

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Inspired Community Organizing and Development

www.gatherthepeople.org

REMAKING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY V:

Reviving Our Founding Moral-Spiritual Covenant

By Moshe ben Asher & Khulda Bat Sarah

© 2025/5785 Moshe ben Asher & Khulda Bat Sarah
(Creative Commons copyright conditions)

DEDICATION	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
PREFACE	4
I: CHRISTIANIZATION OF HEBREW BIBLE COVENANT	11
ETHICAL BLINDSPOT OF CHRISTIAN SUPERSESSIONISM	12
PURITANS ACCEPT GOD OF TORAH AND MANY COMMANDMENTS	13
MORAL-SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF SELF-GOVERNMENT	14
II: POLITICAL ROOTS OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY	14
FOUNDING OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY	14
DEFECTS AND CRITICISM OF EARLY TOWN GOVERNMENT	15
DIVINE SANCTION OF POLITICAL FREEDOM	16
MORAL FREEDOM SUBSTRATUM OF ALL OTHER FREEDOM	17
III: ADAPTATION OF THE TORAH COVENANT MODEL	18
COVENANT WITH GOD ACCEPTED ENTHUSIASTICALLY	19
ISRAEL'S COVENANTAL OBLIGATIONS	20
CHESED INCLUDED IN TRADITIONAL COVENANT	21
COVENANT WITNESSED BY HEAVEN AND EARTH	22
LUXURY LEADS TO DEFECTION FROM GOD AND COVENANT	23
ABRAHAM BECOMES FOUNDER OF A GREAT NATION	25
IV: BUILDING THE MORAL-SPIRITUAL HOME	26
HOME THE BASIS OF COMMUNITY AND NATION	26
VITAL ROLE OF THE HOME TO PRODUCE AND EDUCATE CHILDREN	26
CLEAVING TO GOD	27
V: BUILDING MORAL-SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY	29
TORAH FOUNDATION OF COMMUNITY	29
BEHAVIOR THAT THREATENS COVENANTAL COMMUNITY	31
VI: TRANSITION FROM COVENANT TO CONSTITUTION	32
EARLY MIGRATION OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY	32

THE FEDERAL IDEAL OF THE NEW NATIONAL GOVERNMENT	34
THE WANING OF POLITICAL FREEDOM AND CIVIL RIGHTS	35
VII: DEMISE OF THE MORAL COVENANT	37
FROM 'FEDERAL' TOWNS TO THE BUREAUCRATIC CITIES	37
THE MORAL SLIDE TO OBLIVION	39
A BROTHERHOOD OF BILLIONAIRES	41
POWERLESS DEMOS VS. OLIGARCH-LED CORRUPTION	43
CORPORATE SCI-TECH DOOMS MORAL-SPIRITUALITY	45
PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISTS TURN TO PAGANISM	46
OUTCOMES OF FAILED MORAL-SPIRITUAL INFRASTRUCTURE	47
VIII: RESTORING THE DEMOS COVENANTAL SOVEREIGNTY	48
ERSATZ DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLIC	48
POLITICS AND POLICY CANNOT SAVE DEMOCRACY	49
REMAKING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY	51
DIVERSITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY	52
THE LIMITS OF COMMONWEAL	54
FORMATION OF POPULAR ASSEMBLIES	55
HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF DEMOS POWER-LEVERAGE	59
EPILOG	63
ADDENDUM: TASK OF PUBLIC POWERS ORGANIZING	63

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to every “wandering” Jew, as Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808-1888) described one of them more than a century ago.¹ They have enabled us to see what is possible in the present moment.

I had spent the afternoon talking with one of the few people who look at life's situations with an open eye, with a warm heart and with a view ripened by experience. He was one of those people who, as their life's treasure, carry an ideal in their heart and would not let it be robbed by the sophistication and tension of a desperate time, who would not let themselves be deprived of their faith in the present, of the possibility of a better present. Because of their ideals, these same people carry an immeasurable pain in their breast, because it is clear to them in every situation what it could be like, what it should be like, and what a profoundly grievous contrast the ideal presents to what the situation really is. Unknown, ignored and lonesome, they walk this earth. Nobody suspects the pain and nobody suspects the bliss that lies in their warmly beating hearts. Narrow-minded pity shrugs its shoulders about the kind-hearted romantic who does not know how to fit into today's situation. “Look here, look at the fools of the past,” the clever people of the present say. And they do not know how precisely those that they call the fools of the past are truly men [and women] of the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to Professor Daniel J. Elazar (1934-1999) and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888). Their scholarship, illumination of history, and intellectual creativity have inspired us to help bring to light the significance of American *covenantal* democracy and its origins in Torah. We especially value the symbiosis of Rabbi Hirsch's teaching of *Torah im derekh eretz* (“Torah with the way of the land”), that Torah Judaism is not in conflict with all true scientific knowledge, including the social sciences; and Professor Elazar's teaching of Torah as the morally based model of America's unique “experiment” in covenantal democracy—on which we rely as Torah-inspired American community organizers.

PREFACE

In our first article in this series, “Remaking American Democracy I: Kick-Starting the Public Powers and Power-Leverage of Popular Assemblies,”² we reviewed some of the shortcomings of contemporary American political institutions and culture (as *social criticism*); we drew detailed descriptions of a remade democratic institutional future (as *social futurism*); we described a feasible plan to get to that future (as *social strategy*); and we outlined well-proven tactics and tools of the strategy (as *social action*). All together these are the basic elements required to build a popular movement of the *demos*³ to remake America democracy structurally.

In “Remaking American Democracy II: A Groundplan for the Demos to Gain Public Powers,”⁴ we proposed a detailed political movement-building and institution-building groundplan to organize directly democratic popular assemblies with public powers,⁵ as the lower tier of two-tier urban government, to anchor our democratic republic in the institutionally empowered

participation of the *demos*. In doing so, we sought to cover the stages of professional organizing required to reinvigorate democratic political institutions and culture—namely: *community-building*, *organization-building*, *mobilization-building*, *movement-building*, and *institution-building*. Belatedly, we have added *home-building* to first place in that progression, since we have come to recognize the home as the primary building block of democracy.

In “Remaking American Democracy III: ‘Keep Your Eye on the Ball’—The Arch-Enemy of Democracy Among Us,”⁶ we surveyed the historical roots of American oligarchy, beginning with the class culture imported from Europe and the early rise of partisan parties, the political action arm of the elites. We have charted the ever-increasing distance between the *demos* and the government, which was achieved in the last century primarily through bureaucratization. The contemporary outcome is a nearly complete loss of political freedom by the *demos*, which has enabled oligarchic sub rosa control of national and local government, urban and suburban.

In “Remaking American Democracy IV: Kleptocratic Oligarchy and America’s Economic Destiny 2.0,”⁷ we explored the economic destiny of the U.S. based on kleptocratic oligarchic government, the kleptocratic economic development model, the economic development model of competitors confronting the U.S., the demands of redirecting the downward trajectory of the U.S. economy by disempowering the oligarchy, and the singularly promising means of reestablishing the constitutional sovereignty of the American *demos* through long-term social movement that reallocates public powers to directly democratic urban government.

Now, we turn our attention to *social morality*,⁸ the vital attribute of social-change thinking, writing, and action, which determines the staying power of organized movement for the *commonweal*. Not incidentally, social morality is also the value-foundation of democratic self-governance. Reading social and political movement history has reinforced our experience as professional organizers, that addressing social morality is the final, indispensable requirement to achieve not only short-term political and economic reforms that serve the commonweal but also to institutionalize participatory democracy, political governance in which the people at large directly *exercise* their sovereignty.

The concept of commonweal derives historically from the belief that we are all created equal as humans by God, the Creator and Mastermind of Creation, whose “subjects” we are—that is, all bound by the Creator’s spiritual laws, which is the status we have in our moral-spiritual life—and commonweal affords us that equality in our political life. In a community dedicated to the commonweal, each human is recognized legally as equal to all others, such that taking the life of one is no more or less than any other, or taking their property, or taking their reputation unjustly, no matter how high or low their position in the community.

Our commonweal encompasses the general prosperity of the public at large, a conception known in the British Isles by the tenth century. Satisfying the commonweal was thought to advance God’s glory, and its perceived absence produced insurrections because it was believed, although of course only as a dim hope then, that government—the monarchy—should rule for the commonweal. Commonweal is closely related to commonwealth, the idea that the state is comprised of the whole people, an entity in which the supreme power resides in the people, an

idea which had taken hold by sixteenth century, and which defined the state as a republic or democratic state.

By the time of the first settlers and colonists in New England, “commonweal” had matured to the point of becoming the *raison d'être* of their directly democratic politics. It expressed their commitment to work as a unified body for the general good of their settlement or town (and later, colony), enjoying the benefits while meeting their obligations, nonetheless free in other respects to enjoy their “natural [personal] liberty” to pursue their private, individual interests.

The root and measure of the commonweal is unanimity of *values*, typically faith-derived, which require that governance uplift every individual life equally and equitably, although members of the community do not have the same needs and need not share the faith of the majority. Commonweal cannot comfortably and permanently accommodate the second-class citizenship of marginalized classes. The uneducated early settlers, by the standards of the day, were not to be excluded but educated and, nonetheless included in the rights, benefits, and obligations of citizenship generally. However, it must be acknowledged that, at the outset, the directly democratic “open” town governments in New England denied the franchise to non-landowners, women, non-members of the church, and, in many places, indigenous people—which, in part, was characteristic of the age but was long-ago recognized as an immoral political and social defect to be remedied.

While not ignoring the long-lasting defect of the American version of commonweal, David Rollison usefully characterizes it as “popular politics”—not the policies of a monarch, the nobility, or the gentry but the *demos*, the whole people at-large. Dating roughly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the writings of many intellectuals, commonweal came to mean by the 1640s, “... Good things to all people. Whatever you were—Protestant or Catholic, Puritan or Arminian, Cavalier or Roundhead, Possessioner, Digger or Quaker—you were for the Commonwealth.” The word represented the hope and faith of the people in the possibility that all the important institutions of society would be committed to their well-being and prosperity.⁹

Our grounding in regard to the linkage of social morality and democracy is *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), in which he observed that democracy requires a certain level of moral and civic virtue among its citizens. He noted that in America, religion and moral beliefs played a crucial role in supporting democratic values: “The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom”; and “The Anglo-Americans are the first nations who, having been exposed to this formidable alternative [of a “passion for equality”], have been happy enough to escape the dominion of absolute power. They have been allowed by their circumstances, their origin, their intelligence, and especially by their moral feeling, to establish and maintain the sovereignty of the people”¹⁰

In the same era, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) emphasized the importance of moral and intellectual development for the proper functioning of democracy. He argued that a well-informed and morally upright citizenry was essential for the success of democratic governance.¹¹ Some contemporary political scientists also argue that trust, social capital, and adherence to

democratic moral and ethical norms are crucial for the survival of democratic systems. When these elements are lacking, democracies become susceptible to authoritarianism.¹²

Our history tells us, social morality and democracy are existentially coupled—historically, each begins to fail without the other—and the failure of either marks the beginning of the end of commitment to commonweal. We have more than enough evidence to conclude that democracy, the mission-critical feature of republican government, does not survive—the sovereignty of the people is abandoned by the people—in the absence of shared moral clarity and commitment by both the citizenry and the governors (the executives, representatives, and judges).

That brings us to the early days of our history, when *covenantal* democracy established the foundation of the legendary “American experiment,” which describes the political innovations of the United States of America as a *democratic-republic*. This expression conveyed the visionary hope of the country as a ground-breaking venture to create a new form of *covenantal* government, one which combined the sovereignty of the people at large with their representation by elected officials, creating a system in which, in principle, ultimate power remains with the people who elect the legislators of their republic, which was established in a written constitution—a sharp contrast with all previous governments.

Covenantal democracy in practice demands that the measure and evaluation of commonweal must be that *every* life is uplifted without regard to irrelevant attributes (e.g., race, ethnicity, and sex), station or status—that there is no valid competing purpose in the exercise of public powers. (That does not mean we are precluded from actions for equity in contrast to strict equality, such as special appropriations for the education of children with disabilities.)

We are thus prompted to examine not only the particulars of the early directly democratic covenants and how they were adapted from the Hebrew Bible to Christian theology, but also their moral grounding in the home and community life, in recognition of those institutions as the pillars of the generation-to-generation continuation of the nation as a democratic republic.¹³ And now, more than ever, our electoral democracy depends on the viability of our democratic culture and institutions to counter a Christian nationalist movement which is dedicated to the transfiguration of the republic into an oligarchic empire, crushing the moral-spiritual soul of the nation, all with the imprimatur of the legally constituted authority of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS).

The Puritans in New England, who were among the early settlers and colonists,¹⁴ found an inspiring model in their “Old Testament,” a Christian translation of the Hebrew Bible, especially in the first book, the Torah.¹⁵ However, they viewed the Torah through a Christian filter, selectively accepting the commandments, justified by the belief that Jesus fulfilled the law. Still, they read the Bible with sustained interest and discipline, deriving from it the certainty that their first earthly covenant, which included God, gave them a “divine right” to be self-governing with God as their witness—that is, the right to govern themselves if they lived up to the God they affirmed in the Torah.

Our story begins with how the Puritans adapted teachings from the Torah according to their Christian theology, even as they identified with the Hebrews of antiquity. But one should not imagine they saw themselves as Jewish in any way or that they compromised their Christian beliefs to accommodate commandments that appear to be in conflict with those beliefs. They held the common Christian view at that time, that Jews and Muslims were infidels, damned for rejecting their Savior. Nothing we have written here should lead the reader to think there was any kind of blending of Judaism and Christianity in the culture of the early New Englanders. The Puritans did not adopt Jewish religious practices or beliefs but rather adapted teachings of the Torah to their Christian worldview. Many of their Christian beliefs and practices violated both the spirit and the law of the Torah. Nevertheless, the scholarly sources confirm the Puritans' acceptance of the authority of the God of the Torah, and many of the commandments, as binding on themselves.

We continue with how the Torah informed the early settlers' understanding and use of covenant and bolstered their families and communities to devise their newly invented covenantal, directly democratic popular assemblies. We consider the transformation of the directly democratic covenant model of government to representative constitutions. And we conclude with how the features of moral covenant were lost and what it will take to restore the covenantal sovereignty of the people.

We make the case in the following seven major sections and in an addendum addressed specifically to organizers in the future who are dedicated to reallocating some direct control of the *public powers* to the people at large:

Christian Appropriation of the Covenant is where we begin because of the discontinuities between covenant as described in the Torah and how it was borrowed and theologically transformed by Christianity. This should be understood before considering how the New Englanders were able to benefit from the Torah covenant and many of the commandments, ultimately incorporating them in their home, community, and political life, despite the gravity of those discontinuities.

Roots of American Covenantal Democracy highlights the “ordinary” immigrants who were the actual innovators of America's historic democratic experiment; how they jettisoned the historically claimed divine right of kings; how the covenants they authored included God as a witness, ensuring divine sanctions for violations by any one or all of the company; and how their political innovation created the universal and timeless benchmark for *political liberty* (sometimes referred to as *political freedom*)—the *sovereign* right of each citizen and the entire, at-large citizenry to take part *in* the government to which they are subject and required to support as a condition of citizenship.

Adoption of the Torah Covenant Tradition points out the key role of covenant in the Torah; how some of its most important features, considered as a model, inspired the New Englander's civil self-governance; their selective acceptance of the covenant insofar as doing the commandments without fully understanding God's reasons for them, and how they exempted themselves from commandments based on Christian apologetics; the extent to which they

recognized the importance of loving-kindness in home and community life, which served as part of the basis of the political equality they valued; why and how they called on “heaven and earth” to witness and guarantee their political covenants; their belief that worldly success leads to defection from God and to idolatry; and the benefits of “spiritual rewards.”

Building the Moral-Spiritual Home and **Building the Moral Spiritual Community** emphasize the critical importance of these traditional institutions to the establishment and the subsequent generation-to-generation durability of covenantal democracy. We look at some of the commandments that were particularly relevant to the New Englanders.

Transition from Covenant to Constitution relates how covenantal democracy played out in the new colonies, and how eventually it was transformed into a *federal* constitution for the newly created national government. In this history we consider the social morality and social action of home and community in maintaining American democracy; we look at some of the historical players and forces that undermined social morality in the home and the community; and we consider how those developments have played out in the succeeding centuries, especially from the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first.

Demise of the Moral Covenant recounts the transition from covenantal towns to bureaucratic cities, the moral slide that accompanied that transformation, the corruption of urban government that followed, the cultural shift over decades, the rise of amoral culture, the unwitting abandonment of monotheism for pagan-like values, the effect on American moral-spiritual infrastructure,¹⁶ the loss of commonweal, and the resulting existential threat to the United States of America as a democratic republic.

Restoring the Covenantal Sovereignty of the People proposes what will be required to remake American democracy, to overcome some of its existential weaknesses, which have persisted beyond the reach of politics and policy; to restore the lost moral covenant of democracy for the sake of the commonweal—which will require the initiative of the at-large citizenry to effect permanent structural change, which must empower themselves to act not as petitioners but participating decision-makers in their governments, as the first New England settlers were in the polities they formed, the self-governing, directly democratic towns they founded—which cultivated the mental clarity and courage that birthed the American Revolution.

Community Organizing’s Public Education Challenge suggests the most pressing take-away for professional *public-powers* organizing. If the citizenry is to fully grasp what’s at stake and what must be done to *restructure* American democracy, it’s essential that a new American version of a Civics 101 democracy-curriculum convey the origins of our democracy, the people who brought it to life, their values, what they intended, how they went about it, and the outcomes they produced, which include the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution, which are the heart and soul of the best of American exceptionalism. And that curriculum must be talked about at the grassroots throughout the nation by a unified and reinvigorated base-building movement to remake American democracy.

Our overarching premise is that the present vulnerability of American democracy threatens the survival of the republic equal to having lost World War Two. Back then the nation faced the prospect of the maxi-fascist Hitler running the world. In this era, the threat is internal, domestically driven by the covert influence of a home-grown, historically rooted enemy of democracy embedded within our institutions: the Christian nationalist “billionaire brotherhood”¹⁷ of oligarchs.¹⁸

Our hope and faith reflect the recognition that the country’s long-lived foundational moral covenant, although enfeebled, continues to function in ways that can restore shared *moral* values in the future, which would be trust-building and thus allow disparate citizens to identify their commonweal and remake American democracy: (a) based on those who, in the spirit of the Abrahamic faith traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—accept the existence of God as the Creator and Mastermind of Creation, the author of the physical and moral lawfulness of the Creation; and (b) based on those who no longer, or possibly never, accepted the existence of God, yet have internalized the basic *values* of various faith traditions, primarily through older members of their own families, secular institutions such as public schools, and the socializing power of the society’s moral-spiritual infrastructure (MSI).¹⁹

The Abrahamic force in the world has historically been to recognize the role of an “Almighty” God, one who has absolute free will to save a world drowning in materialism and sensuality and in the denial of the free moral will of humankind. Abraham and those who followed him were to reawaken moral freedom, the inherent human capacity to choose good over evil, which ultimately is the basis for all other worthwhile freedom. Even where belief in God has waned, the residual values of righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and compassion persist everywhere. They wait silently in the hearts and minds of millions for an opportunity to break through the ambient noise of profit-driven AI algorithms that condition our unconscious limbic brains to become dominated by fear, division, hatred, violence, money, and sex. The effect is to erode moral free will.²⁰

We recognize that for many Americans now, any variation on the theme of *social morality*—any version of “God-talk,” personal witness of faith, or fixed standards of social and sexual morality—exceeds their threshold of tolerance. It should be clear, however, there is no brief here to recruit anyone to religious life or to impose it on anyone. *Our purpose is to help Americans see that morally based covenant* is the indispensable foundation of our democratic republic. Its loss directly corresponds to the present existential threat to our democratic culture and institutions.

We have every reason to believe that, ultimately, a political movement over many decades, supported by public powers organizing²¹ can constructively remake American democracy structurally. But as we have noted elsewhere,²² the organizing, aimed at a measured reallocation of the public powers, will necessarily represent a significant departure from the well-known faith-based and neighborhood community organizing models in its governance, funding, replicable organizational units, action life, and overall objectives. But what we have proposed will very much rely on the history, knowledge, and skill-base of the profession.

I: CHRISTIANIZATION OF HEBREW BIBLE COVENANT

Despite the widely known discontinuities between Christian theology and the Torah and Rabbinic tradition,²³ the early Puritan settlers and their successors in the colonies nevertheless accepted the authority of the God of the Torah and many of the non-ritual commandments, as confirmed by the consensus of historians of the period.²⁴

But how is it possible to make sense of that history when settlers and colonists were mostly Puritans who had rejected many of the Torah's commandments, which were absolute conditions of the Covenant that God had made with the Israelites? Wouldn't such an assertion create unavoidable cognitive dissonance?

The apparent ability of the early settlers and colonists to avoid cognitive dissonance stemmed from a difference in how they understood the Covenant in contrast to the traditional Jewish interpretation. The Christians saw the biblical Covenant as a model to form their own political covenant, among themselves, which was democratic in that it involved mutual consent, even though it was still under the authority of God. The dissonance was thus more imagined by us than real for them, as they believed themselves to be reinterpreting rather than rejecting the Covenant. They selectively applied a Christian theological rationale to their own context, which allowed them to reconcile their rejection of many of Jewish legal requirements with their desire for a sacred Christian communal order. And, as historians of the period have confirmed, the Puritans adopted the Torah Covenant model as the basis of their own innovation of directly democratic self-government.

The Puritans believed themselves to be in a covenantal relationship with the same God who had made a covenant with the Israelites, yet they viewed themselves as a "New Israel." Thus their relationship with the Torah covenant and commandments was filtered through their Christian beliefs. While they followed many of the moral and ethical teachings of what they regarded as the Old Testament,²⁵ such as the Ten Commandments, they did not regard themselves as bound by the ceremonial or civil laws given to Israel in the Torah (like dietary restrictions, sacrifices, and other specific laws meant exclusively for the Israelites). They believed that Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament law, making many of those legal requirements obsolete. But they also believed that the moral aspects of the Torah, such as those that reflected eternal principles of righteousness, still applied to them.

What would seem to have been the most problematic aspect of the Hebrew Bible for the settlers and colonists, the First Commandment—"You shall have no other gods before Me"—was nonetheless foundational to their system of belief. Of course, they interpreted this commandment from a Christian perspective, which strains reason when we consider the Trinity and the widespread belief that Jesus was/is considered to be God in human flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), fully man but also fully God (Colossians 2:9).

Although they regarded Jesus as God, the Puritans understood idolatry not only in terms of physical idols but as anything that could take the place of God in a person's heart. This included material wealth, power, or even the ritualistic practices they associated with Roman Catholicism.

They tied their vision for society to the First Commandment, as they believed their covenant with God required them to uphold God's laws to ensure that their community remained faithful to God. They believed their success as a society depended on their loyalty to God and that disobedience would bring divine punishment.

Although they interpreted the commandment as requiring exclusive worship of the one true God, their God of the First Commandment was the *Triune* God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They did not see the Trinity as a violation of monotheism but a deeper understanding of God's nature. The rationale being that the one God exists in three persons; and Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, was fully divine. Worshiping Jesus was believed to be in full accordance with the First Commandment because it was through Jesus that they could truly know and worship God.

The Puritans often read the Old Testament “typologically,” seeing events, persons, and laws as foreshadowings of Jesus.²⁶ This rationalized their view that the First Commandment was not contradicted by the worship of Jesus but actually as pointing to him. Such views, it should be understood, have always been regarded by Rabbis and Jewish scholars as tendentious misreadings of the biblical text. Nonetheless, the Puritans believed that the revelation of God in the Old Testament was incomplete until it reached its full expression in Jesus.

ETHICAL BLINDSPOT OF CHRISTIAN SUPERSESSIONISM

How was such theology possible in light of the Torah's explicit language in Numbers 23:19—“God is not a man”?²⁷ The Puritans' emphasized faith over reason when it came to what they regarded as divine mysteries. They believed that the Trinity, while beyond full human comprehension, was divinely revealed in Scripture.

How did the Puritans and later Christians, knowing their theology was stunningly contradicted by both the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Judaism, accept a covenantal relationship with the God of the Jews, whom they rejected from their society and denied the right to unmolested life? They believed Judaism had failed to recognize the true Messiah, and thus its authority on covenantal matters was superseded by Christian revelation. Their doctrine of supersessionism, that the Christian church had replaced Israel as God's chosen people, was central to Puritan theology. Thus, while the Puritans claimed a covenantal relationship with the God of the Jews, they also participated in the widespread Christian attitudes of the time that marginalized, degraded, and rejected Jews.²⁸ Their theological convictions justified their persecution of the Jews, even as they took elements of Jewish tradition. Their ethical blind spot was to worship the same God while they failed to honor the people who, even by their lights, God had originally offered a covenantal relationship, which the Israelites had accepted.

