonial relationship shaped the urban and power landscape of Yehud: "The reorganization of Yehud shifted the bases of political power as well as the culture of the colony, producing a predominance of influence among those with experiences in Babylonian and Persia. These new occupants of Yehud possessed a larger worldview and perhaps shared their cultural assumptions and attitudes more with the non-Yehudites of their regions of origin than with the inhabitants of Yehud where they now lived" (*Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 140). But note that Berquist has since reevaluated his original argument in "Constructions of Identity," 61.

21. Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists," 105.

22. *Ibid.*, 99.

23. See H. Barstad, who wrote, "By bringing the aristocracy of Judah into exile, Nebuchadnezzar in fact removed its statehood, which was identical with the royal family and the upper classes... The Judean state was then replaced with a Neo-Babylonian state. This would have but little effect on national production in Judah, where life soon would have 'returned to normal'" ("After the 'Myth of the Empty Land,'" 3-4).

patriarchal family as the sociological model for the state are guilty. It is as though, to put it metaphorically, the loss of the patriarch leaves the family wistful and aimless, hoping to scrape by on the materials the patriarch left behind. A naïve sociological understanding, indeed! One need only look at the family, to continue the metaphor, to see that if the patriarch is absent, another from within will take his place—often the eldest son. *Wasn't that the tortured truth at the heart of Shakespeare's plays?* Even in the ancient world, the systems of production were not directly dependent upon the individual or class. If one king died, for example, another could easily take his place. It is likely that the majority wouldn't even feel an interruption in the overall production of the community. With the removal of the aristocracy, or only members of it, by the Babylonians, we can be fairly confident that a new one took its place and preserved the general pattern of production. Or one might even see a more modern metaphor in the conflict between Israel and Palestine: Israel's week-long shelling in August 2014 was part of a several-month conflict that resulted in over 1800 people being killed and destroyed a number of economic centers.²⁴ Despite the event, the people of Gaza, while recovering from the shock, are still participating within the systems and processes of production that define their territory. If a new group were to immigrate into Gaza, it would have to combat the extant systems of production, even if they are tattered, in order to construct a new distributed system of relations and a dominant power hierarchy. Likewise, scholars who see an ease with which Judeans from Babylonia could establish or restructure the operative systems of (desire) production are guilty of buying into the biblical portrayal of the world: there exists the remnant and a grossly reduced, simplified, inept, minion-esque "other."

Take Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers' statement, for example:

For the Yehudites, the Persian decrees assured that God's house in Jerusalem would be functional once again. This meant the return of civil government and economic development to the priestly sphere, for the permitted restoration of the temple and its organization was not accompanied by permission to reinstitute the monarchic government that had been the integral accompaniment of the central Israelite shrine since the days of David and Solomon.²⁵

24. Cf. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/03/world/meast/mideast-crisis/>.

25. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 335. This position was also articulated earlier by Roland de Vaux and John McHugh, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (New York: McGraw–Hill, 1961), 98.

The underlying assumptions there, which are still shared by many scholars, are that the remnant represented the social context of Yehud, that Yehud was knowable through the remnant's identity,²⁶ that the Persian decrees which prioritize the *golah* community, as Ezra–Nehemiah designates it, were historically real, and that the symmetry between social-political relations was not between the aspirations of the immigrant group and the extant social-political context but between the immigrant group and the “pre-exilic” social-political context—as though the time in between left Yehud unproductive, like the general Protestant view of the “intertestamental period.” Yet this last was also ideal. The exact relation of the Jerusalem cult to the political authority has been largely obscured by the idealistic interpretations of the biblical authors. *Did the cult have political authority? Well, the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt.* As one writer remarked about such idealistic tendencies, “[T]he transition from chiefdom to a monarchy with a strong central government, such as the mighty kingdom and the intensive building activity attributed to Solomon in the biblical account, does not find expression in the material record at Jerusalem, and limited expression in the outlying areas.”²⁷

Let's return to the original point of this section: How should we understand the attitude of the immigrant community if it itself was not a colonizer? Or perhaps that question is phrased poorly. One could very effectively and rightly argue that the biblical texts reflect a colonizing attitude. But one could not argue well due to the lack of sufficient evidence that the group was an *effective* colonizer. The point is that we must understand how the attitudes and beliefs of the group were developed within the multivalent cultural context of Yehud. George Mendenhall put it this way:

Over the next century, other Judaeans traditionalists would seek to establish additional formal criteria to define social and cultural boundaries increasingly considered sacrosanct. Among these were commitments to temple ritual and the Jerusalem priesthood, to dietary laws, to circumcision, to Hebrew names and language, to Sabbath observance and other sacred holidays, to the avoidance of pronouncing the name of “Yahweh,” and to

26. In this case, note also the term “Yehudites,” used frequently to denote the inhabiting “remnant” community, as a gentile adjective that borders on political identification.

27. Margaret M. Gelinas, *United Monarchy—Divided Monarchy: Fact or Fiction?*, ed. Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 228–29.

the social application of the Torah as enforced law. They were so successful in this endeavor that by the first century A.D. these traits had become part of the distinctive hallmark of Judaeen religion (i.e., Judaism) and among the most tangible emblems of Judaeen identity.²⁸

The question is, Why? What was the motivation behind the series of events that led to the centralization of monotheistic behavior, ritualistic and other, and attitudes? Our argument has been that that question is best answered in the social-political insecurities—the threat of irrelevance—of the “returnees,” which became shared more largely along with the continual shift in power from the Persians to the Greeks to the Romans. Theories that preserve the centrality of religion as an institution within the social-political context of Yehud grossly reduce the real diversity and complexity of the environment into the ideological wish—restoration—of a minority struggling to find its place. This work has pulled back the scab to reveal the underlying complexity of life trying to save itself.

Joseph Blenkinsopp’s “Sectarian Phase”

Despite its shortcomings, Blenkinsopp’s proposal that sectarianism shaped the biblical texts and their accompanying religious ideologies was erudite:

My...proposition is that in this conflict over continuity and discontinuity with the past the strongest impulse came at that time, and continued to come, from the Babylonian diaspora, and that its principle embodiment was the group whose ideology is presented in the canonical book Ezra–Nehemiah. This impulse was explicitly religious, generated in the first place by an interpretation of the disaster as the climax of a history of religious infidelity. One of the most important aspects of the ideology was a strong ritualization of social interaction, not only between Jewish communities and the external environment but among the communities themselves.²⁹

Blenkinsopp is after the origin of the sectarian thinking that shaped the Hasmonean and later periods, which was characteristic of the multifaceted religious-social context in Palestine during the first century CE.³⁰ Put more baldly, his objective is an exposé on the origin of Judaism, which he situates within the Persian period in contrast to others who link

28. Mendenhall, *Ancient Israel’s Faith and History*, 195–96.

29. Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase*, 229.

30. Cf. *ibid.*, 11.

it to the Hellenistic or Hasmonean periods.³¹ And within that, he seeks out the general formation of Jewish collective identity. "The liquidation of the nation-state and the beginning of the homeland-diaspora polarity created a new situation which problematized the status of those who had, up until then, defined themselves with reference to the kingdom of Judah."³² He finds within the biblical texts an increasing amount of polarity at the base of the distinction between member and nonmember in Persian-period Yehud. This polarity, especially in light of the continuing lack of a "restored" nation-state, increased in terms of parties, politics, and religious polemics under the successive empires, Persian, Ptolemaic, and Seleucid.³³ Thus, a sectarian approach accounts for the plurality of ideologies while emphasizing the victory of one over the others:

The problems facing us in attempting to say anything about Jewish origins will be apparent when we take into account the proliferation of movements, parties, and ideologies and the different ways of periodizing the past in recent scholarship on ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism, a confusing situation exacerbated by the discovery and publication of the Qumran texts. One attempt at alleviating or circumventing the problem which has become quite popular in recent years is to postulate a plurality of Judaisms.³⁴

Conflict brought on by continuity and discontinuity provided the impulse for sectarian thinking, the strongest impulse for which came during the Babylonian exiles.³⁵ "The most distinctive form assumed by this ritual ethnicity is associated with the persons Ezra and Nehemiah as presented in the canonical book. Both attempted, each in his own sphere of activity, to translate their religious convictions into social and political reality."³⁶ For Blenkinsopp, in other words, religion was the driving force behind the production of the exclusive collective identity of the remnant community. He maintains that that clarifies the rationale behind the purpose of the canonized form of Ezra–Nehemiah: "to promote a particular understanding of Israel, the agenda of a particular party, and an ideology imported from the Babylonian diaspora which drew its

31. Cf. Garbini, *Myth and History*, 100; Israel Eph'al, "Syria-Palestine Under Achaemenid Rule," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 4, *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean, c. 525 to 479 B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, et al., 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 158.

32. Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase*, 22.

33. *Ibid.*, 42.

34. *Ibid.*, 13.

35. *Ibid.*, 229.

36. *Ibid.*

inspiration primarily from certain aspects of Deuteronomic theology and the ‘law of the temple’ (*tôrat habbayit*) in Ezekiel 40–48.”³⁷

This view is not without its cognates. Like Berquist, who we discussed previously, Blenkinsopp views the returnees as a colonizing group linked to the Judeans who remained in Babylon.

[T]he arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah in the province of Judah represented not so much a ‘return to Zion’ but a kind of diaspora in reverse from the parent body in southern Mesopotamia, a religious colonization with a definite religious agenda, namely the creation of a self-segregated, ritually pure society inspired by the new temple and new society profiled in Ezekiel’s vision and elaborated by his disciples in the diaspora. I have argued that this agenda had much in common with the sectarianism of the late Second Temple period.³⁸

But the problem is in the emphasis that Blenkinsopp puts upon religion as the driving factor behind the immigration of the returnees. This “missionary” approach, a type of ideological imperialism, necessitates that the source of social-cultural stability, the “home context,” be found in the Babylonian diaspora communities. To put it differently, religious motivation for structural change is impossible without a stabilized “home” context, the “parent body,” from which the community’s beliefs and rituals were legitimated. The immigrating community must come in with an already fundamentalist, constructivist belief that the values of the group are objectively true. Blenkinsopp expresses the attributes of that type of belief well,

The *golah* therefore corresponds to the introversionist type of sect by virtue of its self-segregation not only from the Gentile world but also from other Jews who did not share its theology and agenda. Its claim to be the exclusive embodiment of the Israel of the predisaster period is exhibited in the language in which it describes itself. It is “the holy seed” (Ezra 9:2), “the seed of Israel” (Neh 9:2), “the remnant of Israel” or “Israel” *tout court*... It is sectarian not in breaking away from the parent body...but in claiming the right to constitute Israel to the exclusion of other claimants.³⁹

Blenkinsopp assumes that the immigrating community came into Yehud with an already developed collective identity, which was based on the stability of the “home” group culture. Consequently, conflict between the people already in the land and the immigrating community was a product

37. Ibid., 160.

38. Ibid., 229.

39. Ibid., 199.

of ideological disagreement, the sort of which, for parallel, European missionaries were guilty. *The blueprint for a stabilized world is ours, everything else is chaos.*

That the envisioned society, the glorious crown of restoration, was still a work in progress is evident in that the community was subject to foreign rule. "Subjection to foreign rule indefinitely postponed the realization of the ideal polity, and was therefore basically unacceptable."⁴⁰ Certainly the biblical texts allow for Yahweh's use of foreign powers—Deutero-Isaiah is a prime example of this—but hope lay in the eventual removal of foreign overlordship. That this ideal society was not yet manifest demands that one question the real impact of the ideological agenda of the community. In other words, it seems more likely that the identity of the community *must* take into account the intra-provincial influences originating with the people already in the land. What was to be *golah* identity in Ezra–Nehemiah, for example, was not a product of any parent–child type of relationship between Babylonian Judeans and the Judean immigrants. "*Golah*" was not an identity whose articulation was to be found in the relationship between a parent community and the immigrating one. It was a product of the social, political, and religious forces that were operative within the province itself. In other words, the identity of the returnee community was one fashioned not in the furnace of Babylon but in the fires of Yehud.

