FUNCTIONAL YAHWISM AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE EARLY ISRAELITE MONARCHY

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The ever-increasing application of modern social-science concepts to the OT text is directly responsible for this paper on the development of the early Is-raelite monarchy. Unquestionably, such approaches to the development of an-cient Israel's political and religious life have made significant contributions to our understanding of the OT milieu.[1] In addition the utilization of contempo-rary anthropological, economic and socio-political models in the analysis of the OT has demonstrated clearly the merits of interdisciplinary research. In this same manner the present study not only affords a new perspective on the com-plexities related to the emergence of the monarchy on the stage of Israelite history but also seeks to further interdisciplinary research on the early mon-archy by outlining its growth from a management functions perspective, yield-ing a nearly complete management paradigm dating back three millennia.

This fact notwithstanding, the application of modern social-science concepts to the OT often fails to disclose adequately the true nature of the relationship between the politics and religion of ancient Israel. This is due in large measure to the inability of such concepts to account fully for the dynamic variable of individual faith in Yahweh.[2] Our study, through the application of a manage-ment functions model to the OT historical record, seeks to show first the value of this particular modern social-science concept in understanding the matur-ation of the Israelite monarchy while underscoring the need for continued re-straint and discrimination in the employment of such models, given their in-nate deficiency to properly address the role of personal faith in the socio-political process.

In discussing the development of the Israelite monarchy from a social-sci-

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[1]For example W. Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of An-. cient Israel," *JBL* 98/2 (1979) 161–185; D. R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Bal-timore: Johns Hopkins, 1969); G. Herion, "The Role of Historical Narrative in Biblical Thought: The Tendencies Underlying Old Testament Historiography," *JSOT* 21 (1981) 25–57; L. Marfoe, "The Integrative Transformation: Patterns of Socio-political Organization in Southern Syria," *BASOR* 234, pp. 1–42; J. W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); J. R. Rosenbloom, "Social Science Concepts of Modernization and Biblical History: The Development of the Israelite Monarchy," *JAAR* 60 (1972) 437–444; K. Tollefson, "Nehemiah, Model for Change Agents: A Social Science Approach to Scripture," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15 (1986) 107–124.

[2]See G. Herion's penetrating critique of the utilization of social-science presuppositions and metho-dologies in Biblical studies in "The Impact of Modern Social Science Assumptions on the Reconstruc-tion of Israelite History," *JSOT* 34 (1986) 3–33.

entific approach, J. R. Rosenbloom states that "the gaining of power and its perpetuation requires ruthlessness."[3] That King David opted for the ruthless exercise of brute force in obtaining and consolidating his empire is beyond dispute.[4] In fact, analyzing David's rise to prominence G. E. Mendenhall writes: "The glorification of Yahweh and the 'divine warrior' . . . has now given way to the glorification of a professional warrior for his superior ability to commit murder."[5] This is not totally unexpected, as Mendenhall correctly observes (and as current political events in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere verify), since it is impossible for a political monopoly of force to maintain even the thinnest veneer of unity and stability without a central bureaucractic organization.

Contrary to Rosenbloom and others, we argue here that the development of the Israelite monarchy was a highly sophisticated process involving several interrelated factors—a complex process in which the exercise of sheer brute force is one but not the sole and not necessarily even the most important factor.

The record of the early Israelite monarchy in the books of Samuel and Kings reveals that David not only understood the need for the centralization of the bureaucratic organization but also effectively consolidated his power throughout Israel (whether by imitation or personal ingenuity) by means of a careful application of basic management techniques commonly recognized in secular and sacral circles as essential components of efficient and successful administration.[6]

These basic administrative techniques are the management functions of planning, organizing, directing and controlling.[7] We grant that extreme caution must be used whenever modern Western social-science categories are superimposed on ancient Near Eastern historical sources. Nevertheless the demonstration of these management principles within the confines of the Israelite monarchy enables one to visualize not only the administrative strategy operative during the reign of David (and his successors) but also to portray most vividly the various and complex phases comprising the process that ultimately led to the consolidation of power in the Israelite empire. Consequently this

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[3]Rosenbloom, "Social Science" 437–444.

[4]David's skill and courage as a warrior were unparalleled in ancient Israel as the citations of the "hero-chant" attest (1 Sam 18:7; 21:11; 29:5). Even on his deathbed David counsels Solomon on the political expediency of exterminating Joab and Shimei (1 Kgs 2:5–6, 8–9; cf. 2 Sam 23:6–7).

[5]G. E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy," *Int* 29/2 (1975) 155–170.

[6]It is not within the scope of this article to determine the source of the Israelite administrative model. Mendenhall, "Monarchy" 159–161, and J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 201, argue that David patterned his bureaucracy after Egyptian models. D. B. Redford, "Studies in Relations between Palestine and Egypt during the First Millennium B.C.: I. The Taxation System of Solomon," in *Studies on the Ancient Palestinian World* (ed. J. W. Wevers and D. B. Redford; Toronto, 1972), contends that the parallels are to be found in the Canaanite city-state administrative systems. One thing is certain: The Israelite administrative system was borrowed from existing foreign management models.