Regardless of the claims of supersessionism, the Puritans simply sidestepped several instances in the Hebrew Bible in which we learn that God has an “eternal” covenant with the Jews—which would seem to delegitimize supersessionism unequivocally. In Genesis 17:7, God promises Abraham: “And I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you”²⁹; in Psalms 111:6-9, (6) He has declared to his people the power of His works, that He may give

them the heritage of the nations. (7) The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His commandments are sure. (8) They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. (9) He sent redemption to his people; He has commanded his covenant for ever; holy and reverend is his name³⁰; and in Leviticus 26:44-45, (44) And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor will I loathe them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. (45) But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God; I am the Lord.³¹

To overcome these affirmations of an eternal covenant with the Jews, the Puritans and later Christians reinterpreted the meaning of “eternal” and “everlasting.” They were not inhibited by I Samuel 15:29: And also the Eternal One of Israel will not lie nor change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change his mind.³² In their view, the covenant was fulfilled and transformed by Jesus. They declared that the original covenant with the Jewish people had been a precursor of a greater covenant through Christ. They saw the stories and covenants with Israel as symbolizing the deeper truths that were revealed in the New Testament. Their belief that the Jews were no longer the central focus of God’s covenant provided the theological rationale for Christians to reinterpret biblical passages about the eternal covenant as referring to the Christian church rather than the Jewish people.

This rationalization, while internally consistent within the Christian theology, created an ethical blind spot. The Puritans failed to acknowledge the significance of the Jewish people’s ongoing covenant with God from a Jewish perspective. Instead, they viewed Jewish claims to the covenant as outdated, incorrect, or even heretical, without fully engaging with the biblical passages that affirmed the eternity of God’s promises to Israel.

PURITANS ACCEPT GOD OF TORAH AND MANY COMMANDMENTS

While much of the foregoing may be interpreted as theological sophistry, it doesn't change the fact that the Puritans adopted in their daily life a covenantal relationship with the God of the Torah and integrated many of its commandments into the daily life of their families and communities. They accepted the commandments against theft, false witness, adultery, and murder, but according to their own standards of juridical administration. They believed God’s covenant blessings and curses were tied to the behavior of the community, and they established strict legal codes and punishments to ensure moral purity, enforcing laws related to blasphemy, adultery, theft, and other moral transgressions, viewing their violation as a threat to the entire community’s covenantal relationship with God.

The commandments they accepted shaped their personal piety and communal governance. They saw themselves as obligated to uphold significant segments of the moral law as revealed in Scripture, believing they would be blessed or cursed as a community based on their adherence to God’s commands. They placed strong emphasis on home and community morality, echoing the Torah’s commandments on how to live a righteous life within a God-fearing society. They emphasized strict Sabbath observance, respect for lawful authority, and the sanctity of marriage. Their legal codes, although passed through a Christian filter, often reflected biblical justice. The

Puritans adopted principles of fairness, punishment, and societal order from the Torah, viewing it as a divine model for creating a godly society. While they were selective in applying specific laws, they often embraced the spirit of justice and righteousness from the Torah. They saw themselves as bound by a community-wide covenant, just as Israel had been bound to God in the Hebrew Bible. This covenant shaped every aspect of life—religious, social, and political. They believed their success or failure in New England was directly tied to their faithfulness to this covenant. Their leaders preached that their society’s well-being depended on maintaining their covenant with God, warning of divine retribution if they strayed, much like the warnings given to Israel in the Torah. Their well-known “city upon a hill”³³ was rooted in the idea of covenantal faithfulness to God, much in the same way the Israelites were called to be a model nation.

The Puritans’ political structures, religious practices, and home life were profoundly informed by the Bible, including the Torah, as the foundation for their laws and moral principles. Like the Israelites of their Old Testament, they saw themselves as a “chosen people” on a divinely ordained mission. Although their theology may be said to qualify as theologically paralogical in how it reinterpreted the Hebrew Bible to justify supersessionism and the rejection of Judaism and the Jews, at the same time their day-to-day lives were rooted in commitment to a covenantal relationship with God.

MORAL-SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

The Puritans’ successful formation of historically long-lived, directly democratic, covenantal polities, which have continued to the present day with the overwhelming support of the New England citizenry, was undoubtedly made possible by the moral-spiritual foundation of their home and community life based on their appropriation and vigorous enforcement of selected Torah commandments. As De Tocqueville observed, “In New England the education and the liberties of the communities were engendered by the moral and religious principles of their founders.”³⁴

II: POLITICAL ROOTS OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY

FOUNDING OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY

The founders of American democratic culture and institutions were *not* the brilliant Founding Fathers many of us have encountered in the Federalist Papers and in their letters; nor were they their intellectual sources of inspiration, such as John Locke, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.³⁵ Those Founders were concerned primarily with the establishment of a *republic*, not a democracy, and the radical Enlightenment philosophers were thinking of *representative* democracy. They were leery of direct democracy, doubtful (seemingly with good reason) of the ability of a national government to be free of chaos and irreconcilable factions if its policies and practices were to be in the hands of the citizens directly. And, in point of historical fact, the institutional, and thus cultural and intellectual origins of American democracy, were not the Founding Fathers and Enlightenment philosophers but the self-governing covenantal practices of the Puritan-founded communities of the first European settlers and colonists in New England.³⁶

We must look to the settlers and early colonists to understand our democratic roots, including the reasons and rules articulated by such founders, who were *not* necessarily land-owning gentry, highly educated, or recognized as outstanding men and women of their time. Most who came to settle the wilderness of the New World were more or less “ordinary” immigrants.

With the compact they made on the Mayflower while still at sea, they jettisoned the historical “divine right of kings.” They covenanted with one another instead, “witnessed” by and subject to their own communal will, morally measured by their understanding of the will of God but with themselves sovereign over their political affairs. *Each individual and the entire company together voluntarily agreed to the rights and obligations, the benefits and burdens, which would be shared by all, binding one and all together.* Yet critics often fault early town government because the franchise was limited to male members of the church who were land-owners, and indigenous neighbors were not accepted as equals.

DEFECTS AND CRITICISM OF EARLY TOWN GOVERNMENT

Of course, no government that exists today, even the most democratic and inclusive, would be considered a democracy if judged by its beginnings. The open New England towns evolved over the centuries and now they are at least as inclusive as any other form of government, in the United States or elsewhere.

The critics are also uncomfortable with the religious culture of the Puritans, which included belief “... in God, Satan, demons, witches, the moral significance of plagues, and other-worldly intervention in personal as well as national affairs.”³⁷ Their concern seems to be that the inhabitants of the towns were not entirely free to be independent thinkers because they were mentally bound by restrictive religious dogma.

Drilling down into this criticism does not suggest the townspeople were somehow denied free will but that their moral values and principles were objectionable to the much more “enlightened” modern intellectuals and scholars who are critical of them. In other words, the essence of the argument is that “narrow-minded” religiosity and democracy cannot coexist, which is hardly persuasive since equalitarian democracy changed the religiosity of town culture by the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was still religious but yet, under the influence of more European immigrants, it was more religiously inclusive.

Some critics fault the town founders because they were not ideologically dedicated to creating an ideal form of democracy from the outset. But only in an ivory tower does one imply that how social actions were intellectually conceived, regardless of their evolved actual effects, somehow characterizes their contemporary rightfulness. And to ignore empirical knowledge of the practical conditions and stresses of the early settlers’ existence, and the demands of their survival to devise stable, productive, and widely accepted self-governance, not surprisingly leads to all manner of theoretical proofs of their inadequacies.

For example, Michael Zuckerman,³⁸ seems to be unaware of the inevitable messiness of institutional development. He describes the town meeting as anything but democratic, possibly

because its particulars emerged from less than ideal democratic principles. Zuckerman's *criticisms* include: "... they had no other way to secure the social order," "extension of the franchise occurred only in grudging adjustment," the town meeting was "... bent toward securing ... unanimity," conflict occurred but was "[never] accepted as legitimate..." and the politics of the towns "... were not expressions of abstract democratic principles but an integral aspect of the conduct of those communities..." One wonders if he would delegitimize European democracies on the same basis he criticizes town meetings.

But even with those "defects," their efforts produced open-town direct democracy. And although the popular and academic views of the open towns have shifted over the course of town history, the worldwide consensus today is that the "open" assemblies have never been bested as the as ideal form of democracy in action.

DIVINE SANCTION OF POLITICAL FREEDOM

The newcomers left behind the forms of hierarchical church and government they had known in England and Europe. They regarded themselves as responsible only to one another and God. In time they began to record constitutions to govern themselves and others within their purview as the colonial population of New England grew and became more diversified. The covenants, compacts, and constitutions they "drafted and ratified.... often were highly religious in their values-foundation, although designed for civil purposes."³⁹

Their first directly democratic political covenant was the Plymouth Combination, which established a rough approximation of civil political rule⁴⁰ on the basis of their religious values—which became known as the Mayflower Compact after the Revolution.⁴¹ It preceded the Enlightenment philosophers who inspired so many but were themselves followers of the innovations of the members of the Mayflower band, innovations which were adopted by the later settlers and colonists. Now, four centuries later, the worldwide benchmark for *political freedom* (which should not be mistaken for *natural (personal) liberty*, which we consider below) is the covenant that guarantees the right of every citizen to take part in the government that makes the laws, policies, and practices that govern the society, the community, and the individual.

No government can claim greater legitimacy for its existence than it was formed and operates by the direct mutual consent of the governed, individually and collectively. This is the essence of freedom: to live lives of fulfillment, peace, and contentment because *we* choose the commonweal and *we* use the public powers of *our* government to promote good and prevent evil, as *we* understand those terms through *our* moral-spiritual convictions, regardless of how we relate individually to whatever transcendent power we may or may not recognize.

These understandings were initially based on the idea that we have those rights because God offered to the people a covenant (Hebrew: *brit*), to be freely chosen by them, to receive God's love and justice, mercy and judgment, if they accepted God's Law.⁴² But from what specific experience or knowledge did they presume to arrogate to themselves the unheard of authority and power to form a government that would suit themselves, and to what specific standards were they willing to hold themselves? Professor Elazar quotes Daniel Lutz to make the point that, "...

the radical Protestant return to biblical sources for ordering their lives led to their becoming, to a far greater extent than they realized, precisely what they saw themselves as metaphorically—a modern version of the Jewish people.”⁴³

Our speculation is that the Puritans’ reliance on biblical sources was also a response to the moral disorder they had left behind in England, the corruption of the hierarchical church they had sought to reform in England, their adaptation to the harsh conditions they faced in the New World, and the political blank slate they encountered in the wilderness. The net effect was that, *culturally*, they identified with the Israelites, and they appropriated and recalibrated the Torah covenant.

For the early New England settlers and colonists, the Bible was their most widely read literature, a significant source of their understanding of God and the role of moral law in history, society, the home, community, and themselves individually. They were well-versed in its engaging narratives. They were familiar with God’s *miracles* that superseded nature, in Egypt at the time of the Exodus of the Hebrews, and beyond, doing things we ordinarily regard as impossible. As with many other aspects of the Bible, they nevertheless regarded it as a model for their own behavior. Perhaps because they recognized that, unlike all other living creatures, their moral free will made it possible for them to overcome otherwise unyielding physical obstacles.

They believed it was possible, with God’s help, to rise above nature and accomplish things most others in their era would say are too fantastic to be achieved, short of a miracle. The first was traveling to the New World and settling the wilderness. In time they came to believe that, as largely undeveloped agrarian *Gemeinschaft* communities,⁴⁴ they could defeat the strongest army in the world and overthrow the rule of a powerful king. And they have been credited with the creation of a morally based foundation of self-governance that led to the successful movement for American independence from Great Britain.

Their moral-spiritual beliefs were thus linked not only to their immediate practical arrangements for self-governance but also to their political aspirations for the future. What followed became the history of their use of the covenant as a model, based on the *brit* described in the Torah, which in turn became the participatory democratic foundation of the later New England towns, the American colonies, and the newly formed United States federal (i.e., ostensibly covenantal) government.

MORAL FREEDOM SUBSTRATUM OF ALL OTHER FREEDOM

Inspired by the Christian vision of themselves creating a “city upon a hill” for all to see and aspire to, and as students and practitioners of what they selectively read as the “Old Testament,” the colonists were responsive to the Torah’s demand for submission to higher law and personal self-control to achieve communal freedom and independence. Only that would assure both self-governance and “natural [personal] liberty” (the latter with some limitations).⁴⁵ In that regard it’s likely they would recognize their own moral responsibility to achieve the blessings of a godly life. As students of the Bible, they would have distinguished themselves from all other creatures by the virtue of their moral decision-making.

We imagine that their reliance on the Torah values they adopted was not the result of abstract religiosity but practical awareness that the acknowledged will and ability to choose good over evil, *moral freedom*, is the prior condition for all worthwhile forms of freedom. Moreover, that they would have well understood, that if they allowed their lives to become *dominated* by materialism and sensuality, unrestrained by moral boundaries (which they had witnessed in the Old World), they would forfeit their moral freedom (which, even so, they might continue to value in word but not deed).

Living on the edge of civilization, in the wilderness of an unknown land, the Pilgrims would have appreciated that the Law of God they accepted from Scripture, when put into practice, signified their freedom to rise above the well-known laws of nature. They could overcome their so-called natural, baser, animal-like instincts and drives for the sake of their commonweal, which they expected from themselves. Yet, they regarded their own prospects for eternal life to depend on accepting Jesus as their Savior.

The early Christian settlers and colonists derived the essentials of the home, community, and personal morality from the Torah. But they ignored many more of the commandments than they adopted.⁴⁶ We have included here a limited number of the Torah verses they favored, which may be helpful to understand some of the essentials of our nation's original, morally anchored covenantal democracy, and to get a glimpse of *why* and *how* we might bring about its renewal.

III: ADAPTATION OF THE TORAH COVENANT MODEL

The foremost role of covenant in the Torah helps us to understand why the New Englanders adopted it as the backbone of their self-governance, in relation to individuals and the whole people. As described by Professor Elazar, “The Jewish political tradition, both as it specifically applies to the Jewish people and as a ‘mother’ tradition in political thought ... throughout the Bible, ... is grounded on and derived from the idea of covenant. In its original biblical form, covenant embodies the idea that relationships between God and humans are based upon morally-sustained pacts of mutual promise and obligation.”⁴⁷

With its economy of verbiage, the Torah conveyed to the settlers and colonists that the covenant between God and humankind was based on the voluntary consent of the people to subordinate their will to the Law of God. God's promise, which they could rely on, was to be their divine guide and protector,⁴⁸ in effect by revealing to them through the Torah, the essentials of the moral-spiritual lawfulness of the Creation. Knowing and abiding by the Law, they would survive as a people against the threats and evil arrayed against them. Once again, all this was reframed by Christian theology.

Nevertheless, the covenantal relationship between God and the Hebrews was the primary model that inspired the New Englanders' innovation of covenantal democracy, the incidental byproducts of which have been unparalleled promotion of freedom to participate directly *in* government, and more broadly based citizenship and franchise. The New Englanders related to the Torah covenant in two ways simultaneously: as a working model that could be applied to define the essential

characteristics of their self-governance—for example, as a voluntary compact between the parties, witnessed (read, judged) by a just and compassionate God; and as a binding covenant on themselves directly but in limited respects—far from the scope of its implications for the Israelites and always within Christian theology and supersessionism.

Familiar with the offer and acceptance of the covenant⁴⁹ and the giving and receiving of the Torah (Hebrew: *mattan Torah*) at Mount Sinai,⁵⁰ God’s commandments were understood by the New Englanders not simply as legalistic ordinances, such as what we might find in our own state codes, but largely inescapable conditions of human existence. One can, in a manner of speaking, outrun laws that are simply “on the books,” but the “eye of God” was understood to see everything. Sociologically, we would say that the “Law of God,” which is aimed at the conduct of the people at-large as well as every individual, was built into the moral-spiritual infrastructure of society—much as the law of gravity is built into the physical creation, and the eventual consequences for either following it or ignoring it were rarely surprising.⁵¹

We presume the New Englanders imbibed the Torah’s timeless commonweal values and principles which have come to be associated with long-lived democracy. These must be learned in every generation and passed on to the next, from parents to children, and then upheld in community. They include treating others righteously, telling the truth, acting fairly (justly), supporting political freedom, advocating peace-making (Hebrew: *shalom*),⁵² and extending compassion. Thankfully, an enduring residual of these values and principles survives in American culture.

COVENANT WITH GOD ACCEPTED ENTHUSIASTICALLY

Covenant, considered apart from Christian theology, describes a complex relationship between the parties. The Jewish religious tradition⁵³ teaches that God offered the Torah elsewhere before presenting it to the Hebrews,⁵⁴ and their willing response was enthusiastic by any measure: “We will do and we will hear.”⁵⁵ In other words, we will meet the conditions of the Covenant willingly, of our own free will, even before we know all the reasons for those conditions. Perhaps this was because they believed it’s not possible for humankind to see into the “mind” of God and understand *how* God masterminds the Creation, which the Jewish tradition acknowledges.

Although *doing* before *knowing* offends the scientific mindset, the Puritans did not in the slightest regard the Torah as a scientific treatise regarding the physical world, such as Galileo Galilei’s *Sidereus Nuncius* (The Starry Messenger), which they may have known.⁵⁶ They would have rightly viewed the Torah as revealing what *should be* in the lawful moral universe, as established by God.

What did the Pilgrims encounter in the Torah in regard to doing before knowing? In Exodus 24:1-3 they read: (1) And he said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship from far away. (2) And Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him. (3) And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all *the people answered with one voice*, and said, All the words which the Lord has said will we do.

(Our emphasis.)⁵⁷ And soon thereafter, in Exodus 24:7: and he [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it into the ears of the people. Then they said: *All that God has said we will do and hear.* (Our emphasis.)⁵⁸

Our speculation about why the settlers and colonists would subordinate their own will to God's will, do whatever was required of them (even if only selectively as Christians), only afterwards to "hear" (understand) the reasons, perhaps was because humans cannot fathom all the reasons for God's commandments and judgments, just as a child cannot understand all the reasons for a parent's rules, and adults cannot understand all the reasons for a medical specialist's diagnosis and prescriptions. We are not surprised by this condition, since the commonplace experience of ordinary life is that understanding often remains beyond our grasp, and *it's far more likely that doing leads to understanding than understanding leads to doing.* We come to understand necessity when we witness the effects of our actions firsthand. The early New Englanders certainly must have understood this principle from their experience of home life and raising children. Then, too, the willingness of the Christians to do God's will before knowing God's reasons could have hinged on the fact that the commandments they accepted did not conflict with Christian theology. In any event, "we will do and hear" was the keystone in establishing the covenant between God and the Israelites, and a limited measure of it was taken on by the Christian settlers.

ISRAEL'S COVENANTAL OBLIGATIONS

But the covenant had some conditions that potentially could be deal-breakers if the people rejected them. In Deuteronomy 4:13, the New Englanders read: And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to do, ten commandments, and He inscribed them on two tablets of stone.⁵⁹ And then in Deuteronomy 4:14: And God commanded me [Moses] at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might do them in the land where you go over to possess it).⁶⁰

These two verses specify non-negotiable conditions of God's relationship with Israel. God's protection would continue as long as Israel honors its commitment to the commandments, statutes, and ordinances. Doing so will earn God's blessings and avoid the curses. In effect, if they live their lives according to the *legal* moral-spiritual infrastructure (MSI) of the Creation established by God, they would thrive; if not, they would hasten their own deaths, because forsaking moral-spiritual goodness intensifies all the circumstances that lead to physical death, individually and collectively.

Considered from a contemporary perspective, not knowing or respecting the MSI, we make more moral and ethical missteps, which ultimately affect both our psychological and physical well-being; since spiritual death, the loss of the values and principles that sustain goodness in its myriad forms, hastens physical death. As noted in a JAMA article, "Improving the social determinants of health will be brought at last to a boil only by the heat of the moral determinants of health."⁶¹ We maximize the length of our lives by living within moral-spiritual boundaries; and we shorten our lifetimes when we allow sensuality and materialism to monopolize our thinking and action, since virtually all the pleasure-producing activities, focused as they are on

continuously intensifying sensuality and materiality, commonly lead to addictions that are self-destructive and damaging to others in one's marriage, home, community, commerce, and nation (the last, given the economic and national security consequences of metabolic syndrome diseases).⁶²

The effect is cumulative on a societal level, evidenced in the physical decline of nations and communities, for which historians have identified moral-spiritual decay as a variable. MSI serves to inculcate moral character and responsible citizenship, which rely on the mutual trust that accompanies expectations of reciprocal ethical and moral behavior. In other words, "... [such] trust is a collective moral achievement,"⁶³ without which our ability to create a commonweal disappears. The MSI sets not only the boundaries of our day-to-day conduct, it also projects the moral vision that raises up our present existence and bolsters our long-term investments to refine our national character.

But, as we have already discussed above, a variant of apologetics rationalized selectively disallowing the relevance of commandments that contradict Christian theology, most notably the first commandment and God as a trinity. Yet despite what would seem to be a source of unavoidable cognitive dissonance, the early New Englanders apparently took to heart the idea from Proverbs, which has been very popular throughout the ages, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God."⁶⁴

CHESED INCLUDED IN TRADITIONAL COVENANT

Although the New England settlers disallowed many commandments, the stipulation of loving-kindness posed no theological difficulty. Two of the most significant elements of the relationships that are necessary to sustain democracy are covenant and loving-kindness (Hebrew transliterated: *chesed* or *hesed*),⁶⁵ which are frequently linked in the Hebrew Bible—notably in Deuteronomy 7:9—Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.⁶⁶ Again in 1 Kings 8:23:—Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.⁶⁷ And in Nehemiah 1:5—Then I said: 'Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commandments....⁶⁸

Professor Elazar explains:⁶⁹ "Covenantal principles lead to the establishment of partnership relations based upon the fundamental equality of free people in such a way that actions and agreements are achieved through negotiation and bargaining. Negotiation and bargaining, to be covenantal, must be conducted with kindness [*chesed*] (the willingness to fulfill one's covenant obligations), that is to say, in a spirit of piety, devotion to religious obligations to others, with joy and enthusiasm [Hebrew: *hasidut*] with the recognition they are negotiating with covenantal partners and hence must be prepared occasionally to overlook strict legal requirements."⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the Torah-based lineage of Professor Elazar's partnership conception, which necessarily encompasses kindness, its presence in the culture of the Christian communities should be expected given the character of love ascribed to Jesus.⁷¹

Kindness comes into play in covenantal relationships because they are entered into voluntarily by individuals who share “fundamental equality...[as] free people.”⁷² Thus, they can debate and decide on their commonweal and the binding mutual obligations they commit to, not only because of their legal force but because in the course of their face-to-face relationships they have learned of one another’s suffering and hope—they have developed simple human affection and concern for one another. There is nothing anomalous about their relationships.⁷³ (Notably, they are the commonplace experience of base-building community organizers, which we discuss in greater detail further along.)

The social-psychology of combining loving kindness with strict justice has particular relevance to covenantal democracy, which depends on each citizen’s willingness to subordinate personal liberty to the “rule of law” specified by the covenant, which is to be enforced by both every individual and the self-governing polity they establish. Why does it work? In a *Gemeinschaft* community, in which citizens know one another’s day-to-day struggles and hopes, with empathy for others’ losses and disappointments, their loving-kindness implicitly expresses their values, which creates trust between the members of the community.⁷⁴ It’s that trust, based on common values, reflected in caring for one another, that leads to considering their commonweal and their agreement on how best to achieve it. Without loving-kindness in a community, the needed trust fails to develop, and resistance to their polity becomes commonplace.

COVENANT WITNESSED BY HEAVEN AND EARTH

Following the recitation of all the blessings and curses that were conveyed to the people, Deuteronomy 31:28 reads: Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call *heaven and earth to witness* against them. (Our emphasis.)⁷⁵ How is any reader of the Torah, whether today or hundreds of years ago, to understand that “heaven and earth [can be called] to witness against [us]”?