Like others, Blenkinsopp when describing the context of Yehud through Ezra–Nehemiah depends upon the *golah* community's continued relationship to the community in Babylonia. To note:

Nehemiah is presented not only as a member of the upper-class *golah* segment of the population but also as an exponent of the rigorist legalism which characterized Ezra and his associates. This quasi-sectarian orientation, with its roots in the eastern diaspora and its orientation heavily dependent upon Deuteronomistic theology and the teaching of Ezekiel and his school, was a significant factor in Nehemiah's conflictual relations with the lay and especially the priestly aristocracy in the province. His ejection of Tobiah from the temple precincts and ritual purification of the space he had occupied (13:4–9) is one pointer in this direction.⁴¹

Though one might be tempted to take Blenkinsopp's description as strong support for an argument that the *golah* community was the aristocracy in Yehud, one should avoid doing so. It is possible that

40. Ibid., 158.

41. Ibid., 115.

members of those who immigrated, who may also have been members of the laity or the priesthood, integrated themselves into the landed aristocracy. Yet unless we wish to maintain the existence of an “empty land” prior to the arrival of the *golah* community, we cannot assume that the immigrants were the new aristocracy, whether by virtue of their own charisma and claim to Yahweh or through the support of the Persian Empire. Such arguments are highly problematic in that they generate conclusions based on problematic sociological methodological analyses. Unfortunately, Blenkinsopp tends toward this route, especially in his belief that Nehemiah “secured the autonomy of Judah within the Persian Empire.”⁴² Yet to accept that, one must also accept that the imperial government handled Yehud uniquely.⁴³ But the problematic biblical portrayal of the imperial attitude toward Yehud and Jerusalem was driven by an overwhelming emphasis upon restoration. Ezra–Nehemiah’s descriptions, for example, border on the utopian as they present a constructivist narrative, the intent of which was to offer a blueprint for a new social-political order. That utopian agenda offers better social-political explanation for the events under the Maccabees:

The Maccabees, Nehemiah’s heirs, saved Judaism from distinction, at least in Judah; but having achieved independence and territorial integrity, they went on to pursue a policy of territorial expansion at the expense of the Samaritans, Galileans, Idumeans, and others in the endless wars of John Hyrcanus and his son Alexander Jannaeus (135–176 B.C.). To represent the coercive incorporation of neighboring peoples and tribes into the Hasmonean kingdom as conversion to Judaism is, to put it mildly, misleading. Hyrcanus, Josephus tells us (*Ant.* 13.257–58), allowed the Idumeans to remain in their country on the condition of being circumcised and conforming their manner of life to that of the Jews. In this and similar instances, “Judaism” no longer stands for an essentially religious form of life but a facet of a political-ethnic entity, a way of characterizing an aggressive and expansive state claiming religious legitimacy through the usurpation of the high-priestly office and control of the temple while maintaining and expanding its power by military means including use of foreign mercenaries.⁴⁴

42. *Ibid.*, 188.

43. A point that Weinberg (*The Citizen–Temple Community*) also argues. That this was not the case has been effectively argued in several works. For but a few, see Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); Cataldo, *Theocratic Yehud*.

44. Blenkinsopp, *Judaism: The First Phase*, 188.

Despite our frustration with his proposal, we should appreciate Blenkinsopp's exposure of the development of sectarianism in the Hasmonean and later periods. Such sociological formations do not happen overnight! But where his argument remains weak is in his dependence upon the biblical portrayal of Yehud as being motivated by a historical concern. In other words, he seems to accept that the biblical authors described precisely events as they happened. Yet it is more likely that if the biblical texts, such as Ezra–Nehemiah, reflect something about the context of Yehud during the Persian period it is less a historical accounting and more the ideological posturings of a minority group. In other words, the biblical texts dealing with restoration are less concerned about the present and past and more concerned about the future. The past and present are important only as much as they align with what restoration will look like. Perhaps we can say this better. While there remain problems with the specifics of his argument, Blenkinsopp is correct that any macrosociological analysis of Yehud must be able to trace out the pattern of development that leads to the social-political situation and cultural response of the events that occurred under the Hasmoneans.

The crippling flaw in his argument is its emphasis upon the central importance of Jerusalem and of religion. His argument necessitates that Jerusalem is important to the returning community and the “host” community in Babylonia *because* of religious reasons. This fundamental problem as we have shown throughout this work is shared largely across the discipline: a dependence upon religion—institution and ideology—as being the central driving force behind not only collective social identity but the institutional and hierarchical makeup of the social-political context of the province. *A problematic dependence that depends upon an imperialist argument!* An immigrating community enters a “foreign” context and reshapes it to mirror the community. *That* is imperialism *par excellence!* But such arguments are imperialist without an empire. The community had no power on its own to restructure dominant social-political hierarchies in favor of the cult it imagined. In response to the community's own lack of material power biblical books such as Ezra describe the imperial government opening up imperial coffers as a wellspring of material power (cf. Ezra 1:4; 3:6–7). It was this type of perception of a positivistic relationship between the *golah* community and the imperial government that led Blenkinsopp to conclude:

The Hasmonean leaders achieved what Nehemiah, in the service of the hegemonic power of that time, could not. They achieved the independence of Judah after the measures adopted by Antiochus IV, but their efforts bore

bitter fruit in the endless campaigns of conquest and annexation of the Hasmoneans. This deterritorialization of Judaism, a by no means inevitable turn of events, can be traced back to Nehemiah. It may be said to be one of the most prominent and problematic indications that the past, even the remote past of our origins, remains with us.⁴⁵

As we have shown, however, the onus does not need be lain at the feet of Nehemiah. In fact, reconstruction of that historical, sociological process is highly problematic if attributed to a single individual or to any single theology that assumes a false uniformity within the cultural context. The process begins with the sociological struggles of a community, struggles that manifest themselves in new ways through changing empires. But struggles that have the same core: fear that what is collectively desired, a favorable world and stabilized order, will never come to pass.

Fear + Desire = Monotheism

It was that fear that gave birth to a strict form of monotheism that later developed into modern forms of monotheism. Yehud is the critical juncture at which the right historical, social, and political forces met producing a strict form of monotheism. Yet we must also not get ahead of ourselves and speak of monotheism as something distinct from the historically contingent identity of a minority group in conflict.

The remnant community ritualized its identity through the mechanism of divine law. Religion served the constructive role of institutionalizing the parameters of collective identity. And the biblical authors envisioned the law as a primary force driving collective identity. Such was the utopian hope in religion because its community was caught on the margins of authority. This romantic hope, the desire for an improved life, is reminiscent of any number of millenarian-like groups. In Yehud, the anxiety of the *golah* community over acculturation resulted in an increased dependence upon religion for the basis and articulation of collective identity (cf. Ezra 9:9). The need for ritualization expressed in the biblical texts reflects the dominant presence of anxiety, which we have argued resulted from the community's marginal position. As Richard Davis put it, "The stimulus for ritualization of human behavior is...the presence of anxiety of some sort."⁴⁶ And as I wrote elsewhere,

45. Ibid., 230.

46. Davis, "Ritualization of Behaviour," 106.

Ritualized obedience resists the anxiety of instability, but it does not always *alleviate* it. It is, in other words, an ever-present threat. Yet an anxiety caused by disorder is typically a *defensive* mechanism and as such does not fully support the production of desire: “To code desire—and the fear, the anguish of decoded flows—is the business of the socius.” But, by reframing relations of production and distributed power as not naturally social but as religious in nature, that is, as the production of monotheistic desire and not any uniquely social-political desire, the monotheistic community locates its desire, as an object of production, within the divine, who is also the object of ritualized obedience rather than in the material world, for which it must initially compete from the fringes of power. Obedience, therefore, is an act of agency from which expressions of identity are expressed externally. The obvious, heavy emphasis within the Persian-period biblical texts upon religious law confirms this. Ritualized identity is a collective response to other competing, cultural identities; it is a promise of stability. The *golah* community demonstrates its ritualize identity through obedience to the law, including, for example, observance of the Passover festival, which connects the community with the Hebrews of the Exodus tradition (cf. Ezra 6:19–21).⁴⁷

Consequently, the fundamental pillars of monotheism (revelation, law, and restoration) can be explained as attempts to alleviate collective anxieties over “death” (either in the physical sense or the ideological one) *and* to express a desire for authority upon which a new normative order could be based—the fundamental need of authority is to control the social order. But that need also tends to produce gross dichotomizations between insider and outsider, which we often identify with the term prejudice. *My security in power over you is preserved in my ability to define you.* The basic premise is this: prejudices reside at the level of the basic, awkward awareness of identity, you are not me and the differences X mark my identity as better. In that sense, everyone is prejudiced. What marks a difference between overtly prejudiced individuals or groups and those more quietly so is the level of legitimation offered by a surrounding normative order. Oftentimes, those prejudices that are legitimated are justified by those attitudes and actions that preserve the host group or community.⁴⁸

47. Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism*, 197, citing Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 139–40.