Heaven and earth are ineradicable in our lives, since our survival depends on timely rainfall and the productivity of the earth, along with the absence of devastating hail and nutrient failure of the soil—such conditions predictably occur when our moral malfeasance and nonfeasance encounter the physical and moral lawfulness of the Creation. The history of humankind, up until the present day, bears incontrovertible evidence that we are capable of both beautifying and despoiling the earth and its atmosphere, and the outcomes of our initiatives are rarely surprising upon later reflection. In regard to the plundering of the earth, one of the standout instances during the twentieth century was the Dust Bowl.⁷⁶ That early twentieth century catastrophe may be rivaled in time by what’s happening to the poisoning of the land now.⁷⁷ But both of these developments together don’t begin to rival the effects of climate change.⁷⁸

By calling upon heaven and earth as witnesses, Moses highlighted the permanence of God’s covenant, to which heaven and earth would be an inescapable “witness” insofar as they continued to bless or condemn the actions of the people. The underlying principle is not complicated: the lawfulness of God’s Creation is such that the *moral* character of our behavior invariably affects the *physical* creation—the ecological causes and effects between the two

systems are inescapable. The integrated relationship between physical and spiritual lawfulness is given to us in the Torah, which is described by Rabbi Hirsch in his commentary on Bereshit 7:9 in relation to Noah: “But here appears in concrete actuality that important fact, shown in the sacred scriptures, that the same God Who gives [spiritual] laws to [hu]mankind is also the lawgiver [of physical laws] and director of Nature, in other words that ה' (*Hashem*—representing God’s attribute of compassion) is also אֱלֹהִים (*Elokim*—representing God’s attribute of justice). [The Torah teaches that both of these attributes effect God’s loving care for humankind.] He Who gave Noah the command which he was to obey of his own free [moral-spiritual] will, also led the animals to him in such a manner that he was able to fulfill the command. This fact, that the God of [hu]mankind is identical with the God of Nature, that the Word of God which administers Nature is the same which gave His Law to [hu]Man[kind] to be observed by his own free will is a principle of Jewish consciousness which, amongst others, David sang in Ps. CXLVII....”

We discuss this systemic process in more detail below. Sociologically, we understand that Moses was indirectly appealing to the Creator of heaven and earth to convey that the terms of the covenant, including its consequences, would ultimately be exercised by God’s lawfulness in the physical creation if the people failed to live up to their moral obligations. Divine justice was thereby assured for those who were parties to the covenant, both those who would remain loyal to it and those who would break it. The emigrants and early settlers, from the Mayflower Compact to the founders of the first towns and beyond, similarly recognized and incorporated God as a witness to their covenants, probably with some variation of the foregoing in mind.

LUXURY LEADS TO DEFECTION FROM GOD AND COVENANT

But in Devarim 31:20-21, taking a phrase from the wisdom of Ecclesiastes (1:9), “there’s no new thing under the sun,” the Torah forecasts the inevitable: (20) For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore to their fathers, that flows with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and become fat; then will they turn to other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. (21) And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles have befallen them, that this poem shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten in the mouths of their seed; for I know their inclination and what they do, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.⁷⁹

The import of these verses is unmistakable, and it would have seemed so to the early settlers who regarded themselves as escapees of a morally corrupt society. They could see for themselves how the self-satisfactions of dissolute life led to breaking the covenant and undermining the morals, health, social well-being, and productivity of a community.

The settlers and colonists knew the connection between immorality and idolatry. But idolatry, in the narrow sense of worshipping physical idols, was almost entirely absent among them. The settlers, primarily Puritans and other Protestant groups, were strongly opposed to any form of idolatry, which they associated with the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church’s remnants of Catholic rituals. Insofar as idolizing materialism, land was not only a source of sustenance and economic wherewithal but also a sign of divine favor. The Puritans believed that success in

acquiring and cultivating land revealed God's blessings. This belief was rooted in their interpretation of biblical principles, where land ownership was often associated with God's covenant promises. However, this strong emphasis on land ownership and expansion also led to questionable moral and ethical practices, particularly in their relations with indigenous peoples (e.g., Cherokee, Lakota, and Diné).

The obsession with land and the economic security it provided could be seen as a form of idolatry, where the settlers placed their trust and devotion more in material success than in their spiritual mission. While they would not have used the term "idolatry" to describe their pursuit of land, the intense focus on land acquisition and the moral compromises made in the process, suggest that, in practice, land ownership did become an object of near-idolatrous importance for many settlers.

Idolatry threatens the well-being of the whole people when one individual, rejecting conventional morality, becomes self-idolizing, redefining and dispensing with moral standards altogether, inevitably leading many others to become enthusiasts and then enablers of idolatry. That it did not have a lasting dysfunctional effect on the settler and colonial culture may have been due, at least in part, to what they had borrowed from the Torah and integrated into the life of their communities. Similarly, that they saw themselves as a "city upon a hill," striving for communal righteousness, may have tempered some of the moral missteps of their material ambitions.

The warning against idolatry, treating anything—nowadays, from little green pieces of paper, hot sex, fast horses, and expensive jewelry, to crystals, black cats, and astrology—as if it has the power to bring blessings or curses, is well understood to be warning that every form of idolatry contradicts God's Law. Deuteronomy 4:23-24 reads: (23) Guard yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of Adonai [(the) Lord]⁸⁰ your God, which God made with you, and make you an engraved image, or the likeness of any thing, which Adonai your God has forbidden you. (24) For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a possessive God.⁸¹

The image of a "consuming fire" would be appreciated by the early settlers, literate in the Torah, insofar as they would understand that, the Creation being both physically *and* spiritually lawful means that if one makes a habit of failing to treat the land respectfully and lies as a matter of course, in both instances violating God's Law, that person may be mercilessly consumed by painful consequences, the "curses" (described in Leviticus 26:14-39).⁸²

The two *lawful* realms, physical and spiritual, are *not* independent of one another but an integrated, unitary system, such that the violation of God's spiritual law ordinary fails the intended purpose when it encounters God's lawfulness of the physical creation. In effect, immoral purposes affect the physical world, which reacts according to its own lawfulness. For example, that's what happens with lying, which is a violation of spiritual lawfulness. It's a lesson most of us learn in childhood: one lie inevitably leads to another lie, and another, and another, until the corrupt edifice of deceit crumbles when its effects eventually encounter the lawfulness of physical life and results in harm to ourselves and others, and we're caught in the blowback of our wrongdoing, sometimes immediately, sometimes long-delayed. And it's equally true that

immoral behavior can stimulate and reinforce immoral intentions in others, because often we acquire behavior in cognitive form through observational learning before acting it out.]

ABRAHAM BECOMES FOUNDER OF A GREAT NATION

The Puritans identified with Abraham, seeing him as the ultimate example of faith and obedience. But they viewed him “typologically”—that is, they interpreted events and figures from the Old Testament as precursors and reflections of later events in Christian history.

Some of the particulars are suggested in Genesis 17:1-6, which reads: (1) And when Abram was ninety nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be perfect. (2) And I will make my covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. (3) And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, (4) As for me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. (5) Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. (6) And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you. (7) And I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you.⁸³

His willingness to leave his homeland at God’s command was mirrored in the Puritans’ journey to the New World, which they often interpreted as a divine mission. Just as Abraham had left the familiar for the promise of a new land, the Puritans saw themselves as leaving England for the promise of religious freedom and the creation of a new “promised land” in America. Taming an undeveloped wilderness, our political forebears saw themselves as the inheritors of a tradition that was timeless, one they encompassed within their Christian beliefs, reinforcing them with guidance for day-to-day life. Then, in Genesis 15:1, they read: After these things the word of Adonai came to Abram⁸⁴ in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am your shield, and your *reward* will be great.⁸⁵ In many ways, the human story of covenant begins with Abraham, long before the events at Mount Sinai. Abraham’s existence was about to be radically reordered, from his personal journey, with its challenges and accomplishments, as guided by God, to a life in which the future of the entire people would devolve upon him. Rabbi Hirsch illuminates the import of the changes: “Up till now Abraham was respected and valued and loved for his good heart and personality. Now something higher is demanded from him, and that is, doing all these good deeds as a duty, as a law to be obeyed, obeyed from his free-willed submission to the Law of God,⁸⁶ so that he becomes, of his own free will that which all other creations are forced to be by their very nature.”⁸⁷

We speculate that the settlers and colonists understood that Abraham was not the biological father of all the peoples of all the nations but a *spiritual* model, so that they too could covenant with God and with one another. To the Puritans, Abraham was a model of obedience to God, living in covenant with God, while meeting the challenges of godly leadership and nation-building—which the Puritans sought to emulate in their own spiritual and communal lives. Their identification with Abraham and other biblical figures would have shaped their spiritual self-understanding, reinforcing their belief that they were part of a divine mission to create a new,

godly society in America. But the Torah covenant can only be understood and upheld for generations in social life by recognizing the *cultural*, moral-spiritual content that serves as its underpinning, especially that which is inculcated and promulgated from the bottom up, first through the *home*, then by the *community*.

IV: BUILDING THE MORAL-SPIRITUAL HOME

HOME THE BASIS OF COMMUNITY AND NATION

The day-to-day life and teaching of the Puritan home formed the cultural foundation of their community, but their home life in no way resembled the home in America today.⁸⁸ The Puritan family was patriarchal, which was the norm throughout Europe, Africa, and much of Asia.⁸⁹ The father headed the household, serving as the economic provider and making the major decisions. Puritan men were farmers, tradesmen, or skilled craftsmen, while women managed the home, cooked, cleaned, and made clothing. Women were responsible for raising children and supporting their husbands. They were expected to be pious and submissive. Children were considered blessings but also seen as inherently sinful,⁹⁰ requiring firm discipline and religious instruction. Parents were responsible for their children's religious education, teaching them to read the Bible and adhere to Puritan beliefs.

Much of their home life was guided and reinforced by the Bible. Deuteronomy 24:5 provided a clear statement of Torah perspective on the overall societal importance of marriage and family: "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the host [army], neither shall he be charged with any business: he shall be free for his house one year, and shall cheer his wife whom he has taken."⁹¹ Even when the nation is engaged in war, its national interest in establishing a solid foundation of marriage and the home may be prioritized over drafting a newlywed to serve in the Army or continue in business. It's an explicit policy confirmation of the critical connection between marriage, the home, community, and nation—that marriage and the home are of pivotal importance to the survival and success of the community and nation.⁹²

VITAL ROLE OF THE HOME TO PRODUCE AND EDUCATE CHILDREN

The vital (but obviously not exclusive) purpose of family life is to produce children to ensure the longevity of the home, community and society. So Genesis 1:28 reads: And God blessed them, and God spoke to them: Be fruitful and *multiply yourself* and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the bird of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.⁹³ (Emphasis added.)

Here God distinguishes the commission of humankind in contrast to all other living creatures. The commandment itself addresses the inborn human potential for moral sensibility and free-willed moral decision-making, in contrast to the largely instinctual, amoral behavior of animals. This initial commandment to be fruitful and multiply is likely to be understood by a reflective reader of any era *not* to mean, first, raise fruit trees and increase their productivity, but have children and multiply them in God's image as beings who realize their full moral-spiritual potential. The parents have to pass on to their children not only their physical attributes but their

spiritual and moral qualities, carefully nurturing their children's development over years. The commandment also implies, even to the casual reader, that the moral-spiritual education of every human being is a prior condition to their "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the bird of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." Otherwise, such dominion evolves into little more than random exploitation and carnage of the earth's natural wonders.

Perhaps, Deuteronomy 6:5-7 is the clearest and most complete Torah teaching in regard to the moral-spiritual education of children: (5) And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (6) And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart; (7) And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.⁹⁴

The Torah's standards for parenthood come across in every age and place: First, parents must love the Word of God, must love all the justice, truth, and compassion which the Torah expects of us; and they must act together with all their heart and soul and resources to diligently educate their children, every day, without fail. They must live out the Torah's expectations in the day-to-day life of their home, sparing no effort to ensure that their children understand the moral-spiritual meaning of their experience. The early New England settlers and colonists led lives that mirrored the directives they read in Deuteronomy 6:5-7. Education was highly valued, with a strong emphasis on reading, particularly the Bible. Religion permeated every aspect of daily life. Family prayers, Bible readings, and regular attendance at church were integral parts of their home routine. Their moral and ethical values were shaped and enforced through a combination of home-based instruction, community norms, religious teachings, and legal regulations.

The moral curriculum for children's education was rooted in Puritan religious beliefs and was mainly the responsibility of the home. The aim was to instill religious piety, moral integrity, and social discipline. The Bible was considered *the* authority on moral and ethical behavior. Bible stories, moral tales, and proverbs, were used to teach lessons about right and wrong, obedience, humility, and other virtues. Family prayers, Bible readings, and religious discussions were daily activities that reinforced moral teachings. The Puritan emphasis on moral education aimed to create a godly society by ensuring that each generation was deeply grounded in their religion's moral and ethical principles. This approach involved the home as the primary educator, supported by the church and the wider community.

CLEAVING TO GOD

The essence of the Puritan child's education was to learn, day by day, that durable happiness, fulfillment, and contentment in life is no farther away than "cleaving" (Hebrew: *devekut*) to God,⁹⁵ with all one's heart, with all one's soul, and with all one's resources, by aligning one's will and actions to God's purposes for humankind. Although *devekut* is not mentioned in the Torah until Deuteronomy, its significance is then affirmed repeatedly: in Deuteronomy 4:4,⁹⁶ But you who held fast to Adonai your God are alive every one of you this day; in Deuteronomy 10:20,⁹⁷ You shall fear Adonai, your God, worship Him, and cleave to Him and swear by His Name; in Deuteronomy 11:22, ⁹⁸ For if you keep all these commandments which I command you

to do them, to love the Adonai, your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him; in Deuteronomy 13:5,⁹⁹ You shall follow Adonai, your God, fear Him, keep His commandments, heed His voice, worship Him, and cleave to Him; and in Deuteronomy 30:20,¹⁰⁰ That you may love the Lord your God, and that you may obey His voice, and that you may cleave to Him; for He is your life, and the length of your days; that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Although the Puritans would not have understood *devekut* in the Jewish mystical sense,¹⁰¹ they nonetheless regarded it as a call to uphold their covenantal relationship with God by living in obedience to God's will. They would have responded to the directives in the following verses, but within their Christian theological mindset, especially in relation to covenant, faith, obedience, and rejection of idolatry. These commandments, to which Puritan children were introduced, emphasize that we cleave to God, find meaning and fulfillment in life, not by getting things for ourselves but doing things for others. One of the first lessons they learned in that vein is about the brothers Cain and Abel: Genesis 4:9 reads: Then God said unto Cain: Where is Abel your brother? And he said: I know not; am I my brother's keeper?¹⁰²

Even a youngster can imagine where an attitude of me first, last, and only leads. Most have seen or personally encountered a bully or lunatic at school or on the streets. Thus, in the heart of home life, parents plant the *morality* that calls each of us to be responsible for every other in our community. The obvious alternative is the dissolution of commonweal that binds individuals together in community, and its replacement with conflict that follows from self-infatuation. Thus the education of the Puritan children reinforced the goodness that comes from obeying the commandment to set aside one's own willful inclinations on occasion in favor of the Torah's requirements for "neighborliness" in community, which they encountered in Leviticus 19:14-18. The commandments required that they not take advantage of their neighbors who have disabilities which make them unusually vulnerable, nor should they create a situation that causes a neighbor to stumble physically or morally.

Leviticus 19:14 reads: You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God; I am Adonai.¹⁰³ Leviticus 19:15 reads: You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.¹⁰⁴ "Judgment" (דִּינָה) here refers to formal judges, but the New England Puritans generalized Leviticus 19:15 to include everyone in the community. They saw themselves as living under God's law in a covenantal society where individual and communal righteousness were inseparable, and standards of moral and ethical conduct were applied not only to those in formal positions of authority but to every member of the community. The commandment thus taught their children to treat all their schoolmates and neighbors righteously, fairly and with kindness, regardless of their station in life.

Leviticus 19:16 reads: You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people; nor shall you stand against the blood of your neighbor; I am the Lord.¹⁰⁵ Children were taught not to gossip and carry tales about others, and not to stand by idly while someone may be harmed and it's possible to help. Leviticus 19:17 reads: You shall not hate your brother [any human being] in your heart; you shall reason with your neighbor, and not allow sin on his account.¹⁰⁶ The

commandment requires that we not separate ourselves from our “neighbors” by bearing a grudge for real or imagined injury.¹⁰⁷ Leviticus 19:18 reads: You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself,¹⁰⁸ I am the Lord.¹⁰⁹

We have presented only a small number of teachings from the Torah, ignoring many more of equal significance, and leaving out altogether obvious extreme examples of wrongdoing, such as murder, rape, and robbery. Taken all together, the commandments setting out the Torah’s vision and path of neighborliness, which comprise a significant part of the Puritan *home*-education curriculum, provide the values-foundation of community and commonweal. They were the cultural underpinning of the Puritan’s direct democracy, whatever the other differences in personality and character, interests and ideologies of the members of the community. We speculate that the Puritans understood that it is not the quality of the state that produces the morally competent home but the quality of the home that produces the morally competent state.

V: BUILDING MORAL-SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

TORAH FOUNDATION OF COMMUNITY

The culture and institutions of the Puritans’ communities supported the transition from the material-rewards culture of the Old World cities to a New World culture of moral-spiritual rewards. This was carried out in myriad ways, from shaping public education and sanctioning public misconduct, to imposing standards of behavior for social acceptance and occupational or professional advancement. In elementary schools, it was commonplace to teach and grade not only academic performance but “citizenship,” “conduct,” and “deportment.” Mistreating the elderly, weak, disabled, impoverished, or mentally disturbed received the widest condemnation.¹¹⁰

In the early days in New England, communal spiritual rewards were reinforced by the Torah’s directives. Because the produce of one’s land, which was required for survival, was believed to be a gift of God first, the result of one’s own labor second. It was understood that it should benefit not only the farmer and the farmer’s home but needy neighbors as well. In Deuteronomy, one of the standards of “neighborliness,” unlike anything most urbanites and suburbanites can imagine today, *required* that the agricultural producer share the bounty of the land with needy members of the community. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 read: (28) At the end of three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall lay it up inside your gates. (29) And the Levite, because he has no part nor inheritance with you, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are inside your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.¹¹¹ The text makes clear that the satisfaction of the needs of the needy is essential to satisfying God—in effect, to receive God’s blessings for the continued productivity of one’s land and labor.¹¹²

It may be that the community makes provisions for the basic needs of those who are destitute, disabled, and dependent, in need one way or another. In the early settler and colonial communities, for example, provisions were also generally made for the education of all

members. But then as now, such provisions do not guarantee their well-being. Here (Exodus 22:21), the Torah obviously is addressed to the members of the community who do *not* suffer from such vulnerability, warning them not to take advantage of the weakness of those who are disadvantaged, or in any way to shame them. Exodus 22:21, for example, reads: You shall not afflict any widow or orphan [which includes all who are comparably dependent].¹¹³ Moreover, Exodus 22:22-23, warns: (22) If you afflict them in any way, and they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry; (23) And my anger shall burn hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children orphans.¹¹⁴

While the severity of the warning and the consequences for ignoring it seem to be unmistakable, the particular ways in which the outcomes are realized are far from clear. We do not assume that the Pilgrims would take the words literally, that God would advantage their enemies to kill them if they mistreated a vulnerable member of their community, since there was scant evidence of such strict enforcement. But they certainly might imagine that taking care of every member of their community was indispensable to the durability of their own commitment to the commonweal. Then, too, in the event that disunity in the form of testing God's will became commonplace, the community itself would begin to weaken, creating countless vulnerabilities for every resident set adrift from empowered citizenship.

From the outset on the Mayflower through the historical development of the towns and the colonies, moral spirituality was a matter of *community* concern and responsibility, which, in addition to the role of the polity, every *individual* in the community was expected to enforce. The Pilgrims might well have taken to heart the ancient story of citified life that overwhelmed the moral-spiritual values of *Gemeinschaft* community, leaving the inhabitants impervious to the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,”¹¹⁵ as told in Genesis 11:4-9: (4) And they said, Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (5) And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men built. (6) And the Lord said, Behold, the people are one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have schemed to do. (7) Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. (8) So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth; and they left off the building of the city. (9) Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confuse the language of all the earth; and from there did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.¹¹⁶ In these verses we have the prescient forecasting of the corruption of the city, in which its “name”—a reference to the anticipated fame and glory of those who build it, own it, and rule it—far surpasses the well-being of any of the individuals residing within it.

While the Torah requires that we seek the commonweal, which includes the good of *every* individual within the city, unfortunately the *Gesellschaft* corporate form knows only the contractual, institutional good, from which only privileged individuals and elites are consistently enriched and empowered. To the contrary, the Torah teaches that a community can only justify its existence by uplifting every individual life as the root and measure of commonweal. Private, powerful, autocratic self-interests are anathema to the *polity* of godly community. That certainly doesn't preclude the personal liberty of individuals to pursue private interests with their own

resources or preclude the community polity from creating opportunities equally available for all to seek such private interests.

BEHAVIOR THAT THREATENS COVENANTAL COMMUNITY

The Puritan community was not obligated to accept individuals whose overt *actions* sabotaged the basic values and principles that sustained the commonweal. Although the Torah directs us to uplift every individual life, that inclusiveness does not extend to those who would deny the existence of God—that is, in effect disclaiming the moral legitimacy of the commandments, or who would engage in idolatry (as defined above) by making “sacrifices” to a false god. Public indifference, questioning, expressing doubt, and protesting, may be tolerated; but threats, intimidation, violent rhetoric, and actual violence are not to be tolerated. And in the worst cases of spies, malevolent infiltrators, and “cool alternators,”¹¹⁷ they need be afforded no compassionate consideration.

In general, the *Gemeinschaft* community is prepared to accept the “oddball” and “crank” and “freak,” because it’s understood that commonweal is not based on personal or cultural homogeneity but commonality of *public* interests—what benefits *every* citizen, such as clean water, serviceable roads, law enforcement, public education, care of the vulnerable, etc. Apart from the extreme threats to the settlement or town mentioned above, the Mayflower Compact, as the forerunner polity of American democracy and its political offspring, included both the “churched and the unchurched.”¹¹⁸ Exodus 22:20 reads: You shall not wrong a stranger, nor oppress him; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.¹¹⁹ But there were limits.

Yet the limits did not preclude the formation and success of diversified communities, which included non-believers. One was entitled to the privileges of citizenship, both the benefits and burdens, regardless of whether having faithfully lived lifelong as a Christian or as a “heathen” (e.g., Muslims and Jews). What would deserve full equality and equal rights was belief in, or at least not denial of, God the Sovereign over all. In effect, full citizenship required at least the recognition of a shared set of basic unifying values, which enabled the very possibility of commonweal despite enormous differences between members of the company, community, or colony.

We can surmise some of what the Pilgrims learned about community from their study of the Bible, but what do scholarly historical studies¹²⁰ reveal about the underpinnings of their community life? What do such studies show of their cultural values, principles, and practices that nurtured their political innovation, allowing it to take shape and endure? Throughout, according to the historians, what the early settlers and colonists gleaned from the Torah is unmistakable. The cultural norm was that they experienced themselves to be in a covenantal relationship with God, one in which the community collectively endeavored to follow God’s laws for the sake of divine protective guidance. This religious framework shaped their communal political culture and structures, including covenantal self-governance. The Puritans prioritized the well-being of the community over individual desires, which was crucial in forming and maintaining a democratic polity that served the commonweal. There was a strong sense of mutual

accountability within the Puritan community, such that members were expected to watch over one another and ensure adherence to the community's moral and legal codes.

The legal system was heavily influenced by their interpretation of the Bible. They believed in a legal order that reflected God's will, ensuring that justice was both fair and aligned with their religious values. Their emphasis on education fostered a well-informed populace capable of participating in governance and decision-making. Education also played a key role in transmitting cultural and religious values to future generations, ensuring the continuity of their covenantal community. While not egalitarian by modern standards, the Puritans valued the idea that all members of the community were subject to the same laws, reinforcing the rule of law as a foundational principle. Self-governance was practiced in town meetings, where male church members (and before long, freeholders, and in time, all other adult citizens) could participate in decision-making. This laid the groundwork for democratic governance by involving the entire adult community in political decisions. The idea that legitimate government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, the sovereignty of the people, was central to their covenantal democracy. The Puritans were wary of absolute power and implemented checks and balances within their governing structures. This balance helped maintain a stable, democratic system where authority was exercised responsibly and in accordance with community values.

While the Puritans valued individual liberty, they believed it should be bound by moral and civil law, ensuring that personal freedom did not lead to social disorder that would threaten the unity required to agree on commonweal. That unity existed in much of American society from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, mostly unfazed by an equally long history of revolts and rebellions. These included revolts by slaves (who were not universally considered citizens until ratification of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1868) and indigenous peoples (who were not universally considered citizens until passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924).¹²¹ Our take-away is that the nation had the common values and consciousness of the commonweal to survive all of its insurrectionists and secessionists.

The community culture was instrumental in the development of covenantal democracy, which emphasized religiously derived basic values, adherence to the principles of a moral code, collective responsibility, and participatory governance. The Puritans' religious beliefs, communal focus, and commitment to education and justice, especially, all of which were seeded in their home life, laid the foundation for their unique political innovation of covenantal democracy.