48. Cf. the study of Crandall and Eshleman, “A Justification-Suppression Model,” 414–46.

Therefore one can say that prejudices reflect also a concern for the survival of the community—one that results in an elevation of law over morality. The law provides a legitimating mechanism for prejudices when it supports any action that elevates the collective identity of the community over the “other,” which it designates as “profane,” “foreign,” etc. Its dogged emphasis upon distinction betrays a defensive and paranoid relationship with the “other.” When Ezra–Nehemiah portrays the antagonism of outsiders toward the group, it does so for the purpose of connecting the physical frustrations and anxieties of the group with those identified by the law: *the chosen community must suffer the outsider*. Nehemiah 2:19–20 (and see also 4:1–3, 7–8; 6:1–9), for example, sets up the context by describing the antagonistic position that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem had against what the text describes as the productive activities of the *golah* community. The account is a bit far-fetched in that it seems to assume (1) that these individuals felt strongly enough to create a type of confederacy against Nehemiah, and (2) that a destroyed city and its god held much relevance in the grand scheme of things. It is better that we read this story *not* as historiography but as an attempt to use external threat or antagonism as a way of validating the Returnee group and its larger agenda, which was restoration. In other words, the account is not concerned with describing accurately the actions of Sanballat and companions but with establishing the social-political legitimacy of the *golah* community. Nehemiah 13:23–27 provides a related but inverse example in Nehemiah’s emphatic condemnation of intermarriage. There individuals outside the community are a source of antagonism, but it is not they who actively strive against the community. Instead, the community takes action by ostracizing them to assert its collective boundaries. This act is consistent with newer theories in prejudice studies that maintain that negative evaluations of others reinforce the positive evaluations we have for ourselves.⁴⁹ This reinforcement may be especially true when the expression of prejudice results in conflict. Expressions of prejudice are also about reinforcing the positive evaluations (which may be described as favoritism) of oneself. We may refer again to Ezra 9:1–2 for a biblical example of this. In that passage, the author emphasizes the near loss of the community’s collective identity in that by mixing with the peoples of the land the community neither reinforces the negative evaluations of individuals or groups external to the community or the positive evaluations it maintains of itself. Such evaluations are critical for the preservation of group boundaries in that they reinforce the limits of what or who can constitute the group.

49. Ibid.

Consequently, the origins of the biblical concepts of revelation and law must be found in the anxieties of a group appealing to a supernatural “other” for the purpose of constructing a defensive mechanism for self-preservation. They are not products of theology as an autonomous (from social-cultural experiences) mode of thought. In other words, those concepts are not the unique products of an already extant belief in the divine as a benevolent being. They are reactions to a tenuous situation in which an appeal to the divine was the last recourse for the preservation of collective identity and the aspirations of a minority group. Are not the gods of minorities always bigger than those of the majority culture in which minorities live? And does that not reveal something about the desire(s) of the group: that it seeks an inversion of the current distributed relationships and corresponding power? In Yehud, the frustrated attempts at gaining authority were the basis for the collective anxieties preserved in the biblical texts.

The Impotence and Power of Revelation

Understanding revelation is important for understanding the centrality of law and restoration. As we have argued, revelation is an interruption of the forces of production, or more broadly the more natural order. Yet there is never any material evidence for revelation, which is a product of belief. Moreover, revelation is problematic in that it is “privatized,” but it is powerful in its use in preserving hope in the absence of certainty. The definition of “revelation” I provided elsewhere may be helpful here:

Revelation means divine revelation, the moment, or process, in which the Divine “entered” the social and material world to begin the process of restructuring social-political systems in support of divine authority. The manner in which this occurs differs among the different monotheistic identities. Revelation is a process, an atemporal instance rather, that begins a process. That is, revelation does not secure authority for the religious community but inaugurates the process toward restoration in which divine authority would be absolutely (re)established and in which the religious community would be granted the benefits of divine authority. “The LORD says to my lord,” for biblical example of this, “‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’ The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes” (Ps. 110:1–2). The end-result of revelation is restoration, a created or “restored” reality in which all authorities that compete against divine authority have been defeated. Initially, monotheistic restoration was thought by early monotheistic communities to be materially immanent; however, the seemingly failed historical validation

required revised expectations. Restoration took on a more eschatological tone before its previous historical and material expectations and became “unassailable” by empirical invalidation.⁵⁰

Rodney Hutton wrote, “Israel’s belief structures made no fundamental distinction between ‘faith/revelation’ and ‘reason.’ For Israel’s faith, natural knowledge—knowledge gained by a reasonable assessment of nature—is that gained by revelation of the divine will.”⁵¹ And further, “One cannot construe natural reason and historical revelation against each other in a manner that does not do violence to Israel’s faith. Israel understood creation and redemption, nature and history, and now we would add reason and revelation, to be inextricably related.”⁵² His conflation of faith and revelation are problematic and reflect a modern meaning imposed upon the terms. Revelation, as we have defined it, refers to structural change. It is the thunderous roar on Mt. Sinai that left in its wake the law. Faith in the mind of the ancient Israelite lay more in the belief that Yahweh would uphold his part of the covenantal agreement if the community obeyed the law. More modern notions of faith imply a blind trust replete with feelings of adoring dependence upon a God whose only obligation is to divine desire. Moreover, the term “faith,” when applied to ancient contexts, because of the baggage it carries tends to separate religious belief from cultural ideals. To be “Israelite,” “Judean,” “Babylonian,” “Persian,” and so on, was to believe in the gods that symbolized the particular ethnic or political identity. Gods were linked to geographic spaces and political identities. The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, are not stories of “faith” in the sense that we moderns understand the term. They are not stories about internal and external conflicts of faith as a theological attitude developed in response to some supernatural ideal imposed upon human individuals as motivation. Rather, “faith” for them was a type of cultural attitude and expectation.⁵³ The community with the right cultural attitude, disposition, and social makeup would become the recipient of divine blessing—or of “restoration” in a term perhaps more consistent with the Persian-period and later biblical texts. In a sociological sense,

50. Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism*, 14–15.

51. Rodney R. Hutton, *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 187.

52. *Ibid.*

53. In Ezra 10:2, מעל denotes “to act unfaithfully, treacherously” sometimes against God by dwelling among the גבריות מעמי הארץ. The antithesis of faithlessness was measured by action. אמת denotes “firmness, faithfulness, truth, reliability, stability, continuance.” In its use as “stability,” see also Isa 39:8; 2 Kgs 20:19; Est 9:30; Jer 33:6; 14:13; Zech 8:19.

faith is belief and hope in the certainty of a stabilized normative order.⁵⁴ In fact, it was a two-way street, the heart of which one cannot help but see as a system of reciprocity. The ruled, for example, were considered faithful if they were honest and dependable, following the expectations of the ruler. The ruler was faithful if he likewise was honest and dependable and maintained the normative order (cf. Ps 54:7; Isa 38:18; 61:8).⁵⁵

Revelation is interruption. It is the emphatic articulation of difference as insurmountable. For this reason, God is thought to exist as something inaccessible, as something radically different from the individual and community. Yet revelation occurs because it is meant to change the prevailing order. It is a radical restructuring of preexisting social-political orders for the benefit of the Divine and those whom the Divine favors. Gerstenberger says of the Elijah narratives in 1 Kings, for example,

The brusque, irreconcilable juxtaposition of Yahweh and the “other” gods is characteristic of a developed theology of exclusiveness. The God of the forefathers, as audibly and visibly in the Pentateuch, is the one, exclusive God of the new community. His word and revelation is available as the plumb line. What is demanded is the undivided turning to Yahweh on the part of the community *and* of each individual member.⁵⁶