VI: TRANSITION FROM COVENANT TO CONSTITUTION

EARLY MIGRATION OF COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY

What religious travelers to the New World authored as a *covenant* to meet their common needs as settlers, soon became the basis for their newly established churches to govern their religious affairs, and then covenanted councils to govern their civil community. Those covenants, religiously grounded, as we have seen, provided the foundation for similarly derived constitutions, which were adopted by the emerging states and the national government. Their thinking and action reflected their biblical beliefs, political principles, and policy-making

practices. As Professor Elazar has written, "...American constitutionalism fit exactly into the covenantal mold and indeed represents the successful adaptation of that mold to modernity."¹²² In almost every detail the church covenants written in early colonial America resemble Jewish covenants, with one important exception—they do not establish a particular form of government.

From the time of the Mayflower Compact through the early New England settlements to the formation of the new national government and the founding of towns, and eventually the formation and admission of the states to the Union, right up to the twentieth century, covenant was the means by which various degrees of citizen self-initiated and self-directed polities were established in contrast to the old hierarchical order of autocratic rule by monarchs. This basic conception was adapted to the republican, representative form of government, that it too must reflect the will and participation of the *demos* and be grounded in the common morality of the people of that era, what we refer to as the moral-spiritual infrastructure.

The federal conception, that the people at large had the right to *federate based on the values and vision of their faith*, the right to form themselves into self-governing bodies, while simultaneously maintaining their personal liberty, had great appeal. This federal conception of self-government played an indispensable part in the nation's history: first in settling the wilderness, later in forming a national government, and finally in the westward-moving frontier. Eventually, the model was applied to every kind of American organization, revealing our cultural DNA of hostility to every autocrat, tyrant, and dictator. We may become bamboozled on occasion by the slickest of would-be rulers, but in time we wake up, embarrassed by our own gullibility and enraged at the effrontery of the pretender to the throne of the people.

The *moral* base of the covenant is indispensable, because without it relationships of trust remain impossible. Without trust, the perceived risks to personal liberty of relying on others in community life prevent common decision-making and action. As Donald Lutz put it, "... federal liberty rests upon a combination of [moral] virtue and trust, and a tension between individualism and communitarianism. Although the combination originally relied upon religion, it has been transformed into a civil concept."¹²³ Notably, in our own time, when we have seen the moral foundations of government deteriorate beyond recognition, we have entered an era when trust and unity on the commonweal, at every level of governance—local, state, and national—has become unobtainable, even unthinkable.

The history of covenants in America, all characteristically *religious-political*, is widely recognized and celebrated, beginning with the Mayflower Compact and continuing on in the founding of towns in New England, and emerging somewhat transformed in the state and national government constitutions. Its *moral authority* was established by mutual consent of those who would be governed by it through their elected representatives. It should be especially noted again that the first compact in the new world included both the 'both the church and the unchurched,' and thus makes it an *inclusionary* model for the current secularizing population in U.S. society.

The Pilgrim code of law, written in Plymouth Colony in 1636 was "... the first true constitution written by Americans."¹²⁴ It was an important step toward governance by compact and

constitution. As American constitutionalism evolved, the Pilgrim Code provided the basic model, which over time was adapted to modern circumstances. In the early incarnations of the covenants, they followed a widely accepted model, which Elazar outlines, including: a preamble naming the parties to the covenant; a prologue, historical or ideological, establishing the setting or grounding of the covenant; the operative section of the covenant including stipulation or what is agreed; provisions for public reading (proclamation) and deposit of the text for safekeeping; the divine witness to the covenant; and the advantages of performance (blessings) and sanctions for nonperformance (curses).¹²⁵

We can see these aspects of the model were bequeathed from generation to generation, from the Mayflower Compact to the adoption of the Articles of Confederation by the Continental Congress in 1777. In the Articles, the states retained their sovereignty, independence, and all powers not expressly delegated to the central government. The legitimacy of this government, established under the Articles, came from a mutual agreement, a “compact” or covenant, among the states, where each state agreed to cooperate for common purposes, such as defense and foreign relations, but without surrendering their core sovereignty. This aligns with the *federal* concept, which focused on a collective agreement where autonomy is preserved within a larger framework.

Possibly the most novel aspect in the development of federal constitutions is that they too have been regarded as subject to divine guarantee and/or protection but for entirely *civil*, non-religious, purposes. It has only been since the latter part of the last century, for example, that the practice of requiring witnesses in court to swear in God’s name on a Bible to the truthfulness of their testimony, began to be phased out as an infringement on individual rights. Nowadays, one simply “solemnly swears (or affirms)” that the declaration, of whatever type is at hand, will be truthful. Seemingly, as a society we no longer possess or share any common belief in a just and merciful God who cares about and visits consequences on humankind either for righteous or wrongful behavior. We seem to be entirely on our own, doing our own thing, and letting the commonweal take care of itself, which it has no wherewithal to do.

THE FEDERAL IDEAL OF THE NEW NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Presumably, the early references to the new national government as *federal* would have meant, at least to the political cognoscenti, that it was a *covenantal* form of republican government—in effect, a *democratic*-republic. “The word federal is derived from *foedus*,¹²⁶ the Latin word for covenant which, in turn, is the Vulgate’s translation of the Hebrew word *brit*, meaning covenant. According to the OED, it was first used, in English, in 1645 in the midst of the English civil war to describe covenantal relationships of both a political and a theological nature.”¹²⁷

Unfortunately, the term “federalism” has been completely misunderstood by the modern American public. It has come to be simply another word that describes our system of national government with oversight of state and local governments. When Americans refer to the “federal government,” more often than not they have in mind “big government,” far removed from the people—with all its defects and disabilities, anything but covenantal.¹²⁸

While the covenantal foundation of the country was being established, the political philosophers of that era were adding to the momentum of democracy by affirming that government could only be legitimate with the consent of the governed, and that the powers of government must be balanced by separations of those powers—judicially, legislatively and executively. They were pushing up the conception of democracy to the national state, far from its directly democratic roots. The federal approach to self-governance adopted on the Mayflower, only slightly different in its particulars, became the self-governing seed of what was to become local and state government as the westward frontier was opened up by settlers in the nineteenth century, leading increasingly to separations of power as the towns, and then cities and states were established.

The covenantal dimension, which emerged from ancient roots, blossomed in the New England settlements, and became an ideal of the new national government, an integration of political design with moral-spiritual values. It enabled the political means for the gathering of disparate interests and ideologies that nonetheless had equal standing and rights, and the basis to discuss and decide together on their commonweal. In the course of their deliberations, they learned to have affection for and value each other as children of God, with similar experience of suffering and hope.

The American political tradition did not conceive of *federal* as necessarily “big government” but its antithesis, covenantal self-governance. It first became the constitutional cornerstone of the colonies and eventually the states uniting to form and then expand the boundaries of the national government.

THE WANING OF POLITICAL FREEDOM AND CIVIL RIGHTS

But the Founders’ anti-democratic bias was strengthened by the early (1790s) rise of popular factions and partisan parties that threatened to achieve governing majorities in Congress. The favoritism toward representation by an elite of educated and propertied White men led inexorably to the democratizing of the Constitution at the end of the Civil War by the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. These abolished slavery (1865), established birthright citizenship (1866), and prohibited racial discrimination in voting (1869). The effect was to significantly broaden the civil rights of the lower classes. However, these amendments’ effects were limited by widespread Southern resistance and, later, the rise of Jim Crow laws, which delayed their full impact.

At the same time, political freedom to participate directly in government was beginning to wane. While civil rights expanded in theory, systemic barriers such as literacy tests, poll taxes, and segregation effectively disenfranchised many, especially in the South. Over the next century and a half, the civil rights of the *demos* continued to expand with landmark cases and legislation (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968 (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968). This continued until, after many decades of expanding political freedom as the nation’s frontier moved westward, it began to contract with the rise of bureaucratized urban city governments (discussed below). This development led in turn to the near-total loss of *political freedom* and a corresponding reduction of civil rights in our time by the anti-democratic Senate and SCOTUS.

Because the United States was a frontier nation during its first century, much of its development involved transcontinental movement of small, newly formed, self-governing communities. Settlers crossing the continent in clusters adopted political compacts for the duration of their travel, not by chance or personal predilection but for survival. “Public space” was created from necessity, marked by democratic election of officers, establishment of rules, and subscription to mutual obligations, to answer the conditions of an historic migration.

The conceptualization and existence of “public space” has had many variations. The archetype in the West was ancient Greece, where citizens gathered in the marketplace to socialize and discuss politics. All of the subsequent thinking and philosophizing about public space have similarly emphasized physical space and social interaction of one kind or another. However, our view highlights the power-dynamic of public space. We see public space or the lack of it in modernity primarily in regard to whether a community or society affords access to the rights, roles, and resources required by the at-large citizenry to effect public policy and to hold public officials accountable. For us, public space is less a matter of physical space and talk than institutional empowerment and political action, which of course means that accessibility must be afforded to all citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or ability.¹²⁹

The self-governing communities, disbanded at their destinations, were often replaced by another informal and temporary political form. “Claim clubs” and similar associations were organized to confirm, give notice of, and protect claims, filling the institutional void between settlement and formation of towns. These groups began with community meetings, then drafted constitutions and bylaws, elected officers, established procedures for selecting juries to settle disputes, and in some places evolved into recognized local governments. Equally common was the organizing of some variant of town government on the New England model, departing ever farther from the original as the country’s second century and westward settlement progressed, but never entirely forsaking councils, schools, law enforcement, and the other accoutrements of public life.

During the nineteenth century, when America’s rural and urban populations were reversed from their present distribution, small- and moderate-sized towns had usable public space. This was not always by explicit political right—there was little institutionalized direct democracy outside New England—but through social and physical arrangements that fit the geo-political scale of the period. There was much more opportunity for, and actual participation in public life by individuals, far less privatization.

Paralleling the older cities of the East—Boston, New York and Philadelphia—small self-governing towns fed the growth of Midwestern and Western metropolitan centers. Neighborhoods in Chicago and Los Angeles, and many cities in between, had their own representative governments, were independent political units making decisions about zoning, taxes, and other matters of public concern. Some, as in New England, sent representatives to state legislatures.

Throughout the history of our political development as a nation, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the Northwest Ordinance (1787) was the constitutional model for the U.S.

Constitution (1788) and the constitutions of all the states subsequently admitted to the union. It included acceptance of what were essentially covenantal conditions by each newly admitted state. The idea of federal liberty was carried over to the states that comprise the United States, each giving up some of its liberty to act for the benefit of having others being equally limited in their actions that might cause them harm if not limited.

However, the Southern states began to pervert the theory with the argument "... that the Constitution was no more than a compact among the states from which any state or states could secede for cause; that is to say, if its people believed the compact to have been seriously violated."¹³⁰ The effect was to disparage the idea of compact altogether as the basis of the national government.

Yet, "In the West, community after community and state after state were organized on the basis of the same tradition that had served the colonists prior to the American Revolution. This did not cease until the opportunities for that kind of behavior diminished and then disappeared with the end of the rural-land frontier."¹³¹ The era of the first world war saw the end of such "meaningful covenanting" in the United States.¹³²

As Elazar affirms, "The evidence is overwhelming that the covenant principle translated into the larger political realm to produce modern popular government in the form of federal democracy."¹³³ Our national government, long-recognized as federal in structure and culture, epitomized by rights and privileges which were balanced by obligations, ensuring a limited form of freedom, has become a model not only for our state and local governments but governments throughout the world. The declaration, "I know my rights" can frequently be heard in public life, only outnumbered by complaints about the demands of taxation, military service, business regulations, driving restrictions, ad infinitum—we live with the limitations on our personal liberty for the sake of our common liberty or commonweal to act together in ways that are far more powerful than anything we could accomplish individually.

VII: DEMISE OF THE MORAL COVENANT

FROM 'FEDERAL' TOWNS TO THE BUREAUCRATIC CITIES

In earlier incarnations of American society, when most Americans lived on farms and in small towns, human relationships were face-to-face (or at least included person-to-person connections), so their interests were known to be either congenial to or in conflict with the commonweal. The potential to identify shared concerns and reach agreement on unified action was more or less inherent in the natural circumstances of small-scale, *Gemeinschaft* social life.

Beginning in the middle of the 1800s and coinciding with the nation's spectacular industrialization, waves of immigration and the domestic population movements fueled urbanization and the growth of impoverished urban neighborhoods. Historically poor peoples came first from Europe, later from the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Black Belt and Delta regions of the South, the Cumberland Plateau, and the high plains of central Mexico. Desperate to flee what

for most was an oppressive rural life, they were as cut off from power in the political economies of the cities as they had been previously in rural communities.

After the shift of the population, first to cities and then later to large suburbs, social life was transformed from the traditional *Gemeinschaft* community in which individuals are bound together by common norms because they share physical space and values, to *Gesellschaft* conditions in which associations exist mostly through impersonal, institutional connections, in which membership is motivated by individual self-interest.

The partisan parties began to monopolize mid-nineteenth-century urban politics through the political machines, which isolated policy-making from local political demands and conflicts, most of which originated in race- and ethnicity-conscious populations, those most victimized by urbanization and industrialization. The effect of the machines, like all top-down-sponsored infrastructure, was to convert volatile revolutionary redistribution issues into placating distribution policies.

The “progressive” or municipal reform movement,¹³⁴ dating from about the turn of the twentieth century, was a top-down reaction to machine corruption, urban deterioration and instability, which threatened economic growth. The reformers were liberal, Protestant, upper and middle class. Their ideology featured effectiveness, efficiency, and economy. Their strategy stressed administrative centralization in bureaucratic organization and rational policy-making by technical experts. This resulted in the removal of public administration not only from the corrupting influence of the machines but from political control generally. Unceasing municipal annexations and consolidations ended any semblance of local self-governance.

After 1900, virtually every major city in the country created a “municipal reform bureau” to promote their principles of local government. Undoubtedly, many of the municipal reformers were motivated by the horrendous living conditions of the urban poor and the indifference of the industrial corporations that employed them. However, “... the major initiators of structural reforms came primarily from the cities’ top commercial leadership and upper-class elite ... to take formal political power from the previously dominant lower- and middle-class elements so that they might advance their own conception of desirable public policy.”¹³⁵ In the early 1900s, well-known industrial capitalists, such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, having seen that the political machines could no longer control the increasing demands of urban industrial workers, bankrolled the movement. These centralized urban polities and their bureaucracies quickly became mechanisms of social control, sublimating politics, corrupting and discrediting the political process and transferring its functions to mass organizations. The municipal reform movement led to bureaucratic gigantism and institutionalized the end of urban public space.

Mass urban and (and more recently) suburban public bureaucracies have little commitment to the commonweal. In turn, the *demos* has little commitment to them, as evidenced by their refusal to vote in local elections. Unfortunately, this alienation of the citizenry from public life barely registers in the bureaucratic calculus of municipal successes and failures. We’ve had only more of the latter since 1964 when Richard Korn defined “... the great unwritten law of [American] bureaucracy: DO NOTHING TO EMBARRASS THE ORGANIZATION.... [which] lives in a

perpetual state of crisis created by the knowledge that its inadequacies or derelictions may become known and result in its disenfranchisement.”¹³⁶

Americans have become so disillusioned and cynical about big government, that now a significant minority of them believe a violent revolution may be necessary to cure the problems. Despite the naive hope that by electing the right president, the country will be righted, most do not believe that the government acts in response to their political preferences. We have already had in this century two presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Al Gore, who won the popular vote but lost the election to opponents who received the most Electoral College votes,¹³⁷ which by design is not democratic but favors conservative rural voters. SCOTUS vacancies have been filled and have been prevented from being filled, by the political machinations of an undemocratic Senate, in order to stack the Court with their chosen ideologues. The power of huge corporations and their billionaire owners is used to control nominations and directly corrupt the decisions of the SCOTUS. In other words, the federal government no longer has the slightest resemblance to an institution based on federal liberty—likewise, state and local government except in small cities and towns.

THE MORAL SLIDE TO OBLIVION

As the historic movement from rural agricultural life to urban industrial life waned, popular views of religion began to shift dramatically. Traditional beliefs and their calls for compliance with moral standards were rejected, defined as archaic and without compelling authority by the *Gesellschaft* culture of the industrial cities. In the “roaring twenties,” working-class families gained access to previously unimagined material goods, such as single-family homes, automobiles, and appliances. World War I brought newly liberated sexuality. These developments fostered a movement that idolized personal amoral autonomy. The test of right and wrong became defined as “doing what feels good,” “what feels comfortable,” “following one’s bliss,” and “doing what your heart tells you is right.” This loss of moral standards was accompanied by increased doubt about the existence of a just and merciful God, a critical loss of the faith and hope which are essential to *citizenhood*.¹³⁸

The remains of the moral-spiritual foundation of covenant were all but buried by these developments. The shared belief that the government is formed and exists by virtue of the continuing participation of the people who voluntarily accept its rule was shattered. This was a near-perfect outcome from the viewpoint of public bureaucracies that were becoming less and less accessible to the public. These bureaucracies unselfconsciously ramped up their policies and budget appropriations to suit corporate ideologies and interests, rationalizing their actions with trickle-down economics.

With the advent of the Great Depression, disillusionment with government and rampant materialism were forestalled. The New Deal’s new level of government intervention in the economy sped up recovery from the depression, brought banks and Wall Street firms under long-overdue regulation, moderated economic inequality, returned millions of the unemployed to productive work, and protected citizens economically through Social Security and unemployment insurance.

But Franklin Roosevelt's initiatives also centralized power in the institutions of the national government. This increased reliance on a bureaucratized state resulted in a more top-down managed form of democracy, where citizens had less access to influence policy decisions. This downside of the Roosevelt recovery was soon forgotten as the demands of World War II quickly led to a massive increase in production and employment opportunities. At the end of the war, the country was briefly unified from the massive defense effort, and religious belief and practice experienced a resurgence. But before long, the permissive culture reemerged even more vigorously.

The nation experienced both an historic upsurge in purchasing power and the pleasure of seemingly unlimited material goods after the sacrifices and rationing of the war years. The national government pumped money into the economy with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) and the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. Private capital moved into manufacturing consumer goods. The nation's corporations retooled to meet civilian demand for consumer goods. And job opportunities were opened to groups previously shut out of the economy.

It should be no surprise, however, that the population's much greater access to consumer goods gave rise to the now long-standing and single-minded pursuit of personal physique, position, prestige, possessions, and power. It did not take long for the first signs of me-first-last-and-forever to replace a commitment to the commonweal. The moral-spiritual infrastructure, which had sustained the nation through the Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, was fading in its effects; it could no longer serve as the basis for the nation to respond as one to overcome great challenges. Alienated from traditional moral-spirituality and the public powers of what previously had been their governments, with their disempowerment reinforced by large-scale manipulation of public opinion (through newly available television sets), citizens became consumers. As the *demos* was neutered as both a moral-spiritual and political force, several reactionary political objectives became feasible.

The bureaucracies were by this time fully divorced from the constraints of moral-spirituality and dedicated to the interests of major corporations and the "donor class."¹³⁹ They took additional steps to diminish citizen demands for access, accountability, and control of government decision-making. As always, the public relations rationale followed the principles of the municipal reform movement. The explanation was that, for the sake of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, the citizenry would be relieved of the burden of managing the government in favor of decision-making by professional experts.

Perhaps the most powerful of the bureaucratic efforts to alienate the *demos* from the *public powers* of local government—affirming the tradition of the municipal reform movement—involved the transition from the smaller constituencies of the towns to the larger ones of the metropolitan cities. The City of Los Angeles, for example, beginning in 1915, sought to expand by annexing towns in the adjacent San Fernando Valley, such as Van Nuys (1915) and North Hollywood (formerly known as Lankershim) (1923). Eventually most of the valley was annexed. With this expansion, the City of Los Angeles enlarged its tax base and created new opportunities

for its council representatives to enrich themselves with quid pro quo zoning and development decisions, which became thoroughly corrupted. In exchange, the annexed areas of the Valley were offered needed water supplies for agriculture, improved public services to financially stressed local councils, and, through ballot initiatives, improved police, fire, and sanitation services.¹⁴⁰ The metropolitan cities took over the smaller municipalities within their claimed “sphere of influence,” with the result that huge electoral constituencies were now “represented by one at-large elected office-holder (who would be all the easier to influence from the top-down).

During the 1950s, the attention of the general public turned away from government. Free from close scrutiny by the public’s preoccupation with a cornucopia of consumer goods, the “National Security State” era took hold, marked by the rise of the National Security Council (NSC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).¹⁴¹ The covert funding and black-arts sophistication of the CIA and other elements of the national security apparatus gave the expanding American elite new, covert means to exploit natural resources worldwide. These sub rosa elements of the national government were used to replace popularly elected foreign governments that were “uncooperative” (read, not easily corrupted). American corporations and their leading stockholders covertly promoted this perversion of government. Thus they planted the seeds of extraordinary economic inequality.

A BROTHERHOOD OF BILLIONAIRES

That economic inequality gave rise to a brotherhood of billionaires, who came to occupy a place beyond the reach of any existing institutional force, from which position they gained the power to corrupt the republic as an electoral democracy.

By the 1980s, during the Reagan era, the billionaires played an outsized role in the reduction of the marginal tax rate from 70 to 28 percent, which contributed to the number of vast new fortunes. They also secured passage of the Glass-Steagall Act, which allowed for fewer restrictions on corporate growth, mergers, and speculative investments. This led to the rise of massive financial conglomerates. In addition, they launched a national strategy of attacks on all forms of labor union activity. By the end of that decade, the number of super rich mega-millionaires and billionaires, and their influence on government policy, had increased significantly.

The 1990s saw the further expansion and entrenchment of the billionaire class through globalization, the rise of the Internet, and the dot.com boom. The last created a whole new class of tech billionaires, whose tech know-how and financial credentials gave them even more political influence. Perhaps their greatest competitive advantage, however, has been their seeming invulnerability to government regulation.

In the 2000s, economic inequality began to rise sharply again. The Great Recession of 2008 and its aftermath resulted in the further entrenchment of the billionaire brotherhood. Their influence led the government to a bailout of large financial institutions while leaving many middle-class homeowners to face foreclosure. Banks and corporations deemed “too big to fail” received

unprecedented financial assistance, shielding billionaires from the consequences of the crisis they were instrumental in creating. Few corporate executives faced charges for their role in the crisis. Even the most powerful institutions of government were unable or unwilling to restrain the bent influence of the wealthy elite.

In the second decade of the new century, the SCOTUS further empowered these billionaires with the decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, allowing corporations and the wealthy to spend unlimited amounts of money on political campaigns through Super PACs. By the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the COVID-19 pandemic had led to even greater concentrations of super-rich wealth, particularly in the tech and e-commerce sectors of the economy. Perhaps least surprising in this history of growing billionaire power and influence, popular calls for higher taxes on wealth and more regulation of corporations have been stymied by the enormous political and economic influence of the billionaires.

As the influence of the billionaire brotherhood grew, the covenantal foundation of American democracy disintegrated. It disappeared from our national memory and consciousness, principle-by-principle, until the *federal* conception of government, which had been integral to popular assemblies in New England and to the national, state and local governments that followed them, became corrupt beyond recognition. Their functionaries insulated themselves from citizen access, accountability, and control. They abandoned the commonweal as their primary mission.

These developments had been predicted for thousands of years by political philosophers and theorists, beginning with Aristotle (384-322 BCE). Many who followed him had a similar point of view regarding the ideal size of a republic. They included Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), Jean Bodin (1530-1596), Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).¹⁴² They favored a republic small enough for citizens to know one another personally and to actively participate in government affairs. They knew that larger states were more vulnerable to corruption, and that most require monarchies. This tradition began to shift markedly with the writings of James Madison (1751-1836), David Hume (1711-1776), and Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804).¹⁴³ They argued that larger republican governments were necessary to prevent factionalism, instability, and tyranny of the majority. But it's doubtful that they imagined what we have now: urban county electoral districts with populations of a half-million to two million, and representatives in Congress with more than seven hundred thousand constituents and senators with more than three million (on average).

The Founders¹⁴⁴ believed the nation could overcome the traditional weaknesses of large republics by declaring the sovereignty of the people, to be realized by their direct representation in the House of Representatives. They anticipated that the population of the country would grow appreciably. But they could not have guessed that it would increase by more than one hundred times to the numbers we have today. The legendary “experiment” in American democracy launched by the Founding Fathers has produced extraordinary benefits, especially given the country’s size and the diversity of its population. But it must also be said that those results have been tainted by the corruption of our republican governments (national, state, and local), which claim absurdly to represent massive urban and suburban constituencies.

Unfortunately, as government grew more corrupt, the religious faith, spiritual belief, and moral practice of the American electorate became more privatized. As such, it had less consciousness of that corruption and little capacity to counter it or to influence the elected government executives and legislatures. With the nadir of the Trump years, however, Americans woke up to the existence of political evil, such as they had not seen since the McCarthy and Nixon years. Most Americans prefer a government that acts righteously, truthfully, and justly, one that is responsive to the will of the majority but which also protects minorities from abuse. However, they also understand that their elected representatives will only go so far in meeting those standards—that is, up to the point where they come up against wealth and power which can derail their career or subject their office to public ridicule or condemnation.

POWERLESS DEMOS VS. OLIGARCH-LED CORRUPTION

Although the majority of Americans are dissatisfied with many of the policies and the conduct of their elected officials, the *demos* is immobilized, suffering from “mass discoordination” to the point of powerlessness.¹⁴⁵ Political scientists and commentators differ in their thinking about how much public space existed in the past and, for those who believe there was more, the reasons for its decline. None of that changes the fact that, in our own time, public space for effective participation of the *demos* in political decision-making is virtually nonexistent. That’s because small-scale local government, which is politically and economically empowering of citizenship, has disappeared for most of the citizenry. Daunting resources are now required to influence elected officials whose constituencies number in the hundreds of thousands and millions (as in Los Angeles county). Grassroots organizations, even those with national memberships and political ambitions, with rare and sporadic exceptions, are too fragile for sustained mass citizen action.

We don’t discount the accomplishments of base-building community organizing, or the use of social networking and other Internet media to influence a broad segment of public opinion. It has also been used to mobilize mass marches and demonstrations. But their organizing has not altered the country’s political-economic power dynamics. Nor has it consistently influenced political decision-making on significant state and national issues.¹⁴⁶ The widespread corruption of all levels of representative government has not been stopped or even slowed by the community organizing of the last three-quarters of a century. Unorganized as a coherent national movement, it has failed to construct (or reconstruct) permanently empowering public space. Its model of grassroots empowerment has been used successfully to make improvements in the day-to-day lives of millions living at the margins. However, it has no objective as a movement to bring about structural, institutional change.

Conventional base-building campaigns that seek to revitalize some variation of covenantal democracy have been running against the tide of privatization. The need to act for common interest is mostly realized now in the *private sphere*. It’s effected through a variety of corporate contracts that enable large numbers of individuals to join in a common enterprise in which their private, individual interests are served simultaneously within a larger *corporate* purpose, the primary goal of which is returning the profits to other private, self-interested investors. The

commercial, profit-driven monetizing of virtually everything in American society has transformed the popular understanding of what it means to be human. No longer feeling responsible to give of ourselves for the common good, having forsaken our citizenship, we have become consumers, investing all we have to satisfy our insatiable personal appetites.

Obviously, the satisfaction of personal appetites contributes little or nothing to our potential to act for the common interest in the *public sphere*. For that potential requires that we serve, in addition to our private interests, a broadly based agreement on values that encompass all the members of society. In effect, we must say, “I support things that do not benefit me directly.” These include procedural guarantees of just treatment for anyone charged with a crime, although most members will not be charged; the freedom to publish one’s critical opinions of the government, although only a handful of members will have any desire to do so; and the remediation of environmental pollution to reclaim clean air and water, although the majority may not experience the benefits directly.

Bit by bit, these benefits of commonweal, our well-being in every respect, have been undermined. Outsized economic inequality has resulted in the outsized (and morally unhinged) political power of the billionaire brotherhood and its servitors in government and corporate institutions. Motivated by greed, they have launched a comprehensive assault on the traditional values of religious faith, the home, community, enterprise, and democracy in favor of monetizing every aspect of life. The commonweal of the American people has taken an unprecedented hit during the last half-century. But we ought not to accept a monetized culture in which materialism and sensuality predominate as the benchmarks of the American Dream.

Shaped by a culture rooted in privatization and profitability, many Americans now claim, as their most valuable heritage, their right to unlimited “freedom,” by which they mean their personal liberty to do whatever they please. As a result, tens of millions claimed the freedom to go maskless in a pandemic, resulting in the needless loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.¹⁴⁷ Americans nowadays rarely make the connection between unchecked personal liberty and the decline of covenantal democracy and *political* freedom. If pressed to give examples of their “freedom,” they may cite the First Amendment’s free speech guarantee or to be tried by a jury of their peers. They have relegated to history books, participatory democracy—the citizenry’s right, role, and resources to access government decision-making and hold it accountable.

As a people, we have long forgotten the cultural and spiritual roots of our political freedom and the conditions that presaged its durability. We remember those who oppressed our forebears and prompted the Revolution, but not the historical circumstances that compelled their radical action. Moreover, our national ignorance of the purposes of our democracy’s founding is only exceeded by our seeming indifference to the change (over the course of some four centuries) in our role as American citizens. By that indifference and passivity we have disempowered ourselves politically and economically.

In our present atomized life style, commonplace in urban and suburban society, we tend to see our ourselves as solo-travelers, idolizing personal liberty and our own self-interest. And yet the typical outcome of morally unchecked sensuality and materialism is slavery, not liberty. What

results is the loss of *moral* freedom—that freedom to choose between wickedness and righteousness, between lies and truth, between injustice and justice, between oppression and civil rights, between violence and peace-making, and between cruelty and compassion. In the absence of moral freedom, goodness departs from individual and social life.

We are the inheritors of an amoral culture. It has given rise to dehumanizing technology. It has resulted in an epidemic of health-destroying hedonism, narcissism, and addiction (including to pornography).¹⁴⁸ It has damned us with environmental plundering, government and corporate criminality, rapacious capitalism, and democracy-annihilating, oligarchic, fascist-leaning, libertarian Christian nationalism.¹⁴⁹

By demanding the liberty we would have in a “state of nature,” we will have in effect abandoned our citizenship. We have forgotten that democracy and political freedom exist for each of us individually only when we recognize ourselves as the basis for everyone else’s freedom. Many of us are well-versed in our individual rights but seemingly unaware of our political obligations to one another, to our community and to our nation. In forsaking the community, we have also forsaken our sovereignty. This abandonment of citizenship has made American democracy vulnerable to the oligarchic pretensions of reactionary billionaires. It is also the most plausible explanation for our present loss of individual rights and personal liberties, as long-standing constitutional guarantees are being withdrawn by a reactionary Supreme Court.¹⁵⁰

CORPORATE SCI-TECH DOOMS MORAL-SPIRITUALITY

The lifestyle described in the previous section has been accompanied by the emptying of pews in America’s mainstream religions. The decline in faith has apparently not included consciousness of the connection between little or no teaching of moral belief and practice by families and faith communities and the urban me-first culture of I-want, I-need, I’m-entitled. Thus, socialization is dominated by personal convenience, pleasure, and prosperity, which much of society now endorses as the highest cultural values.

Historians identify several societal trends to account for the abandonment of religious belief and practice. They particularly credit the rise of science and technology, which often emphasize rationalism and individualism at the expense of ethics and morals. Their values are sponsored and shaped (without public awareness) by highly profitable corporations and their wealthy owners with a view toward future profitability only. The measure of how far the belief in science and technology has reached is apparent in the recent replacement of humanities courses in universities with STEM curriculums, a trend bolstered by billionaire funding of endowed chairs, research grants, and donations to erect new buildings.

Science has been treated by many since the beginning of the twentieth century as if it were a religion, which is ironic since it has not been successful in preserving the best of marriage, the home, community, environment, and democracy. Now, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, all of the latter face existential threats. And if we have learned anything in the last century, it is that the survival of all *goodness* in the material world is not primarily within the scope of science and its technology offspring. Goodness depends fundamentally on the exercise

of moral freedom. When we choose commitment to the commonweal, to that which raises up humankind, rather than our self-weal (that which raises only ourselves), we exercise our moral freedom.

PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISTS TURN TO PAGANISM

In the middle of the twentieth century popular faith transitioned from *monotheism* to *paganism*—the worship of idols, including self-worship.¹⁵¹ Idolatry is often narrowly defined as the worship of objects of wood and stone. As such, it almost certainly would be dismissed by most moderns (including those who practice idolatry) as an absurdity, a piece of religious antiquarianism. That's because they do not realize that idolatry consists of the practice of ascribing to *anything or anyone*, other than observance of God's Law, the power to adorn our lives with health, prosperity, and love.

In modernity, the most common form of idolatry is to place one's faith in "little green pieces of paper"¹⁵² (and in all the means by which we may acquire them). The most pernicious form of all is to place our faith exclusively in ourselves. When we do that, we think and act as if we are the masterminds of creation, holding in our own hands all the lawful forces and consequences that affect us personally for good or evil. This is, in effect, a far greater absurdity than worshipping objects of wood and stone. As Professor Elazar notes, "... pagan and neo-pagan assaults on monotheism are primarily assaults upon the monotheistic understanding of the world and the morality that flows from it, and should be resisted."¹⁵³ Rabbi Hirsch described the moral-spiritual effect on individuals when the idolatry of materialism dominates a culture: "... you have not the courage to fight for [the Law of] God against the world, though you have the courage to fight for the world against God."¹⁵⁴

Perhaps the most significant political reaction to the rise of idolatry was the "politization [sic] of many Protestant fundamentalists."¹⁵⁵ Their mission, championed by the Republican party, was to shape public policy and legislation with the purpose of reintroducing Christian evangelical and fundamentalist religious values. This was a reactionary return to an earlier era.

Not long into the first Trump presidency, the Christian nationalists revealed themselves, especially the leaders of the movement, as unapologetic pagans. To achieve their "religious" objectives, they were willing to acquiesce in bigotry, cruelty, lawlessness and insurrection. White, libertarian, Christian nationalism soon took center-stage as a significant political force. Their most notable success has been the appointment by reactionary Republicans in Congress of right-wing justices to the SCOTUS who would reliably align themselves with the long-term *economic* and *political* objectives of Christian Nationalism. The quid pro quo objectives of the Republicans were barely camouflaged by their performative rhetoric, patriotism, and piety. Eager to secure both evangelical support at the polls and the campaign contributions of the billionaires, they happily bartered their votes on SCOTUS nominees and opposition to progressive legislation.

Reactionary Republicans, despite violating every value and principle of our religious traditions, bamboozled much of the public into thinking that the heart of MAGA is anything except what it

actually is, the fear that nativism and Christian white supremacy are losing political, economic, cultural, and social power, which represents its true heart. Peter Luca Versteegen's research (along with many other peer-reviewed studies) confirms that Trump voters aren't left behind although they feel excluded. They support the "radical-right" because they want to keep their white, Christian male privilege.¹⁵⁶ MAGA is now a powerful white Christian nationalist force ginned up by the billionaire brotherhood to bolster its multi-century campaign to dismantle our electoral democracy and replace it with a white, male, libertarian oligarchic empire.

OUTCOMES OF FAILED MORAL-SPIRITUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Given the violations of values and principles, we can appreciate how far removed from a position of honored authority is the moral-spiritual infrastructure of our democracy. The delicate balance between political freedom and personal liberty (audaciously achieved by our early American political forebears) has been overturned.

It would be a mistake, however, to think this current crisis of American democracy (once over) will never happen again. It is more likely that the challenges to libertarian white Christian male supremacy and domination of American culture, politics, economy, education, medicine, etc., will continue unabated. Equally likely, however, is that the historic diversification of the American population will continue into the foreseeable future. At some point, facing their undoing, the brotherhood of Christian nationalist billionaires, with their economic and political wherewithal yet intact, will wage a battle for survival that could rival our Civil War.

If the *demos* of American society is to honor the nation's founding motto, *e pluribus unum*, out of many (states), one (national government), we must embrace an inclusive national character that values many races, ethnicities, and cultures. *E pluribus unum* is an affirmation that our differences, however much they may separate us from one another, do not negate our commonweal. Regardless of our politics or religious convictions, all who accept the Constitution, which stands as the current incarnation of the early covenants, want, as the foundation for all else, the rights and privileges of a *democratic*-republic.

We recognize democracy as the sole political path to our commonweal, which includes freedom of spiritual belief, free and fair elections, accountable government, free press and free speech guarantees, right to fair taxation, standards of equity and equality in the administration of justice, honesty in the conduct of corporate enterprise, safety in transportation systems, living-wage job opportunities, accessible affordable health care, habitable homes and safe neighborhoods, professional and accountable policing and adjudication, and adequate national defense. We pay, thankfully or grudgingly, accepting limitations on our personal liberty, our resources, and our lives, for the benefits of the commonweal.

We believe that most Americans, upon reflection, would agree that it's not material wealth or permissive culture that makes America a great nation. It is our commonweal, and the moral values that sustain it, that make our nation deserving of loyalty. Few of us would consciously choose to forsake our citizenship for the imagined advantages of some other country. Most of us have accepted (implicitly or explicitly) our individual covenantal relationship with the United

States of America. We trust that the benefits and obligations of citizenship will be fulfilled for and by every one of us according to our common values and principles.

But do we still have the basis to sustain the United States as a unified democratic-republic, one in which the commonweal of the *demos* is served while allowing the exercise of personal liberty? The synthesis of political freedom and personal liberty has produced a great nation, one which has been admired throughout the world for its strength and productivity, and its compassionate support of the impoverished, oppressed and enslaved—in short, for its uplifting of humankind. The nation is also admired for its willingness to admit its failures in upholding those lofty goals, for its continuous efforts to improve itself.

It may seem foolish to believe in the possibility of moral values (which have their origin in organized religion) as the basis for civil government, when so many Americans have disaffiliated from their religious denominations and movements. Despite that, research confirms that they nonetheless retain convictions and commitments based on the values and standards traditionally promoted by those religions.¹⁵⁷ They still find their hearts warmed and their minds inspired by those who stand up for truth and justice, fight against dictators, struggle to achieve peace, and take initiatives to show kindness and compassion. They still find lies, injustice, and cruelty repugnant. Costly lies, such as those that lead to the breakup of families, such as unfaithfulness, are condemned without hesitation, even by those who themselves admit to having engaged in such behavior. When confronted by evil, lawful or not, they reach back to an earlier religious heritage and condemn it as god-awful. Those values may appear to have faded, but that's because they are rarely expressed in action without the promise of positive reinforcement, such as the anticipated rewards of engaging in organized social action.¹⁵⁸

VIII: RESTORING THE DEMOS COVENANTAL SOVEREIGNTY

ERSATZ DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLIC

Is the United States a “democratic republic”? This characterization is common in academic journals, professional publications, popular periodicals, traditional print media, and online news sources. Yet, recent developments in American government reveal a tension, if not an outright contradiction, between “democratic” and “republican” objectives. Some would argue that the tension is natural, but this claim cannot hold when the forces behind their divergent forms of governance increasingly fail to agree on a shared commonweal. Moreover, describing the United States as a democratic republic obscures the systemic corruption within its representative institutions. Those who perpetrate this corruption aim to consolidate power into a self-perpetuating oligarchy. They will employ any means necessary to achieve their ends. This stands in stark contrast to our nation's democratic origins. Recall the experiences of seventeenth-century immigrants. Whether as passengers on shipboard, as settlers of towns, or later as colonists, their efforts at self-governance were covenantal in nature. They were grounded in common religious beliefs and values that bound them to shared obligations and benefits. This initial covenantal governance evolved into the directly democratic, open-town model adopted and refined by early communities.

Yet, more than a century later, the American architects of national government designed a system that would limit the people's direct involvement in public affairs. What they devised was not a direct democracy, but rather a framework wherein public powers would be wielded by elected representatives, which effectively distanced the people from their government. The influence of citizens was thus restricted to their elected members in the House of Representatives. They had no direct role in electing the President, which was left to the Electoral College. And they had no input at all in choosing Senators and Supreme Court Justices. Thomas Jefferson alone dissented against this framework, but he did so too late, after his retirement from public life. He argued that excluding the people from a direct role in governance was a mistake, one that could be remedied by establishing "open" town governments across counties, which had proven successful in New England.¹⁵⁹

From the outset, the franchise was withheld from significant groups: women, Indigenous peoples, enslaved people, and former slaves. In some states, it was also denied to men without property, Catholics and Jews. And although the Constitution recognized the sovereignty of the citizenry, it limited their opportunities to exercise the power inherent in that sovereignty. Participation in government—discussing and deciding, the essence of political liberty—was effectively out of reach. This exclusion of the citizenry from a seat at the table of power foreshadowed a class-based society. This is in stark opposition to covenantal democracy, which cannot abide second-class citizenship.

The right to form one's own government, asserted first on the Mayflower, was grounded in the belief that each person has a God-given right to participate in shaping the terms, obligations, and enforcement of a self-governing covenant. This principle implies that, because each person is entitled to author their government, no one can rightfully assume the obligations and benefits of others who are themselves equally entitled. No representative can adequately substitute for the personal sacrifice and responsibility each citizen bears in upholding the conditions of covenantal democracy.

As Milton Mayer eloquently stated, "I am sovereign here. I hold the highest office of the land, the office of citizen, with responsibilities to my country heavier, by virtue of my office, than those of any other officer, including the president. And I do not hold my office by election but by inalienable right. If I try to abdicate it, to the general will, or to my representatives or to my ministers, I am guilty of betraying not only democracy but my nature as a person endowed with certain inalienable rights."¹⁶⁰

POLITICS AND POLICY CANNOT SAVE DEMOCRACY

There is a common belief that electoral politics, legislation, and public policy can rescue our nation's deteriorating democratic culture and institutions. It is a reminder that sometimes hope springs not eternal but infernal. We forget how hopeful we were with the electoral victories of the Carter, Clinton, and Obama administrations. Each held the House, the Senate, and the White House at times—and yet their leaders failed to address the deep-rooted inequalities of power dividing libertarian oligarchs and the people. Yet such hope merely postpones the real work: adopting a strategic moral vision and building a movement powerful enough to consign the

billionaire class and their White Christian nationalism to the backwaters of history. We will not reclaim the commonweal or revive our lost moral covenant until we have done that.

At this late stage, the decline of American democracy is undeniable. None of the nation's major institutions, despite their professed dedication to democracy—not the branches of national government, not the corporate giants, not the prominent public and private universities, nor the fourth estate—have shown themselves immune to the corrupting influence of oligarchic interests. The response must be driven by an inspired movement of the citizenry at large, especially those who bear the brunt of democratic institutional failure. They have the greatest stake in ensuring that these institutions not only survive but are restored to serve the common good.

To understand the severity of the threat posed by billionaires and their multi-millionaire allies, Americans must move beyond media images of them funding arts centers, lounging on their yachts in the Mediterranean, and placing high-stakes bets in Monte Carlo. Most operate out of public view, shielded from public scrutiny. Their rise to power unnoticed by many is deeply rooted in American history. They are the outcome of an Old World system brought to this country by early New England settlers. Over time, that power and wealth has shaped virtually every facet, every institution of American life.¹⁶¹ Their more recent tactics are the product of multi-decade planning.¹⁶²

Over the institutions of politics

They fund nonprofit, ostensibly nonpartisan research organizations, think tanks, and advocacy organizations to promote so-called model codes and laws, which they foist off on state and local officials in the guise of “good government.” They fund political candidates who support tax cuts, deregulation, and policies that weaken labor protections, labor organizing, and the labor movement generally. They directly shape legislation, relying on professional lobbyists, many of whom are themselves former members of Congress or the Executive Branch. They redirect the careers and social positions of public officials, moving them into the upper class. They work to place their allies in regulatory agencies, ensuring that these bodies enforce laws and regulations or fail altogether to enforce them. They influence the judiciary, ensuring favorable rulings on issues like antitrust laws, labor rights, and environmental regulations. And, they get themselves and their allies appointed to key government positions, ensuring that their interests regularly dominate policymaking.

Over the institutions of the economy

Through mergers, acquisitions, and control of market share, billionaires can stifle competition and maintain dominance in key industries, enabling them to set prices, wages, and terms of trade. By leveraging global supply chains and financial networks, they can minimize costs while maximizing profits, often at the expense of workers, local economies, and the environment.

Over the Institutions of Media

Many billionaires own or control major media outlets, allowing them to drive public discourse and opinion on key issues. By shaping narratives and framing issues in the media, they influence which topics are prioritized and how they are perceived by the public. They may employ the

media, for example, to instigate antagonism among the middle, working, and impoverished classes to divert close scrutiny by those whose resources and rights they rob.

Over the Institutions of Philanthropy

Billionaires often establish philanthropic foundations to fund social, educational, and cultural initiatives. While seen by the public as conventional charities, these foundations are used to promote specific ideological agendas and to influence public policy. Large donations, to universities, for example, can steer academic research and educational priorities in directions that align with their ideological beliefs. Through control of cultural institutions and the funding of art, literature, and entertainment, they can shape societal values and norms in ways that reinforce their power and privilege.

To the extent of their successes (see above), they have managed to turn the covenant upside-down. A new (sub rosa) covenant now exists between the oligarchs and ruling officials. The billionaires have, in effect, taken over ownership of the government and disempowered the covenantal relationship between the people and their government. Sheldon Wolin offers a penetrating conceptualization of reactionary Republican domination of representative government in the service of major corporations and the wealthiest individuals. He describes the emergence of corporate totalitarianism from a strong democracy, a scenario in which democracy is completely “managed,” without appearing to be suppressed. In depicting what he calls “inverted totalitarianism,” he notes, that “... [it] succeeds by encouraging political disengagement rather than mass mobilization, [and] that [it] relies more on ‘private’ media to disseminate propaganda reinforcing the official version of events.”¹⁶³

Over time, the oligarchs have strained our commonweal to the breaking point, such that it now threatens to undermine our *political freedom* permanently. Without agreement, we are not able to act politically. The antidote is for the *demos* to assert the right of *meaningful* participatory ownership of the government. Unfortunately, because Americans have been denied (over a period of 75 years) a basic civics education, these ideas stand outside their awareness.

REMAKING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

If American democracy is to be remade, we must credit the sovereignty of the people as the essence of democracy—that we the people own the government, that “we the people” (as personified in our forebears) authored it, and that it’s our servant. Further, that sovereignty must be exercised through an inclusive covenantal structure, an institutionalized, legally binding agreement. *The covenant must affirm the authority, rights, and responsibilities of every citizen and the powers and limitations of their polity.*

Moreover, such a covenant can only exist if the people have a commitment to the commonweal of all as their overarching priority, including those who have been counted out culturally and politically as lesser classes. The concept of commonweal was one of the essential ingredients in the history of the American innovation of covenantal and, later, federal constitutional democracy. It was the basis of the *popular* governments of the widely supported early New England towns, the colonies, the newly formed republic of the United States, and the state and local

governments. However, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the word “commonweal” had disappeared from the thinking and vocabulary of the *demos*. Perhaps the most important fact about commonweal now is its incremental abandonment by one of the two major political parties over the last quarter-century. Political professionals and political scientists seldom use the word nowadays. But if the *raison d’être* of government is not to serve and be evaluated by the commonweal, then what is its purpose?

We cannot achieve an enlightened society, one that serves the highest life-affirming moral and ethical character and physical requirements of humankind when the exercise of public power is disconnected from the covenantal participation of the *demos*. And that participation cannot be achieved in the absence of mutual trust among the *demos*, which is itself dependent on their commonly held moral values. Thus, in the directly democratic popular assembly, both personal liberty and political freedom dedicated to the commonweal can only be affirmed in a covenantal structure based on shared values, (which need not be explicitly religious). This is the case whether that assembly serves as the local government in rural New England or, in the future, as as a lower tier of an urban municipality.

How can shared values be upheld and, in turn, lead to mutual trust in a popular assembly? Such culture-building is based on widely regarded values, such as truth, justice, and compassion. It’s the job of a professional organizer during one-to-one contacts with prospective participants, to affirm the values foundation of the newly forming organization, by recounting organizing experiences from the past. The prospective member may initially agree with the organization’s values or come around later after talking with neighbors and seeing the organization grow—or not. But, in any case, the values are not open to debate.

On the basis of shared values, they begin to develop face-to-face relationships of trust. That process begins with neighborhood residents gathering to share their concerns for the neighborhood or larger community, especially in relation to the welfare of their children. That trust is further developed as residents themselves carry out informal one-to-one conversations with other residents in the community. The latter leads to small group house-meetings, where, having become better acquainted with other members of their community, they discover which of their concerns and feelings are shared. As a result, they are able to identify which problems are the most pressing, where they can agree on commonweal and issues for action. With the help of a professional public powers organizer, they can begin to organize themselves as an informal organizing committee of a popular assembly.

DIVERSITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD COVENANTAL DEMOCRACY

If there is to be a national public powers movement, it too will require a covenantal foundation based on widely shared values, trust, and commonweal. Professor Elazar’s view is that, the necessary political “Covenantalism does not require that citizens subordinate themselves to the explicit terms of an ancient original contract, but rather that they understand themselves as bound to one another by covenant in a common endeavor.”¹⁶⁴

Accepting a religiously derived covenantal model of self-governance does not exclude non-believers, whether they place themselves within atheism, agnosticism, scientism or secularism. We have seen that many support the commonweal values of righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and compassion, and the civil practices that relate to them, as most Americans do. These values derive from a common religious heritage—specifically, from the Abrahamic traditions. We do, of course, maintain our own unique theologies and forms of worship or religious indifference.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, we reserve the right to argue at length about their specific application as matters of policy and practice—that’s legitimate politics. However, in whatever ways we may be unique, and with whatever arguments we may mount, when we can agree on what constitutes our commonweal, our solidarity, we can work together. And if this agreement occurs across thousands of popular assemblies, then a national public powers movement can be built.