But the real power in revelation is not in the Divine. Where culture is a social construction, the divine world is an idea, a figment of cultural imagination. One may *believe* in its existence and live accordingly, but it may be no more real than Gilgamesh’s journey to visit Utanapishtim. The power of revelation is in the community’s ability to restructure radically the prevailing normative order. It is seen in the receiving community’s ability to impose its own normative order upon the external world.⁵⁷ Thus,

54. See the discussion of אִמּוּת as denoting “stability” in the previous footnote.

55. Liverani puts it in terms of a contrast: “Pharaoh was in fact a distant god, and Palestinian kings tended to consider him rather inert and silent, and thus hard to understand and not particularly reliable. Palestinian kings were used to a system of political relations based on reciprocity, which had no equivalent in Egyptian ideology. They were used to being faithful servants of their lord, but expected to receive from him protection...” (*Israel’s History*, 15).

56. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period*, 300–301.

57. B. Demarest’s description of the incompatibility between naturalism and revelation may be somewhat helpful here: “The biblical world view of natural and supernatural realism assumes a prescientific vision of the universe which process though rejects in the name of scientific modernity... As Griffin affirms, ‘since the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century the conviction has grown that all events have natural causes, and that the natural sequence of cause and effect is never

revelation entails interruptive and prescriptive acts. As Gerstenberger discussing Zoroastrianism in Persian culture put it, “Zoroaster is the only mediator of the divine revelation. He is able to provide the correct instruction that leads to the decision between good and evil (cf. the title: ‘arbiter’; Humbach: the one ‘who knows a judgment,’ stanza 2).”⁵⁸ But revelation rarely occurs without some catalyst, some need for reassurance that a new, better order will replace the old one and prevent any dissolution into chaos. There is a constructivist intent in revelation, a collective need to create a world in support of the collective ideal. We cannot help but be reminded of what we said earlier in the first chapter that revelation, law, and restoration are products of particular, historical sets of social relations. They are the ideational products of a community on the margins of power, which because of its position is consumed with the state of its own relevance. They are—and this is why these concepts function so well in modern forms of monotheistic thinking—aspects of utopian thinking in which the prevailing social-political order is interrupted, changed, and reanimated—in a word, restructured, and often radically so. And in this sense they are also political concepts: the driving motivation behind these pillars is the desire for social-political superiority.

All told, the impotence of revelation is its dependence upon something supernaturally “other.” But the power of revelation is its ability to change social-political structures because of a collective belief in something supernaturally “other.” What is critical for future biblical studies to do is not to take revelation, law, and restoration for granted. Biblical studies must treat such concepts sociologically. It must look for the ideological and material motivations behind their adoption as coping strategies and then be able to explain how the productive activities of a group insecurely battling its own internal anxieties gave us monotheism as a prevailing religious ideal. And this brings us back to our main purpose in this work: exposing the ideological forces that made law and restoration central within the Bible. We must understand how such concepts became central before we build complex arguments about the social-political context based on the biblical texts that assume that law and restoration were already central to Israelite identity. By doing that we might avoid

interrupted.’ Of course if God does not supernaturally intrude from without the natural order, divine revelation by definition is excluded. So Griffin acknowledges that ‘the requirement of rationality seems to imply that theology cannot be based on revelation.’ With the elimination of divine revelation, process theology takes its stand as a natural theology shaped from human materials alone” (“The Process Reduction of Jesus and the Trinity,” in Nash, ed., *Process Theology*, 64).

58. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period*, 72.

assuming that concepts of law and restoration shaped the Bible rather than the reverse. *And* we better understand how the concepts themselves were products of the fears and anxieties that shaped the contours of a historical context in flux. Law and restoration became central not because they reflected a pre-existing theological foundation for Jewish (or later Christian) identity. The concepts themselves were fashioned in the same experiences that shaped the writing of the biblical texts, particularly those of the Persian and later periods. Law and restoration became central because before they were known as “law” and “restoration” they were parts of a larger strategy of resistance to foreign imperial powers. The dependence upon the divine by a minority group to legitimate that strategy was but a reflection of its relatively marginal position and its lack of material power within the imperial world. Increasingly that strategy took on overtones of political independence.