With such solidarity, we can prevail in the face of whatever difficulties may come. For, to the extent that we build institutional power, we should expect fierce and sometimes violent opposition. Abolitionists, like Elijah Lovejoy, were murdered by mobs. Suffragists endured public derision and brutal imprisonment, with some force-fed through metal tubes. Civil rights activists braved snarling police dogs and fire hoses, while others, like Medgar Evers, were gunned down at their homes. Farmworkers led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta endured crushing poverty and corporate intimidation as they rallied for basic human dignity. Environmental activists stood between bulldozers and the land they sought to protect, while LGBTQ+ advocates risked family rejection, job loss, and physical assault to demand equality.

Despite the toll, these movements won victories that reshaped the nation, proving that persistence, courage, and solidarity can overcome even the most implacable opposition.¹⁶⁶ The Abolitionist Movement, which began as small, local anti-slavery groups in New England and other parts of the country, expanded into a powerful national movement that changed the course of American history. Local abolitionist societies, often supported by religious communities like the Quakers, held meetings, circulated petitions, and printed pamphlets. These local organizations gradually came together with the help of national organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society, to mobilize Northern sentiment against slavery and to build a strong enough base to influence national politics and push for the end of slavery.

The Women’s Suffrage Movement also began with small, local efforts in places like Seneca Falls, New York, with the historic 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Local suffrage organizations and women’s clubs spread across states, forming coalitions that eventually led to the creation of larger bodies like the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). These grassroots efforts, which included door-to-door canvassing, rallies, and letter-writing campaigns, ultimately achieved national success with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

The Civil Rights Movement, too, began with local organizations—the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), for example, which launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. These localized efforts inspired similar movements across the South, which were eventually united under larger organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The

grassroots mobilization, often organized around churches and schools, successfully pushed for national civil rights legislation in the 1960s.

The United Farm Workers (UFW) began in California as a local movement among Mexican and Filipino laborers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Through grassroots organizing, boycotts, and marches, they brought national attention to the plight of agricultural workers. The movement achieved significant labor rights reforms, influencing worker conditions nationally and inspiring future labor movements.

The Environmental Movement, founded on the grassroots environmental activism of the 1960s and 1970s, was often local and community-driven. It led, however, to the establishment of influential organizations like the Sierra Club and the Environmental Defense Fund. The first Earth Day in 1970 mobilized local environmentalists from across the nation, uniting them into a movement that led to significant national environmental policy changes, including the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The LGBTQ+ Rights Movement, too, was built on local activism, starting with groups like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis in the 1950s and 60s. The Stonewall riots of 1969, sparked by a raid on a gay bar in New York City, galvanized national attention and inspired local activists to organize for change. This grew into a nationwide movement with organizations like the Human Rights Campaign and eventually led to significant shifts in national policy, including marriage equality.

THE LIMITS OF COMMONWEAL

Most of us crave unity for the peace and harmony that it brings. But unity, as described above, does not mean unanimity. For there can be no reconciliation between those who favor the survival of the nation as a democratic republic and those who don't, those who prioritize commonweal and those who malign it. And the forces that will oppose any effort to reinstate the sovereignty of the people are very much alive and well.

From within our troubles, it's difficult to appreciate the irreconcilability of the conflict we're engaged in. But when we look beyond our own shores to the nearly five dozen authoritarian regimes around the world (from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe), we find elites imposing fascist tyranny over populations aching for democracy. They will never see eye to eye any more than did the American colonists and King George III. It's not our different policies or political perspectives, whether liberal or conservative, that tear us apart. The nation has managed to thrive for centuries despite those differences. But now, the libertarian Christian nationalist oligarchs and their MAGA boosters have dedicated their morally unhinged political power to crushing the remnants of our moral spirituality, covenantal democracy, and commonweal.

If the sovereignty of the people is to be restored, then the hoped-for national commonweal to overcome oligarchic rule must be based on an equalizing of power—it cannot be built from the top down (guided by the hidden hand of the oligarchs). It must originate in face-to-face relationships of trust from the bottom up, much as the directly democratic New England towns

laid the foundation for the Revolution to overthrow British rule. We must disempower the billionaire-oligarchs.

If our commonweal is ever to be restored, it must become *the* priority of our governments, and there is only one means to that end: our political institutions based on representation must become anchored to the sovereignty and directly democratic will of the *demos*. We refer here to the right of every citizen's ownership stake to share directly in the discussion and decision-making of our governments. All our liberties, political and personal, flow from the exercise of the freedom to live our lives in moral freedom for the sake of our political freedom and commonweal—free to be who we are without being brought low by the corruption associated with the alternatives that we know follow from the loss of our social morality and sovereignty.

FORMATION OF POPULAR ASSEMBLIES

The creation of empowered urban popular assemblies will require a covenant between the residents of the neighborhoods in much the same way that it did for the founders of the American republic. Such covenants will set in place not only items familiar to the public, such as the need for civil discourse, but also items less familiar or even unknown to much of the public, such as, the nature of direct democratic participation, the nonpartisan and non-ideological character of urban popular assemblies, and their commitment to the commonweal,

And with the unknown, questions arise: How will people come to appreciate that in the popular assembly, they will be the official decision-makers themselves, empowered directly to take action that addresses their mutual concerns? How will they ensure that the initiatives to establish such assemblies would respect their values? The rescue of American democracy requires that we empower the sovereignty of the people, not by declaring it rhetorically as in the past but by introducing it into the institutional structure of the nation's governance. No other law, policy or practice will equal the permanence of a municipal charter that establishes the covenantal right of each citizen to participate directly, as a *member* of the government. The way to achieve that outcome is to establish in law directly democratic, neighborhood popular assemblies with permanent public powers.

How can we ensure the nonpartisan and non-ideological character of urban popular assemblies, as well as their commitment to the commonweal, given that these qualities are unfamiliar to the current generation of urban and suburban Americans? How will people come to appreciate that in the popular assembly, they will be the official decision-makers themselves, empowered directly to take action that addresses their mutual concerns? How will they ensure that the initiatives to establish such assemblies would respect their values?

These questions challenge us to anticipate the groundwork necessary to create the assemblies.¹⁶⁷ In every city, that outcome would require a founding public powers organizing committee, a group of trustees for interim funding, experts in government law and public administration, and organizers for a canvass-campaign of grassroots education and popular support. And all these elements would have to be dedicated to creating the culture needed to sustain a long-term public powers movement.

The call to *citizenhood* will be the cultural challenge of a public powers movement. It will require that we begin to see ourselves acting together as responsible citizens of a community, committed to moderating the inevitable conflict between our own will and the will of others, and prepared to negotiate and live at least civilly if not graciously with compromise. It requires that we talk with one another, not for the sake of achieving unity or a voting-majority but simply to uncover mutuality in common action. Citizenhood leads us to empathize with one another despite our conflicts, to come together in pursuit of our commonweal. It signifies that citizenship is "... the moral identity par excellence. For it is as citizen that the individual confronts the Other and adjusts his [or her] own life plans to the dictates of a shared world."¹⁶⁸ It's a civics morality lesson that should be repeated regularly to ensure that it becomes understood as a political verity.

Why are we confident that such an extraordinary transformation is possible? We have many decades of organizing experience during which disillusioned members of alienated groups, having lost faith and hope, became responsive to the morals and values promulgated by the three Abrahamic faith traditions when they saw the possibility of themselves empowered. Then they talked, decided, and acted together to define and secure their commonweal. Though the task is daunting, the methodology is well-developed in the knowledge bank of base-building organizing, in the formation of face-to-face, grassroots organizations with nonpartisan, non-ideological culture, dedicated to a moral vision of power-building for the sake of the commonweal. The results of this work of the last half-century may be disappointing insofar as consolidated power-building, but the culture of these organizations has been be a source of pride to their members, leaders, and organizers.

The public powers movement can, by design, go beyond short-term victories in which power is never consolidated and expanded to permanent, institutional empowerment of the *demos*. That movement will further democratize the structure and culture of American democracy. The moral-spirituality of most Americans' faith, once reawakened by the possibility of permanently empowered action, can inspire and strengthen them to remake American democracy. They will see the way forward through the history of the New England towns, the know-how of professional public powers organizing,¹⁶⁹ and the likelihood of ultimate success through a public powers movement guided by a strategic *moral* vision.

But is that promising picture simply a fantasy? Wouldn't our polarization, driven by partisan political claims of ideological certainty, ultimately preclude agreement on commonweal? That might seem likely, but only if one is unfamiliar with the universal experience of institutionally empowered, covenantal direct democracy, mostly because ideology has little meaning in people's day-to-day lives. Moreover, base-building organizing is non-ideological by design and methodology, which invariably is the preference of the citizen-participants. Ideologues have no intellectual openings or oratorical license in these grassroots organizations, because those organizations' agendas focus on conditions, problems, and issues that relate to presently felt injuries and injustices.¹⁷⁰

The public powers base-building organizing of the popular assemblies would include several cultural features that are well-tested. As in the New England directly democratic towns,

individuals would not relate to one another as polarized ideological antagonists. Meeting face to face and becoming acquainted, talking about their common pressures and dreams, for themselves, their families and their community, they would form relationships as neighbors. The cultural wallpaper of their organizations would encourage members with different backgrounds and experiences to meet and talk with others *unlike* themselves, to work out their commonweal and mutually acceptable ways to achieve it. In that respect, it would be like the culture of small towns that have their eccentric “characters” and which include a wide range of values and lifestyles, but in which tolerance is highly valued because it enables the citizens to act together to achieve what they cannot individually.

We have often witnessed these dynamics in our organizing, two examples of which we offer here, (a) in faith-based organizing in Santa Ana (CA) and (b) in neighborhood-based organizing in Jersey City (NJ). These parish and neighborhood settings had in common that they included diverse, mostly isolated, and often mutually antagonistic groups: in the parish, Vietnamese, Latinos, and ethnic Whites; and in the neighborhood, ethnic Whites, Latinos, and Blacks—all of whom were suffering from gang activity, drug dealing, and inadequate policing. In both settings, as a first step the participants met and talked, and most importantly, discovered their common humanity and pain. They warmed to each other knowing they had mutual interests and ways to achieve them, first by organizing themselves to hold corrupt city officials accountable.

Subsequently, the faith-based community’s action turned out 400 of their members in a meeting with the police and city officials. In response, the city attorney brought civil actions against the owners and managers of apartment buildings who were conspiring with drug dealers. The participants in the neighborhood community’s action met with their police department’s patrol division commander and secured an increase in the number of regular police patrols in their neighborhood. What’s notable is not the very modest power-building in these instances but the undoing of polarization, which is the unexceptional experience of professional base-building organizing.¹⁷¹

In our experience, base-building organizing has been characterized by *federal* liberty—which is to say, a covenant (implicit or otherwise) which existed between the participants based on their common moral values. They believed themselves to have an implicit right to join together for purposes of “self-governance.” That is, they act as if they believe that right to be inherent in the very fact of their creation as humankind. For example, in the case of a special water district government that was formed by residents of a neighborhood which suddenly lost its water supply, they claimed the right to govern themselves insofar as the replacement and operation of the missing utility. Through their organized efforts they achieved the legal right to do so by the formation of a special, local government district. In effect, they decided from the outset to join together for the sake of their commonweal, which could be achieved by taking direct responsibility for their water supply. Doing so revealed to them that what they shared in a self-governing polity dedicated to the commonweal was much greater than what they initially may have believed divided them.

Of course, one may question whether, given our cultural diversity, common moral values exist in America that would permit successfully organizing popular assemblies on a large scale. We have

found that moral values are not culturally exclusive or idiosyncratic. Our professional experience in several different organizing settings¹⁷² has led us to see that the moral ideations and actions of diverse individuals in America more often than not cross cultural boundaries.¹⁷³

Members of parishes and congregations were often surprised to learn that, despite the historical isolation of ethnic and racial groups in the formal activities of their churches, when relating one-to-one and in small groups they had much more in common than they ever imagined. For example, in one Catholic church (mentioned above), Anglos, Latinos, and Vietnamese were separated in their church's internal organizations, which exaggerated their cultural differences. But when they began organizing together, they discovered they had the same hopes and dreams for themselves and their children, the same concerns about schools, drugs, and gangs in the larger community, the same beliefs about parental responsibility and the moral obligations of public officials, and the same desire to work responsibly for needed reforms. Once the organizing began, they found themselves in agreement when reflecting together on their beliefs about actions they could take to deal with common problems. After one-to-one visits among many parishioners, planning meetings, role-plays, and turnout preparation, 400 of their members met with police and city officials. And (as mentioned above), in response, the city attorney brought successful civil actions against the owners and managers of apartment buildings who were conspiring with drug dealers.

Moreover, when the members of that church came together in an area-wide campaign with members of non-Christian religious communities, they too found that they had much more in common than they had previously imagined, despite their different cultures and faith traditions. They were soon working together in a faith-based campaign that required large amounts of time, energy, and spirit. In the first meeting of the campaign's 50-plus-member steering committee, an aura of wonder and celebration prevailed. Previously distanced people of diverse faiths and cultures were working together for improvements in the larger community.

The same quality of cross-cultural interaction occurred in Moshe's neighborhood-based organizing, when members of different racial and ethnic groups from low-income, working-class, and middle-class neighborhoods came together to tackle problems they had in common. In addition to their cultural diversity, their families' religious roots were in a myriad of faith traditions. One neighborhood, also mentioned above, included diverse, mostly isolated, and often mutually antagonistic groups, including ethnic Whites, Latinos, and Blacks. They were all suffering from gang activity, drug dealing, and ineffective policing. The participants met and talked, and discovered their common humanity and pain. They warmed to each other knowing they had mutual interests and ways to achieve them, primarily by organizing themselves to hold corrupt city officials accountable. As a first step, they met with a division commander of the police department and secured an increase in the number of regular police patrols in their neighborhood.

Base-building community organizers know well the nuts and bolts of building organizations that cross cultural, racial, and socio-economic boundaries. We have seen innumerable examples of diverse individuals who previously were strangers to one another, join together to deal with threats to their families, neighborhoods, and communities. How does it work practically? As an

example, despite the challenges that existed there during the 1980s, most of the residents who answered Moshe's doorknocking during his first organizing drive in a Compton (CA) neighborhood didn't know the names of their nearest neighbors. But their lack of relationships and community was soon remedied. One of the first tasks of organizing (often overlooked) is to build or rebuild community. In this phase, residents begin to get acquainted as neighbors based on their shared experience of punishing conditions, past experience of powerlessness, and hopes for a better future.

During the organizing drive, the neighbors began to talk informally among themselves and in meetings of their organizing committee. Two of the main venues for their conversations were Catholic and Protestant churches after worship services and during fellowship activities. Several families had had their homes burglarized while they were at church. Within a couple of months, by the time of their newly formed neighborhood organization, which drew about 200 residents from an area with a population of about 1200, they were already beginning to congeal as a community.

They had met and talked, first informally one-to-one, then in small housemeetings, and after a couple of months, in larger meetings in which they affirmed their commonweal. They drafted bylaws to govern themselves as a more formal association, agreeing they would take both self-help initiatives and political actions to pressure their local city officials. In their first campaign, they reclaimed and refurbished a city park that had been taken over by gangs. In doing so, they united as a community. They risked involvement, trusting one another, based on their common values and their shared belief in the righteousness of protecting their families and neighborhood.

In our professional work, virtually everyone discovered, to their surprise and delight, that their beliefs about right and wrong were widely shared. Our conclusion was that cultural boundaries are far less rigid than media sensationalism suggests and far less embattled than divisive politicians might want the public to believe. On the contrary, murder, torture, enslavement, and other forms of physical, social, political, and economic oppression are widely believed to be morally evil. Even less extreme immoral behavior, such as stealing, violating promises, betraying trust, lying, abusing verbally, tale-bearing, and gossiping are also widely condemned across cultural boundaries. This common base of cross-cultural moral values makes possible the risk-taking of political action for the commonweal.

HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF DEMOS POWER-LEVERAGE

But why should anyone imagine that such neighborhoods, having formed popular assemblies, even with permanent public powers, will have any leverage on city, county, state, and national governments? Our understanding of bottom-up power-leverage comes from the labor strike, used to extraordinary effect during the first half of the last century. Labor's power developed in countless "locals" through face-to-face, base-building, workplace organizing, which was not deterred by unrelenting oppression and physical violence by police and Pinkertons.¹⁷⁴ The local unions eventually joined together to form a national institution that combined the CIO industrial unions and the AFL craft unions, whose might was brought to bear on opponents by the power-leverage of the strike.

A particularly relevant instance of bottom-up power-leverage, one which earned historic notoriety from the Boston Tea Party, was a *tax-action strategy by governments* acting together to effect a negotiated reconciliation with a higher government. The American colonies, with the support of their citizenry, rejected abject submission to British Crown authority. Instead, they insisted on negotiations regarding taxation—a strategy that could be adopted by urban alliances of popular assemblies.

Prior to the Tea Party, the colonies had challenged the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act, which prompted the British Parliament to repeal those taxes and, in time, to remove all taxes except on tea. But it was not the financial burden of the tea tax (which was not onerous for the average family) that angered the Americans. Their outrage was a reaction to their lack of representation in the Parliament and, eventually, to a host of related demands.¹⁷⁵ Their aim was to gain some control over the public powers. Their unreconciled demand regarding taxation eventually led to the Revolutionary War.

Most Americans are more familiar with tax resistance by *individuals* in the recent past. It has usually taken the form of refusing to pay one's federal taxes as a protest against what was believed to be unjust or illegitimate activity of the national government. Typically, those individuals were apprehended, prosecuted, tried, convicted, and sentenced or at least fined, for their violation of federal law. That picture changes dramatically, however, when we imagine thousands of citizens acting simultaneously on a single issue through an alliance of their self-governing assemblies, taking the profound step of negotiating reconciliation of their tax obligations. Such an alliance has already taken action in New England, although not on their tax obligations.¹⁷⁶

Tax reconciliation differs from tax resistance and refusal because it seeks neither to rebel against nor to avoid taxation. Instead, the objective of the popular assembly is to negotiate with higher levels of government for a share of control over legislation, regulation, or services, based on an agreement by the assembly to provide economic and political support for those higher levels of government. The initial goal would be to reconcile through tax-liability negotiations the demands of the citizenry for a permanent share of the public powers.

Such an encounter of popular assemblies with municipal, county, state, and national governments may seem ridiculously optimistic, on the order of David and Goliath. But consider: It wasn't until the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) that the right to strike was protected by federal law. Before the NLRA, "Bosses persuaded the courts to issue injunctions to declare a strike illegal. If the strike continued, the participants would be thrown into prison."¹⁷⁷ During the nineteenth century, the idea that craft unions would exert power over massive corporate monopolies, like Standard Oil, probably would have seemed absurd even to most unionists. But the strike, which some union members may have regarded as a futile, costly gesture in the early days, eventually became the irresistible power-leverage of organized labor to effect local, state, and national policy for the sake of the commonweal. When the labor movement had won a revolution in wages and working conditions, not to mention a long list of other benefits, it

dramatically altered the demography of middle-class America. Millions of union members and the public were the beneficiaries.

Commonweal, which previously had been sacrificed to the interests of industrial capitalists, once again uplifted life for the whole people. A new level of political awareness encouraged by union culture changed the experience of day-to-day life for the *demos*. Poverty declined (partly through the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act). Political oppression eased for working classes (but not for the far left or marginalized populations, including Black Americans and immigrants). And although judicial corruption continued, unions won important legal battles (like the Wagner Act). The nation had undergone a partial reversal of Wolin's totalitarian inversion¹⁷⁸ of democracy.

Had the union movement of the early to mid-twentieth century not existed, and had the Roosevelt administration not responded to the circumstances of the Great Depression, the country might have turned toward a much more revolutionary and violent solution than the comparatively placid New Deal. Why, then, not invest all of our time, energy, and spirit to rebuild the labor movement? Why not strengthen the national labor organizations? The most important reason is that, although the labor movement has built long-lived institutions, they do not afford each citizen a direct role in the exercise of public powers. In that regard, they are not an antidote to our democracy itself in jeopardy. The role of labor, vis-à-vis government, never extends beyond petition and pressure to secure favorable legislation, policies, and regulations.

In its more traditional role, leveraging concessions from corporations, labor organizing in recent years has won several notable victories. Unions have directly improved the income and working conditions of their members, while spillover effects have benefitted all workers.¹⁷⁹ Thus they have improved economic *distribution* of the income on the nation's wealth, most of which accrues to privately held entities. However, from the perspective of satisfying the *social development* task of industrialized states, "The prescription for social development [of nations] specifies bottom-up investment in social infrastructure."¹⁸⁰

Requirements for developmental organizing in industrialized states call for democratization of the political economy, a strategy of *redistributive* development, by establishing institutionalized roles for social self-management." they have not achieved economic *redistribution* of the wealth itself. The phenomenal wealth produced by the nation's consolidated corporations, and the political and economic power it gives rise to, has not been affected. The congenital disability of the labor movement confirms the necessity to reestablish the sovereignty of the people by restoring the conditions of covenantal democracy. The inescapable demand of that sovereignty is the allocation of public powers to the *demos*.

What's the alternative? Doing more of what we have been doing and doing it better? If that's it, it's reasonable to believe America is facing the doom of commonweal and enlightened social progress. As the popular (unattributed) quote says, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." The dominance of elites has sickened the soul of America's goodness in many and diverse ways. These include profit-driven despoliation of the environment, continuous war-profiteering, unchecked mass surveillance, politicization and partisan weaponization of mass media, criminalization of dissent, loss of living-wage work,

decline of the middle-class, chronic poverty, inaccessibility of health care, epidemic metabolic-syndrome diseases, systemic educational failures, racism and race-related violence, criminal justice system injustice, and organized crime.

In our own time, the long-term, *institutional* corruption is unmistakable and untouchable by reformers, even the most dedicated. Our lost moral covenant and the sovereignty of the people individually and collectively, will not be restored by an enlightened Congress, Supreme Court, or President. With more enlightened administrations, we will have some legislation that serves the commonweal, such as the Biden administration's notable accomplishments. But nothing will be done to rout the reactionary forces from continuing to enrich and empower themselves at the expense of the commonweal

The American authoritarian eruptions of the 1930s and 1950s have been growing in virulence. When we're a few years past the well-deserved euphoria of having way-laid the kleptocrat Trump and the MAGA malevolence, we will find the billionaire-oligarchs very much alive and still dedicated to the replacement of our democratic culture and institutions with a fascist-leaning, libertarian, White Christian nationalist oligarchy. The threat to White supremacy will have only become more dangerous and the economic inequality only more politically powerful.

To remake and save American democracy, nothing holds more promise than covenantal democracy to mitigate—and ultimately eliminate—the nation's intolerable inequality of power. We are most resilient against poverty, oppression, and injustice when, driven by our deepest values and fortified by institutionalized rights, roles, and resources, we actively engage in the debates and decisions that shape governance. It is our combined individual acts of citizenship that are transformative. This becomes democracy at its least corruptible, most committed to resisting forces that degrade our shared humanity. The alternative leaves citizenship stripped of dignity, eroding self-respect and hope by leaving citizenship powerless.

A public powers movement offers a vision of a better life for nearly all Americans, transcending class, sex, nationality, race, and ethnicity, despite our differences. Yet launching a movement to establish empowered popular assemblies nationwide is only the end of the beginning in the effort to remake American democracy and halt its corruption. The beginning of the end will come when the *demos*, en masse, direct their assemblies to defund and disempower the oligarchy by refusing to sustain special interests with public resources. The true end will come only when the *demos* have decisively overwhelmed the oligarchy, which will be fighting for its survival, and when every government action serves, unambiguously, the elevation of the common good.

Securing public powers for the *demos* is the sole viable path to restoring our sovereignty. No other path can adequately empower the people to resist exploitation and realign government with the common good as its primary aim. Only this course holds credible promise to reverse the empowerment and enrichment of elites at the expense of the public. A movement as momentous as democratizing public powers must be united by a moral covenant.¹⁸¹ It is the covenant's inspirational values that will enable such a movement to succeed. Rooted deep in our history, moral covenant is the muscle and sinew of democracy. Without it, the promise of democracy—to serve the common good and honor our nation's legacy—will remain out of reach.

EPILOG

Authoritarian governance has gained momentum globally in recent years. We're witnessing "democratic backsliding" in countries like Hungary, Turkey, and India.¹⁸² Leaders of free nations now face growing uncertainty as they work to uphold their democracies while remaining allied with the United States. With the right-wing corruption of our own government, they're less confident in relying on the U.S. as a model or partner in sustaining democratic values. Over the past fifty years, it's become clear that the answer to authoritarianism lies neither in violent revolution, civil war, nor conventional politics and policy.

Instead, a *demos*-led revival of popular assemblies in urban America could offer a powerful model, demonstrating how decentralized, direct democracy can serve as a robust defense against authoritarianism. This approach resonates with historic democratic movements and aligns with theories suggesting that genuine democracy requires not just voting rights but also active, empowered participation in governance. By permanently vesting public powers in every individual within the *demos*, a renaissance of popular assemblies in urban America could model a vibrant twenty-first-century democracy for the world.

ADDENDUM: TASK OF PUBLIC POWERS ORGANIZING

The public-powers organizing priority calls us to foster in-depth education of the citizenry about American democracy and its foundations in the home and the community, which (as already noted) is essential to movement-building. To educate the citizenry may be daunting because *covenantal* democracy is likely to be unfamiliar if not completely unknown to urban and suburban city-dwelling Americans' experience. The institutional foundations that enabled widely shared moral commitment to strengthening the home, the community, and the country, long ago gave way to privatized sensual and material pleasures. So we face the possibility that the complete loss of American democracy would not be fully appreciated by the majority until long after it became a *fait accompli*.

There are those who will argue that the United States is still very much a democracy. But elections are far from conclusive evidence of democracy, as currently demonstrated by Putin's Russia and the mullahs' Iran. That anyone in the U.S. can run for office is not conclusive evidence of democracy, when the costs of successful campaigns, even for city-wide offices, can be astronomical, and the Supreme Court has made it possible for ultra-rich donors to finance campaigns anonymously. That voters may freely vote their conscience by secret ballot can have little meaning if critical issues, for which there is overwhelming public support, such as increasing taxes on the wealthy, fail to appear on the ballot.

It may thus be accurate to refer to our system as an "anocracy," neither a democracy nor a autocracy "... but something in between," something transitional, moving toward autocracy, in which "Citizens receive some elements of democratic rule ... but they also live under leaders with extensive authoritarian powers and few checks and balances."¹⁸³ Most Americans have little or no experience of meaningful *participatory* democracy.

Public-powers organizing faces its first test in conveying the full scope of these historic threats to our democratic way of life. To play a significant role in the rescue of American democracy, we face a challenge much like that faced by our professional predecessors two centuries ago. When labor organizing began to build local craft unions in the early nineteenth century, and later moved on to organizing industrial unions, there was little experience or understanding by the workers of how to build enough power to compel negotiations with the owners. However, labor organizers and leaders quickly saw the necessity of *adult education*. Pamphlets, flyers, and leaflets introduced the rhetoric and arguments they used one-to-one, in small groups, and in public speeches to persuade workers. In time, they published labor-focused newspapers and journals¹⁸⁴; and through them, the educational speeches, essays, and articles written by labor organizers, leaders and activists were widely circulated.¹⁸⁵

So too, a national grassroots movement to vest a share of the public powers in directly democratic assemblies will require the mass circulation of an *adult education curriculum* to educate the citizenry. Every community should have the opportunity to tailor such a democracy-curriculum to suit its own culture, history, values, resources, etc. Our hope is that this paper will help in the development of many such curriculums by public-powers organizing projects to meet the variety of their local circumstances and needs.

¹ Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, “From the Notebook of a Wandering Jew,” *The Collected Writings, Volume VIII, Mensch-Yisroel: Perspectives on Judaism* (New York—Jerusalem: Philipp Feldheim, 1995, 1997), pp. 277-78.

² Available at https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/REMAKING_DEMOCRACY_I_2.1.pdf

³ *Demos*, as defined by *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971): “The people or commons of an ancient Greek state, esp. of a democratic state, such as Athens: hence, the populace, the common people: often personified.”

⁴ Available at https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/REMAKING_DEMOCRACY_II.pdf

⁵ In regard to local government, public powers include the power to legislate, police, issue tax-free bonds, collect taxes, provide programs and services for the health, education, and moral welfare of the citizenry, regulate land use, enforce state and local laws, establish courts, and jail misdemeanants.

⁶ Available at https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD3_OLIGARCHY.pdf

⁷ Available at https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD4_ECONOMICS.pdf

⁸ “Social morality” refers to the moral values, principles, and behavioral norms that govern social relations within a society. It reflects a collective understanding of right and wrong, guiding interpersonal relationships, communal responsibilities, and the functioning of societal institutions. Unlike personal morality, which pertains to an individual's conscience and ethical choices, social morality emphasizes widely shared standards that enable cooperative living and mutual respect among diverse individuals and groups. It often encompasses justice, fairness, reciprocity, and care for others, providing a framework for addressing social issues such as inequality, rights, and the common good. Regarding social morality in relation to movement-building, see: Moshe ben Asher, “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing,” *Social Policy* (Winter 2020) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI_CO.pdf].

⁹ See David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People: Popular Politics and England's Long Social Revolution, 1066–1649* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰ See Alexis DeTocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume I and II* (Kindle edition), pp. 25 and 33.

¹¹ See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), pp. 53–54.

¹² See: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), especially regarding the presence of mutual trust, which is based on shared values; Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹³ Torah Judaism does not regard the home as where Jews *look up to God*, but where God “comes to us” by virtue of our sanctifying all our commonplace activities, from eating and drinking to bathing and studying. Each of us is to make ourself a home for God—always making God present in one’s life. See Hirsch commentary on Genesis 46:1.

¹⁴ See Dave Roos, “What’s the Difference Between Puritans and Pilgrims?” *History.com*, July 31, 2019; updated February 18, 2025. The few Pilgrims were the first settlers from England to arrive, founding the Plymouth Colony and creating the Mayflower Compact. Their colony officially merged with the Massachusetts Bay. The Puritans came a generation later in a wave of thousands and had enduring influence on American identity, law, and education.

¹⁵ The Hebrew root of the word Torah (תורה) is usually thought to be ירה, which is related to teaching and guidance or aiming for a target. But Rabbi Hirsch teaches that the root of Torah is הרה, to plant a spiritual seed in someone, to teach in the *Hiphil* form (הורה). See Hirsch commentary on Genesis 16:5.

¹⁶ Torah-Judaism regards moral-spiritual infrastructure as indispensable to societal health and development: “Political freedom without spiritual freedom is an unhatched egg, incomplete. We may have been free and unfettered [following the Exodus from Egypt], but we were still spiritually lost and morally confused.... We may be free from the oppression of the past, but we haven’t yet been provided with a coherent, wholesome infrastructure to help direct our aspirations. So, freedom itself is only half the story. What we do with our freedom—that is the question. We need a purpose in life, and we need a moral, spiritual infrastructure to help guide us in life. Otherwise we wander aimlessly through the wilderness, and our freedom remains undeveloped potential.” See Yossy Goldman, “The Egg in Exodus,” *Chabad.org* (2024) [https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/667075/jewish/The-Egg-in-Exodus.htm].

¹⁷ “Brotherhood” is meant to convey that U.S. billionaires have common interests about which they communicate with one another, and a common purpose, plan, and operation, with roots reaching back more than 150 years. See Nancy McLean, *Democracy in Chains, The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017—Kindle edition), which contends that “... the single most powerful and least understood threat to democracy today: the attempt by the billionaire-backed radical right to undo democratic governance” (loc. 211). They vehemently oppose “... any group or government meddling with the market,” manipulating law and policy to insulate themselves and their wealth from government regulation (loc. 36). See also: Kurt Andersen, *Evil Geniuses—The Unmaking of America: A Recent History* (New York: Random House, 2020—Kindle edition); Kristin A. Goss, “Policy Plutocrats: How America’s Wealthy Seek to Influence Government,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 49(3):442-448 (July 2016); Chuck Collins and Omar Ocampo, “Trump and His Many Billionaire Enablers,” Institute for Policy Studies (January 11, 2021); Jane Mayer, *Dark Money, The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016); Benjamin I. Page et al., *Billionaires and Stealth Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019—Kindle edition); and Sheldon Whitehouse with Jennifer Mueller, *The Scheme, How the Right Wing Used Dark Money to Capture the Supreme Court* (New York and London: The New Press, 2022).

¹⁸ Stuart Stevens, long-time Republican operative and advisor to The Lincoln Project, confirms the threats to democracy from first-hand familiarity. Stevens identifies five conditions needed to create autocracies: wealthy individuals and groups that provide the financial backing, media channels that spread congenial propaganda, alignment of a major political party with autocratic goals, legal theories to legitimize the erosion of democracy, and mobilization of shock troops willing to use intimidation and violence. See Stuart Stevens, *The Conspiracy to End America* (New York: Knopf, 2024).

¹⁹ We explore MSI at length in “Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure: Touchstone of Movement-Building Community Organizing” *Social Policy* (Winter 2020) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MSI_CO.pdf] For those who believe that religious beliefs and practice are nonsensical and simply reflect self-delusion or emotional neediness, informed contrary opinions exist based not on “blind faith” but substantial evidence and reasoning which establish belief in God’s lawfulness as both reasonable and plausible. Our views can be found in our essay, “Tikkun Olam: Our Soul-Searching Repair of the World,” *Gather the People* (2025) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/TIKKUN_OLAM_SOUL_SEARCHING.pdf], which calls out the inability of science to account for the lawfulness of the Creation without reference to an incorporeal cause.

²⁰ On these AI impacts, see Yuval Noah Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI* (New York, NY: Random House, 2024).

²¹ See our paper, “Public Powers for the Commonwealth,” *Social Policy* (Winter 2015) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/PUBLIC_POWERES.pdf]

²² See our paper, “Remaking American Democracy II: A Groundplan for the Demos to Gain Public Powers,” *Social Policy* (Fall 2022) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/REMAKING_DEMOCRACY_II.pdf].

²³ For Jewish readers who are not educated in Torah Judaism, we have added endnotes that rely on rabbinic commentary to illustrate Jewish understanding of the Torah under discussion.

²⁴ We have relied on T. H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630-1730* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant and Commonwealth: From Christian Separation through the Protestant Reformation, the Covenant Tradition in Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Michael McGiffert, *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); and Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²⁵ We refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Hebrew Bible except where we consider Christian belief, in which case we have used “Old Testament” in recognition of their theology of supersessionism (which we discuss in more detail ahead).

²⁶ See: Henri de Lubac (Mark Sebanc, trans.), *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); and Ronald E. Heine, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007)

²⁷ לא איש אל

²⁸ See William Nichols. *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993).

²⁹ וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים וּלְזַרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ

³⁰ כַּח מַעֲשֵׂיו הַגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתַת לָהֶם נְחֻלַת גּוֹיִם: מַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיו אָמַת וּמִשְׁפָּט נְאֻמָּנִים כָּל-פְּקוּדָיו: סְמוּכִים לְעַד לְעוֹלָם עֲשׂוּיִם בְּאֵמַת וַיִּשֶׁר: פְּדוּת | שְׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ צְנֹה לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ

³¹ וְאִף גַּם-זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲיִבִּיהֶם לֹא-מֵאֲסָתִים וְלֹא-גְעֻלָּתִים לְכַלְתֶּם לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אֲתֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם: מֵה וְנִזְכַּרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רֵאשִׁנִּים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי-אֶתֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה

³² וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקֵר וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא לְהִנָּחֵם

³³ For more on the concept of the city as “A Model of Christian Charity,” see Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956).

³⁴ Alexis DeTocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume I and II* (Kindle edition), p. 161.

³⁵ The Enlightenment philosophers saw the government as separate from the people, and from which they had to be protected. John Locke proposed natural rights, social contract theory, and the right to revolution, arguing that individuals possess certain inherent rights, including life, liberty, and property, that government exists to protect those rights, and if a government fails in its obligations, the people have the right to alter or abolish it. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, believed in popular sovereignty, the idea that the legitimacy of government arises from the consent of the governed, and emphasized the importance of civic virtue and the common good.

³⁶ The Puritans were English Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who sought to rid the Church of England of Roman Catholic practices, maintaining that the church had not been fully reformed, that it was still corrupt and unbiblical in many respects. They particularly opposed the hierarchical structure of the Church, the use of religious images, and compulsory tithing and church taxes. The Puritans most familiar to Americans are the Pilgrims of our first settlements in New England.

³⁷ See William S. Simmons, “Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans’ Perception of Indians,” *William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 38(1):56-72 (January 1981), p. 57.

³⁸ See Michael Zuckerman, “Mirage of Democracy: The Town Meeting in America,” *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 15(2): Article 3 (2019).

³⁹ See Daniel J. Elazar, “Covenant and the American Founding,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.) [from “The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume Three,” *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018)]

⁴⁰ Civil political rule refers to governance by civilian authorities (in contrast to military) who operate within a legal, institutional framework, typically characterized by adherence to constitutional law, democratic principles, or legal norms that reflect the will of the people or society’s established legal order.

⁴¹ See Donald S. Lutz, “The Mayflower Compact and Its Significance in American Constitutional History,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 19(4):41-58 (Autumn 1989).

⁴² I.e., the commandments—Hebrew: *mitzvot*

⁴³ Quoted in Daniel J. Elazar, “The Purposes of American Power,” in *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), p. 126.

⁴⁴ The term *Gemeinschaft* was originally coined by the German social and political theorist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), in contrast to *Gesellschaft* social life, in which human relations are more impersonal and indirect, being rationally constructed in the interest of efficiency or other economic and political considerations. We define a *Gemeinschaft* community as an association of individuals in near enough proximity to sustain face-to-face relationships, who typically but not necessarily have some history of continuous engagement in activities essential to their survival and success, which require collective decision-making (despite many differences in their personal backgrounds, interests and ideologies), based on their acceptance of shared basic values and their agreement on what constitutes their commonweal or general welfare. Although many variations of *Gemeinschaft* community may still be found in small towns and urban and suburban neighborhoods, our American archetype for this model of community are the wagon trains that crossed the country in the 1800s. Many of the families crossing the frontier had pre-existing ties, possibly because they came from the same town or were members of the same family, church, or friendship group. All had the goal of surviving the punishing trek to start new lives. The extraordinary challenges they faced fostered a heightened sense of unity and camaraderie.

⁴⁵ Although the Enlightenment philosophers defined “natural [personal] liberty” with several different characteristics and within somewhat different conceptual frameworks, in general they viewed it as the inherent freedom of individuals to act according to their own will, within the bounds of natural law, without being subject to the arbitrary will of others. This concept was fundamental to their ideas about human rights, governance, and the relationship between individuals and society.

⁴⁶ See: Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel* (New York: Routledge, 2017), *Covenant and Commonwealth* (Kindle edition, 2018), and *Covenant and Civil Society: Constitutional Matrix of Modern Society* (Kindle edition, 2018).

⁴⁷ See Daniel J. Elazar, “How the Jewish Political Tradition Can Help Bridge Between Religious and Secular Jews,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.), p. 9 [from “The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume Three,” *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018)].

⁴⁸ Psalm 23:3 reads: He guides me [יְנַחֵנִי] in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (יְנַחֵנִי בְּמַעַגְלֵי צְדָק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ); and Psalm 121:5-7 reads: The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand....The Lord will protect you [יִשְׁמַר] from all evil; He will keep your soul (יְהוָה שְׁמֹרְךָ, יְהוָה צִלְךָ עַל-יַד יְמִינְךָ...יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרְךָ מִכָּל-רָע יִשְׁמַר אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ).]

⁴⁹ Exodus 19:3-8

⁵⁰ Exodus 19:16-20:21

⁵¹ From a contemporary Jewish-oriented, psycho-social perspective: Regardless of the demands of both the Torah and Christian theology, presumably a small number of the Pilgrims would have covertly violated Puritan morality, which in time leads to behavior that has predictable outcomes; since life experience in virtually every age teaches that, however much planning we do, and whatever benefits we anticipate as a result of acting without moral limits—whether spurred on by ignorance, casual indifference, or intentional wrongdoing—the eventual consequences play out unexpectedly and painfully. The onus of our wrongdoing eventually lands on us and others whom we care about, like our family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. While we get to make free-willed moral choices for ourselves, it is God’s moral-spiritual (lawful) infrastructure that ensures the educative consequences, which then become the context of our future decisions. As we mature morally, which can occur at virtually any age, we begin to see there are things we must leave to a power far greater than our own, since we don’t actually control everything. We also discover that when we choose to live as if we are morally autonomous (which, at the time, we are convinced makes us free), we actually condemn ourselves to the distractions and diversions of a life of binging on materialism and sensuality, which often rapidly, but always ultimately, degenerate into boredom, dissatisfaction, and trouble—a life without the invaluable benefits of moral freedom.

⁵² The Jewish conception of peace (*shalom*—שְׁלוֹם) is not limited to the absence of conflict but rather completeness. It’s realized when one’s life achieves an otherwise impossible harmony based on the total integration of body, mind, and spirit with God’s commandments, which have been gifted to us as the best means to align our will with Divine Providence. However, the conceptual essentials of *shalom* apply not only to our personal life but also to our communities, polities, policies, and international relations.

⁵³ Regarding the *mesorah* or “tradition,” see Ezekiel 20:37, וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִסְרֹת הַבְּרִית, (“And I will bring you into the bond of the covenant”). The word “bond” (מִסְרֹת) is based on the root מ-ס-ר, meaning to transfer, as in “handing over,” but is commonly understood to mean “tradition,” that which is passed from generation to generation.

⁵⁴ Numbers Rabbah 14:10

⁵⁵ Exodus 24:7—נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע—*na’aseh v’nishmah*

⁵⁶ Although, of course, the Catholic Church, eventually condemned Galileo because his observations through the telescope challenged the geocentric view of the universe, which was entrenched in religious doctrine. He was accused of heresy, tried, and placed under house arrest.

א ואֶל-מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עַל־הָאֵל-יְהוָה אַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן נִדְּב וְאַבְיָהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרָחֹק: ב וּנְגַשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבַדּוֹ אֶל-יְהוָה וְהֵם לֹא יִגְשׁוּ וְהָעָם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ: ג וַיִּבֹא
מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֵת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה וְאֵת כָּל-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל-הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל-
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה

ז וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה

וַיִּגְדַּלְכֶם אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲשֵׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים וַיִּכְתְּבֶם עַל-שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים

וְאֵתִי צִוָּה יְהוָה בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לַעֲשׂוֹתְכֶם אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִתְּם
עֲבָרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ

⁶¹ See Donald M. Berwick, “The Moral Determinants of Health,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 324(3):225-226 (July 21, 2020), p. 226.

⁶² See Robert Lustig, “The pursuit of pleasure is a modern-day addiction,” *The Guardian* (September 9, 2017); and “A Hacking of the American Mind,” YouTube (March 15, 2018), presentation made at a meeting of the Silicon Valley Health Institute.

⁶³ For example, see David Brooks, “America Is Having a Moral Convulsion,” *The Atlantic* (October 5, 2020).

⁶⁴ Psalms 111:10—רִאשִׁית חֲכָמָה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה

⁶⁵ *Chesed*, which is sometimes translated as “grace” and sometimes as “lovingkindness,” does not easily translate into a single word of English; but according to Rabbi Hirsch, means to devote oneself entirely, being selfless. See Hirsch commentary on Genesis 47:29.

⁶⁶ וַיִּדְעַתְּ כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים הָאֵל הַנִּצָּאֵן שִׁמְרֵי הַבְּרִית וְהַחֹסֵד לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשִׁמְרֵי
מִצְוֹתָיו לְאֶלֶף דּוֹר

⁶⁷ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֵין כְּמוֹךָ אֱלֹהִים, בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת; שִׁמְרֵי הַבְּרִית
וְהַחֹסֵד, לַעֲבָדֶיךָ הַהֹלְכִים לְפָנֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָב

⁶⁸ וַאֲמַר אָנָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא שִׁמְרֵי הַבְּרִית וְהַחֹסֵד לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשִׁמְרֵי
מִצְוֹתָיו

⁶⁹ See Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel*, Vol. I of *Covenant Tradition in Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995—Kindle edition), loc. 1498.

⁷⁰ For a Jewish perspective, see Bava Metzia 24b, which teaches that “[one should go] beyond the requirements of the law....” The expression (*lifnim meshurat hadin*—לְפָנִים מִשׁוֹרֵת הַדִּין) means literally within the line of justice, i.e., perform a good action even if one is not compelled to do so legally.”

⁷¹ Among the most important of innumerable examples: Jesus emphasizes that love for God and love for one’s neighbor are the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:37–40; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27)—“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (although Deuteronomy 6:5 reads: וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ—“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” [read, *all your resources* (מְאֹדְךָ), not just your mind]; and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).]

⁷² Daniel J. Elazar, “How the Jewish Political Tradition Can Help Bridge Between Religious and Secular Jews,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.), p. 10 [from “The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume Three,” *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018).]

⁷³ In Jewish life, the whole concept of Hasidut and Hasidism, both in the biblical period and subsequently, is an outgrowth of this dynamic approach to the covenantal relationship. (See Elazar, *op cit.*) The essence of the idea, conveyed to us in the Torah’s use of an expression denoting the name(s) of God as *Adonai Elokim* (אֲדֹנָי יְיָ—written here in a Hebrew form for non-sacred purposes), which combines strict justice with loving kindness to build up a “blissful future.” See Hirsch commentary on Genesis 15:2. It’s like a parent’s strict but loving rule-making, informed by hard-won wisdom, for a child’s protection; or the high standards of a teacher who truly cares about a student’s future. Our more or less universal values, in large measure derived from biblical sources, especially the Torah, integrate justice and compassion, strict rules and love, to achieve the blessings of enlightenment that follow from social stability and harmony, which, in turn, thrive when governance is based on covenantal democracy that defines commonweal as its *raison d’être*.

⁷⁴ The revival of face-to-face community, according to a major report of the U.S. Surgeon General’s office, offers one of the most effective remedies to our national epidemic of loneliness and isolation. According to the Report, the number one means to foster social connection is to “strengthen social infrastructure in local communities.” See U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,” *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation* (Washington, DC: U.S. Public Health Service, 2023).

⁷⁵ הַקְהִילוּ אֵלַי אֶת-כָּל-זִקְנֵי שְׁבִטֵיכֶם וְשִׁטְרֵיכֶם וְאֲדַבְרָה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאָעִידָה בָּם אֶת-הַשְּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ

⁷⁶ See: Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006); and Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford, UK & New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁷⁷ See Hiroko Tabuchi, “Something’s Poisoning America’s Land. Farmers Fear ‘Forever’ Chemicals,” *New York Times* (August 31, 2024).

⁷⁸ Regarding the well-known destructive effects of climate change brought on by the greed of the carbon-based energy-extraction industries, see: “IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C” (SR15), 2018, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Reports; NASA’s “Evidence”; Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Richard Heede, *Climate Change*, 122 (2014): 229-241; Union of Concerned Scientists, “The Climate Accountability Scorecard: Ranking Major Fossil Fuel Companies on Climate Deception, Disclosure, and Action”; and Andrew E. Dessler and Edward A. Parson, *The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁷⁹ כּי-אַבִּיאֲנוּ אֶל-הָאָדָמָה | אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתִּיּוֹ זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבֶשׁ וְאָכַל וְשָׁבַע וְדָשַׁן וּפְנָה אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרֵים וְעַבְדוּם וְנִאֲצוּנִי וְהִפָּר אֶת-בְּרִיתִי: כֹּא וְהָיָה כִּי-תִמְצָאנָה אֹתוֹ רְעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעֲנָתָה הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְפָנָיו לְעַד כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אֶת-יִצְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה הַיּוֹם בְּטָרִם אַבִּיאֲנוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי

⁸⁰ Hebrew (ordinary usage) for Lord: אֲדוֹן, from the root א-ד-ן, is to sustain, provide a base, like a pillar.

⁸¹ כֹּג הַשְּׁמָרוֹ לְכֶם פֶּן-תִּשְׁכַּחוּ אֶת-בְּרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת עִמָּכֶם וְעִשִּׂיתֶם לְכֶם פֶּסֶל: תִּמְוֹנַת כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ: כִּד כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֵשׁ אֲכָלָה הוּא אֵל קָנָא:

⁸² According to Torah Judaism, Torah may be understood as teaching that the consequences for immoral behavior are not punishment but God’s loving education for what will be required to “habituate” the individual to moral behavior, that which is pleasing to God (Hirsch commentary on Genesis 3:17) and, ipso factor, uplifts and dignifies humankind. The lesson is that “...what is bitter is not always bad, and what is sweet is not always good...” (Proverbs 14:23), which was conveyed to Adam after he ate the fruit from the one tree of the whole garden that was forbidden to him and Eve. (Hirsch commentary on Genesis 3:17) He learned about renunciation (עֲצָבוֹן), that in life one must sacrifice something that has immediate attractiveness to get something of lifelong value—which is learning that accompanies ordinary human maturation and would have been understood by the Pilgrims.

⁸³ א וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן-תְּשָׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתִּשַׁע שָׁנִים וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי-אֵל שַׁדַּי הַתְּהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וְהָיָה תָמִים: ב וַאֲתָנָה בְרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְבָּה אוֹתָךְ בְּמֵאָד מֵאָד: ג וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם עַל-פָּנָיו וַיִּדְבֹר אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר: ד אֲנִי הִנֵּה בְרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְאַב הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם: ה וְלֹא-יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת-שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אַב-הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ: ו וְהִפְרֵתִי אִתְּךָ בְּמֵאָד מֵאָד וְנִתְּתִיךָ לְגוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ יֵצְאוּ

⁸⁴ Abraham’s original name before it was changed in Exodus 17:4-5

⁸⁵ אַחַר | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְּבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם בְּמַחֲזָה לֵאמֹר אֶל-תִּירָא אַבְרָם אֲנִכִּי מִגּוֹן לֶךָ שְׁכַרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מֵאֵד

⁸⁶ Unlike the more limited demands placed on the Noahide (defined in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a–60a), Rabbi Hirsch teaches on Genesis 16:14 that “One only begins to be a Jew with the dedication of all the senses of the body”—that is, by faithful compliance with the “statutes” (*chukim*—חֻקִּים), which demand bodily self-control.

⁸⁷ Commentary on Genesis 17:1

⁸⁸ See: Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944-1966); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and James Marten, *Children in Colonial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

⁸⁹ See: Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (Beth Gillian Raps, tr.), *African Women: A Modern History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁹⁰ Torah Judaism teaches that although Adam and Eve's disobedience brought death and hardship into the world, humans are not born with inherent sinfulness. Instead, humans are seen as morally neutral at birth, with the both the inclination to do good (*yetzer hatov*—יֵצֶר הַטוֹב) and the inclination to do evil (*yetzer hara*—יֵצֶר הָרָע). Each person is responsible for their own actions and is judged based on their freewill choices.

ה כִּי-יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה חֲדָשָׁה לֹא יֵצֵא בַּצָּבָא וְלֹא-יַעֲבֹר עָלָיו לְכָל-דְּבַר נָקִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵיתוֹ שָׁנָה ⁹¹ אַחַת וְשִׁמַּח אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח

⁹² The rabbis interpreted the Torah to suspend exemptions from military service for wars of obligation—for example, against invaders or to conquer Eretz Yisrael. See Sotah 44b for disagreements on the subject, such as whether a war to reduce the number of idolaters that might come upon Israel is a preemptive war and thus discretionary or not. Rabbi Reuven Bulka (b. 1944) teaches in *Jewish Marriage, A Halakhic Ethic* (New York and Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House—Yeshiva University Press, 1986), p. 77, “The bride and the groom, then, are also on the front lines, not fighting external threat, but rather preventing internal erosion.”

וַיִּבְרַךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבַשְׁתֶּהּ וַיְרֹדוּ בְּדַגַּת הַיָּם וַיַּעֲרֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-תְּיָהּ הִרְמִשְׁתָּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ

ה וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ: ו וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְבְּךָ: ז וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבְנֵיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ

⁹⁵ A traditional Jewish view of *devekut* (דְּבִקוּת) is that we bond with God in both the “upper” and “lower” worlds, in both our spiritual and material experience; that our thoughts and words and deeds take place in God's reality; and that we come to know, “By the power of what you do below with true love and awe, will you be able to bond with the Creator” See Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok (trans. & comm.), *Devekut: The Teachings of the Baal Shem Tov* [Rabbi Yisrael Ben Eliezer, 1700-1760] (Fairfield, IA: Yeshivat Benei N'vi'im, 1993—Kindle Edition), locs. 25, 75, 150 & 275.

96 ואתם הדבקים ביהוה אלהיכם חיים כלכם היום

97 ואתם הדבקים ביהוה אלהיכם חיים כלכם היום

98 כי אם-שמר תשמרו את-כל-המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם לעשותה לאהבה את- יהוה אלהיכם ללכת בכל-דרכיו ולדבקה-בו

99 אחרי יהוה אלהיכם תלכו ואתו תיראו ואת-מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקון

100 לאהבה את-יהוה אלהיך לשמע בקלו ולדבקה-בו כי הוא תייך וארך ימיך לשבת על- האדמה אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לתת להם

101 Op cit.

102 ויאמר יהוה אל-קיו אי הבל אחיך ויאמר לא ידעתי השמר אחי אנכי

103 לא-תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלהיך אני יהוה

104 לא-תעשו עול במשפט לא-תשא פני-דל ולא תהדר פני גדול בצדק תשפט עמיתך

105 לא-תלך רכיל בעמיך לא תעמד על-דם רעך אני יהוה

106 לא-תשנא את-אחיך בלבבך הוכח תוכיח את-עמיתך ולא-תשא עליו חטא

107 Judaism teaches we are bound to either (a) approach the neighbor to see whether there is justification for his or her actions, or (b) forget the matter entirely, from then on not letting it influence our attitudes or emotions towards the neighbor.

108 A Jewish understanding of the commandment does not require we love the *person* of our neighbor as ourself, which would be impossible as a practical matter, but directs us to love everything that “pertains” to our neighbor: “... all the conditions of his life, the ‘weal and the woe’ which make up his position in the world. To this, his weal and woe, we are to give our love as if it were our own, we are to rejoice in his good fortune, and grieve over his misfortune as if it were our own.” See Hirsch commentary on Leviticus 19:18.

109 לא-תקום ולא-תטר את-בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני יהוה

110 This kind of community culture was still dominant in much of America, not only in the rural heartland, where it still survives in pockets, but in the increasingly cosmopolitan coastal cities, until the middle of the twentieth century. Despite differences in religious belief and non-belief, affiliation with and alienation from various faith traditions, remnants of culture reflecting spiritual rewards persisted because they had become integrated into the moral-spiritual infrastructure of the nation.

111 כח מקצה | שלש שנים תוציא את-כל-מעשר תבואתך בשנה ההוא והנחת בשעריך: כט ובא הלוי כי אין-לו חלק ונחלה עמך והגר והיתום והאלמנה אשר בשעריך ואכלו ושבעו למען יברכך יהוה אלהיך בכל-מעשה ידך אשר תעשה

112 Judaism has taught that the duty to support the impoverished is not based on their neediness but on the obligation to share one’s abundance; since a successful crop is not the exclusive result of the farmer’s labor and thus one’s private property, but a gift of God, properly to be shared with all who can benefit from it.

כָּל-אַלְמָנָה וַיִּתּוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן ¹¹³

כב אם-ענה תענה אתו כי אם-צעק יצעק אלי שמע אשמע צעקתו: כג וחרה אפי ¹¹⁴
והרגתי אתכם בחרב והיו נשיכם אלמנות ובניכם יתמים

¹¹⁵ Leviticus 19:18—You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord (לא-תקם ולא)-
תטר את-בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני יהוה

ד ויאמרו הבה | נבנה-לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה-לנו שם פן-נפוז על-פני ¹¹⁶
כל-הארץ: ה וירד יהוה לראת את-העיר ואת-המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם: ו ויאמר יהוה
הו עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא-יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות:
ז הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו: ח ויפץ יהוה אתם משם
על-פני כל-הארץ ויחדלו לבנת העיר: ט על-כן קרא שמה בבבל כי-שם בלל יהוה שפת כל-
הארץ ומשם הפיצם יהוה על-פני כל-הארץ:

¹¹⁷ For example, Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32) was a consummate politician, and a “cool alternator,” sociologically speaking; one who alternated between two different realities, in a way called “two-faced” since the seventeenth century. We might even consider him to be a sociopath, without a conscience. He organized to overthrow the established authority of Moses and Aaron for his own private, selfish purposes. He was not an idealist, but cynically used the idea of “power to the people” to justify his own ambitions and recruit allies to serve those ambitions. See Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Magidah Khulda Bat Sarah, “Korach’s Rebellion of Informal Leaders,” *National Jewish Post & Opinion* (June 10, 2009).

¹¹⁸ See Daniel J. Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.) [from “The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume Three,” *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018).

וגר לא-תונה ולא תלחצנו כי-גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים ¹¹⁹

¹²⁰ For examples, see: Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2011); and Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966);

¹²¹ Our history includes: Jamestown Rebellion (1622), Bacon's Rebellion (1676), Glorious Revolution in America (1689), Natchez Rebellion (1729), Stono Rebellion (1739), Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-1766), Regulator Movement (1765-1771), Boston Tea Party (1773), American Revolution (1775-1783), Whiskey Rebellion (1791-1794), Gabriel's Rebellion (1800), Burr Conspiracy (1805-1807), Tecumseh's War (1811-1813), Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831), Amistad Revolt (1839), Dorr Rebellion (1841-1842), Bleeding Kansas (1854-1859), John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry (1859), American Civil War (1861-1865), New York City Draft Riots (1863), Red River Rebellion (1869-1870), Battle of Blair Mountain (1921), and Wounded Knee Massacre (1890).

¹²² See Daniel J. Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.), p. 21 [from *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018)].

¹²³ As quoted in Daniel J. Elazar, “Covenant and the American Founding,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online publication, n.d.), p. 10 [from *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018)].

¹²⁴ Elazar, “Covenant and the American Founding,” p. 22.

¹²⁵ Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment,” p. 8.

¹²⁶ The etymology of *foedus* traces back to the Proto-Italic word *foidos*, which is derived from a Proto-Indo-European root, meaning “to trust” or “to persuade.”

¹²⁷ See Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment,” pp. 4-5.

¹²⁸ As Elazar informs us, “The federal element is part and parcel of the very foundation of the Jewish political experience and tradition, both in the sense of the covenantal founding of the Jewish people and more explicitly in the predominant form of political organization throughout the history of the Jewish polity beginning with the federation of the twelve tribes.” See Elazar, “How the Jewish Political Tradition Can Help Bridge Between Religious and Secular Jews,” p. 12.

¹²⁹ For more on this perspective, see: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991); Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2003); and Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1992).

¹³⁰ Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment,” p. 12.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³³ Elazar, “The Covenantal Origins of the American Spirit,” p. 4.

¹³⁴ We discuss the municipal reform movement in more detail in “Directly Democratic Metropolitan Government: Envisioning Beyond Oppression, Rebellion, and Reform,” *Social Policy* (Spring 2016) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/METRO_GOVT.pdf.]

¹³⁵ See Samuel P. Hays, “The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 55:157-166 (October 1964), quoted by John J. Harrigan and Ronald K. Vogel, *Political Change in the Metropolis*, Seventh Edition (New York-San Francisco-Boston: Longman, 2003), p. 85. For a contemporary study on the policy preferences of the wealthy in contrast to majority citizenry, see Benjamin I. Page, “Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(1):51-73 (March 2013).

¹³⁶ See Korn, “The Private Citizen, the Social Expert, and the Social Problem: An Excursion Through an Unacknowledged Utopia” in (Bernard Rosenberg, Israel Gerver, and F. William Howton, eds.) *Mass Society in Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) pp. 576-593.

¹³⁷ Arguably, Al Gore lost the 2000 presidential election because the SCOTUS decision (Bush v. Gore) that halted a recount in Florida, gave George W. Bush the state’s electoral votes and the presidency, although Gore won the popular vote by more than a half-million votes.

¹³⁸ We have adopted the definition of “citizenhood” as one’s *action* as a citizen; while “citizenship” signifies the *status* of being a citizen. See Robbi Williams, *Model of Citizenship Support*, 2d ed. (Unley SA, Australia: JFA Purple Orange, 2013), p. 8, which defines citizenhood as “... a situation in which a person is actively involved as a valued member of their local community.” Citizenship, on the other hand, is “... static, through a largely unchanging set of rights and obligations.”

¹³⁹ Bob Herbert’s definition of the donor class is a “... tiny group—just one-quarter of 1 percent of the population—and it is not representative of the rest of the nation. But its money buys plenty of access.” See “In America; The Donor Class,” *New York Times* (July 19, 1998). From a legal perspective, see Spencer A. Overton, “The Donor Class: Campaign Finance, Democracy, and Participation,” *GW Law, Scholarly Commons* (152 U. Pa. L. Rev, 2004). For a demographic and political assessment of the donor class, see Sean McElwee, Jesse H. Rhodes, and Brian Schaffer, “How big is the gap between the donor class and ordinary Americans? Bigger than you think,” *The Washington Post* (December 15, 2016). For a scholarly research study, see Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3): 564-581 (2014).

¹⁴⁰ Regarding these developments, see: Catherine Mulholland, *William Mulholland and the Rise of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); William L. Kahrl, *Water and Power: The Conflict over Los Angeles’ Water Supply in the Owens Valley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Abraham Hoffman, *Vision or Villainy: Origins of the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Water Controversy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and William Deverell and Greg Hise, *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

¹⁴¹ The expression “National Security State” is usually attributed to historian and sociologist Hans J. Morgenthau, who used the phrase to describe the growing concentration of military and intelligence power within the executive branch of government during the Eisenhower administration. However, both the NSC and the CIA were formed in 1947, not long after the end of the war. See Philip Zelikow, Ernest R. May, and Timothy Naftali, *The Road to the 9/11 Commission Report: The Rise of the National Security State* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); and Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

¹⁴² See: Aristotle (Carnes Lord, tran.), *Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Niccolò Machiavelli (Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, trans.), *Discourses on Livy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jean Bodin (M.J. Tooley, tran.), *Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1955); Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone, trans.), *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Victor Gourevitch, tran.), *The Social Contract and Other Political Writings* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁴³ See: James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay (Lawrence Goldman, ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008); and David Hume (Eugene F. Miller, ed.), *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985).

¹⁴⁴ Specifically, Madison and Hamilton, whose views were presented in *The Federalist Papers*, as well as John Adams, in *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (London: C. Dilly, 1787).

¹⁴⁵ See Matias López and Joshua K. Dubrow, “Politics and Inequality in Comparative Perspective: A Research Agenda,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 64(9):1199-1210 (2020).

¹⁴⁶ See Moshe ben Asher and Khulda Bat Sarah, “The Blinding Rapture of Mobilization,” *Social Policy* (Spring 2017) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/MOBILIZATION_RAPTURE.pdf].

¹⁴⁷ Such extraordinary estimates are supported by scholarly, peer-viewed studies—notably: Christopher J.L. Murray et al., “COVID-19 Projections,” Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2020); Christopher J.L. Murray et al., “Modeling COVID-19 Scenarios for the United States,” *Nature Medicine*, 27:94-105 (2021); Wei Lyu and George L. Wehby, “Community Use Of Face Masks And COVID-19: Evidence From A Natural Experiment Of State Mandates In The US,” *Health Affairs*, 39(8):1419-1425 (2020); and Derek K. Chu et al., “Physical Distancing, Face Masks, And Eye Protection To Prevent Person-To-Person Transmission Of SARS-CoV-2 And COVID-19: A Systematic Review And Meta-Analysis,” *The Lancet*, 395:1573-1587 (June 27, 2020).

¹⁴⁸ While it’s usually men who regard the use of pornography as a strictly “personal” matter, its use has escalated into a societal problem given the extent of pornography addiction, especially by youth, which is highly damaging to the addict and others. See: Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010); Simone Kühn and Jürgen Gallinat, “Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated With Pornography Consumption—The Brain on Porn,” *JAMA Psychiatry*, 71(7): 827-834 (2014); Barbara Steffens and R.L. Rennie, “The Traumatic Nature of Disclosure for Wives of Sexual Addicts,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 13(2-3): 247-267 (2006); Destin N. Stewart and Dawn Szymanski, “Young Adult Women’s Reports of Their Male Romantic Partner’s Pornography Use as a Correlate of Their Self-Esteem, Relationship Quality, and Sexual Satisfaction” *Sex Roles*, 67(5-6): 257-271 (2012); and Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴⁹ Christian nationalism is sometimes characterized as Christofascism, a term coined in 1970 by Dorothee Steffensky-Sölle (1929–2003), a German liberation theologian. Notable Christian clergy who have spoken out against the current incarnation of Christian nationalism include: Rev. Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; Rev. Amanda Tyler, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty; Rev. Dr. William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign; and Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners.

¹⁵⁰ Whitehouse, op cit.

¹⁵¹ The Founders' belief in the pivotal role of monotheism in moral civilization is suggested by President John Adams 1809 letter to François Adriaan van der Kemp, in which he wrote: "If I were an atheist of the other sect ... I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization." See James C. Taylor (ed.), *The Papers of John Adams*, Vol. 12 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2004.

¹⁵² See Magidah Khulda Bat Sarah and Rabbi Moshe ben Asher, *Become A Blessing, A Book of Intentions* (Gather the People, 2003), pp. 55-56 [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/BECOME_BLESSING.pdf].

¹⁵³ Daniel J. Elazar, "The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (online, n.d.), from *Covenant and Constitutionalism: The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume Three: The Great Frontier and the Matrix of Federal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1996—Kindle edition, 2018).

¹⁵⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, Vol. II (New York, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 1985, 1997), p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ Elazar, "The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment," p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ See Peter Luca Versteegen, "Trump Voters' social position in U.S. Society: Uniqueness and radical-right support," *Political Psychology* (online, May 6, 2024); and "What the media still get wrong about Trump voters," *Los Angeles Times* (September 15, 2024).

¹⁵⁷ The research reported in Philip Schwadel and Sam Hardy, "Faith still shapes morals and values even after people are 'done' with religion," *The Conversation* (June 16, 2021) [<https://theconversation.com/faith-still-shapes-morals-and-values-even-after-people-are-done-with-religion-160328>] confirms that "... the religion residue effect is real. The morals and values of religious ones [sic] are more similar to religious Americans than they are to the morals and values of other nonreligious Americans." Peer-reviewed research confirms that traditional values persist. See Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review*, 65(1):19-51 (February 2000).

¹⁵⁸ See Moshe ben Asher (né Michael Silver), "Social Learning Theory and Community Organizing," *Gather the People* (1978, 2021). p. 17 [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/SOCIAL_LEARNING_CO.pdf].

¹⁵⁹ See Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Governor John Tyler, May 26, 1810, in (Albert Ellery Bergh, ed.) *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), p. 393; Letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813, in (Paul Leicester Ford, ed.) *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 11* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), pp. 343-46; Letter to John Taylor, May 28, 1816, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 11*, p. 529; Letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 12*, p. 9; Letter to Samuel Kercheval, September 5, 1816, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 12*, p. 16; Letter to Major John Cartwright, June 5, 1824, in (Thomas Jefferson Randolph, ed.) *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830), p. 396.]

¹⁶⁰ See Milton Mayer, "The Tribute Money," *The Progressive* (March 1953).

¹⁶¹ See our paper, Remaking American Democracy III: 'Keep Your Eye on the Ball'—The Amoral, Oligarchic Arch-Enemy of Democracy, *Social Policy* (Winter 2024) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/RAD3_OLIGARCHY.pdf].

¹⁶² See: Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016); Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); David Callahan, *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (New York: Knopf, 2017); Jonathan Tepper and Denise Hearn, *The Myth of Capitalism: Monopolies and the Death of Competition* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018); Branko Milanović, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); David Carpenter and David Moss (eds.), *Preventing Regulatory Capture: Special Interest Influence and How to Limit It* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Thomas Philippon, *The Great Reversal: How America Gave Up on Free Markets* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019); and Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017).

¹⁶³ Sheldon Wolin, "Revolutionary Action Today," in (John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds.) *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 252.

¹⁶⁴ Elazar, "The Covenantal Origins of the American Experiment," p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ As our history has demonstrated, if a covenant excludes one or more groups from any of the common rights and obligations of citizenship, such as equality in owning property in certain neighborhoods or military service, a member of that group may challenge those restrictions and, further, *justice* demands they be struck down by the courts, which are established by an electorate that can, at least in theory, redesign the covenantal terms of their democracy.

¹⁶⁶ For a comprehensive survey of social movements in the U.S., see Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds.), *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

¹⁶⁷ We have proposed such groundwork in “Remaking American Democracy II: A Groundplan for the Demos to Gain Public Powers,” *Social Policy* (Fall 2022) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/REMAKING_DEMOCRACY_II.pdf]

¹⁶⁸ Barber, op. cit., *Strong Democracy*, p. 224.

¹⁶⁹ This includes the less well known national development organizing. See: Paul M. Bisca and Renekka Grun, “Higher power to deliver: The overlooked nexus between religion and development,” Brookings (February 25, 2020) [<https://brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/02/25/higher-power-to-deliver-the-overlooked-nexus-between-religion-and-development/>]; Jenny Lund, “The Role of Religion, Spirituality and Faith in Development; a critical theory approach,” *Third World Quarterly*, 30(5):937-951 (2009); Rachel M. McCleary, “Religion and Economic Development,” *Policy Review* (April & May 2008) [<https://www.hoover.org/research/religion-and-economic-development/>]; and Anne-Marie Holenstein, “Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Development Co-operation,” Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation SDC (March 2005).

¹⁷⁰ The only exception is a Jeffersonian belief in the political wisdom of “common people.” See Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to John Adams, October 28, 1813” (in Lester J. Cappon, ed.), *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 387-390.

¹⁷¹ The political actions of both communities were based on multiple steps—such as one-to-one visits, planning meetings, role plays, and turnout initiatives—which we have not included here. Documentation describing the process is widely available on the Internet.

¹⁷² See: Moshe ben Asher, “Faith Into Action—Community Organizing in Orange County, California,” *Organizing* (Fall/Winter 1992) [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/OC_CONG_ORG.pdf].

¹⁷³ It may be much less true of our current performative (read, fake) morality in politics.

¹⁷⁴ The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, first employed by the anti-union industrial corporations of the late nineteenth century, took an active role in strike-breaking, using surveillance, intimidation, and violence by their officers to disrupt labor organizing. See David McLean, *The Pinkertons and the Labor Movement: Espionage and Violence in Gilded Age America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁵ See Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).]

¹⁷⁶ See: Nancy Shulins, “Vermont Towns Vote to Prohibit Nuclear Plants,” *Lewiston Evening Journal* (March 2, 1977) [publication ended in 1979]; and David Scribner, “Resistance to gas pipeline spreads across Western Mass.,” *Berkshire—The Edge* (July 2, 2014).]

¹⁷⁷ See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 331.

¹⁷⁸ Wolin op cit.

¹⁷⁹ Scholarly research has confirmed that union organizing has produced several benefits for all workers: See: David Card, “The Effect of Unions on the Structure of Wages: A Longitudinal Analysis,” *Econometrica*, 64(4): 957-979 (1996); Henry S. Farber, et al., “Unions and Inequality Over the Twentieth Century: New Evidence from Survey Data,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 136(3): 1325-1385 (2021); Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld, “Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality,” *American Sociological Review*, 76(4): 513-537 (2011); John DiNardo and David S. Lee, “Economic Impacts of New Unionization on Private Sector Employers: 1984–2001,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119(4): 1383-1441 (2004); and David G. Blanchflower and Alex Bryson, “Unions, Wage Premiums, and Wage Dispersion,” *Economica*, 71(283): 449-474 (2004).

¹⁸⁰ See Moshe ben Asher, *Unified Community Organizing Theory*, Gather the People (1980-2024), p. 6 [https://www.gatherthepeople.org/resources/Downloads/CO_THEORY.pdf].

¹⁸¹ The importance of moral covenant is apparent in the nation’s military. Rav Moshe Taragin, “Shoftim: A Society Worth Defending,” *Torat Har Etzion* (January 9, 2024), proposes, “A society rooted in justice, fairness, and civility cultivates a stronger, more resolute military. Military success often hinges on the spirit and morale of its soldiers. Armies born from savage and lawless environments are little more than violent gangs, driven by base emotions like hate, greed, and bloodlust. These ignoble traits may spark a furious, fleeting burst of violence, but they lack the endurance required for sustained conflict. In contrast, soldiers driven by the defense of values worth preserving—principles of justice, the sanctity of life, and the freedoms of democracy—fight with selfless devotion and an enduring sense of purpose. They risk their lives not out of mere duty, but out of a profound commitment to safeguarding a civilization that stands for something greater than themselves.”

¹⁸² Nancy Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1): 5-19 (2016).]

¹⁸³ See Barbara F. Walter, *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them* (New York: Viking Press, Crown, 2022—Kindle edition), loc. 284.

¹⁸⁴ *The Mechanics' Free Press* (1828), *Working Man's Advocate* (1829), and *The Man* (1834).

¹⁸⁵ Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story* (New York: United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America, 1955); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); David R. Meyer, *The Roots of American Industrialization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Leon Fink, *The Rise and Fall of the Knights of Labor* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983)