[7]H. Sisk, *Principles of Management* (Cincinnati: Southwestern, 1969).

prompts some very interesting observations about the relationship between the religion of the early Israelite monarchy and the politics of that monarchy.

1. *Planning*. This entails determining objectives and then formulating strategies aimed at accomplishing them. Of the many examples available in the accounts of David's reign over Israel the following are certainly representative of the planning function.

One of David's prime objectives was the unification of diverse and politically divided population groups. David's plan for countering this problem was the appropriation of the Jebusite city of Jerusalem for a capital. No doubt the city was a neutral site in regard to the Israel/Judah or Saul/David controversy. It is also true that David captured the city with his own troops, and thus Jerusalem could be called his city—the city of David (2 Sam 5:6–10). But more importantly, in securing Jerusalem David acquired the political and administrative machinery necessary for the effective organization of an ever-expanding and increasingly complex kingdom. The urban center of Jerusalem furnished David with the skilled specialists necessary for the initiation and maintenance of his administrative bureaucracy. In this way David began the process that, at least superficially, unified the Israelite population with the indigenous Canaanite populations. This process eventually culminated in the complete religious and political syncretism and eventual paganization of the Israelite kingdom under Solomon.[8]

Closely connected with the appropriation of the capital city is the return of the ark of God to Jerusalem (6:1–19). This event (which serves as the focal point of 1 Chronicles) not only contributed to the unification of the Israelite and Canaanite populations but also served to diminish the utility of the twelve-tribe system, a potential rival to the monarchy. The ark's return actually signaled the formal demise of the ancient tribal federation because it was the shrine in Shiloh that had served as the glue for the fragmented Israelite tribes (cf. Josh 18:1–10; 22:9–12; Judg 21:12–21; 1 Sam 1:3–9; 3:21; 4:4–12). The complete disintegration of the twelve-tribe system was achieved for a time when Solomon established his twelve administrative districts (1 Kgs 4:7–19), but the system resurfaced at the succession of Rehoboam (12:1–17).

A final example of the planning function is David's attention to the preparations for the building of the temple of Yahweh. According to the OT narratives David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite for the express purpose of offering burnt sacrifices to stay the plague of Yahweh against Israel (2 Sam 24:18–25). The later history informs us that this site became the temple precinct of Solomon (1 Chr 21:28–22:1). Moreover, we are told that David himself desired to build the temple (2 Sam 7:1–17; 2 Kgs 5:2–6). Although David's plans were thwarted, the Chronicler recounts the preparations made by David in anticipation of Solomon's achievement (1 Chr 22:2–16).

2. *Organization*. This, simply stated, is the ability to order a large number of complex functions designed to execute given plans. Reference has already

[8]Cf. Mendenhall, "Monarchy" 160–170.

been made to the fact that David greatly facilitated his organizing capabilities when he secured the administrative machinery of Jerusalem. In addition, much of David's success can be attributed to the systematization of numerous and intricate socio-economic, military and religious factors through the delegation of authority and responsibility. Two examples are particularly germane.

First, the effectiveness of David's military forces in warfare was due in part to the organization structure imposed on the troops. David appointed a commander-in-chief over all the armies. Next, three men were each placed in charge of a different third of the forces. Under these generals were captains for every hundred men (2 Sam 18:1–5; cf. Exod 18:24–27). Though doubtless an imitation of contemporary military practice in Syro-Palestine and Egypt, this system of organization correlates well with what today is known as the line authority system of management.[9]

Second, David's departmentalized staff system for the administration of the internal affairs of the kingdom is further evidence of the importance of organization in the process of federating power. Again, David's staff system probably mirrored the system existing in Jebusite Jerusalem before the capture of the city. Yet this organizational system is readily comparable to the present-day staff authority system of management.[10]

Included within the "executive circle" were Joab, commander-in-chief of all the armies; Benaiah, overseer of the Cherethites and Pelethites; Adoram, responsible for the corvee; Jehoshaphat the recorder; Sheva the secretary; Zadok and Abiathar, the priests; and Ira, David's priest (2 Sam 20:23–26). To this list we can probably add Nathan the prophet (1 Kgs 1:7–8), Abishai (2 Sam 18:2; cf. 23:18–19), Ittai the Gittite (18:2) and David's sons (8:18). Although sufficient for the initial phases of the monarchy, David's organizational bureaucracy was rudimentary in comparison to the retinue of professional bureaucrats needed by Solomon for the administration of his kingdom (cf. 1 Kgs 4:1–28).

3. *Direction.* This is defined as the ability to provide a coherent and meaningful sense of purpose to the given organization. Although the maintenance of any power structure requires responsible and capable subordinates, it is the chief executive officer—in this case the Israelite king—who must provide dynamic leadership, direction and motivation.

The OT preserves numerous illustrations of David as a leader and motivator of men, but curiously enough almost all of these examples are found in military contexts (cf. 1 Sam 30:1–20; 2 Sam 8:1–13; 18:1–3). Despite the notable exception of David's role in the procession installing the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem (6:12–19), there seems to be good reason to doubt David's ability to provide effective leadership in nonmilitary situations. Rather, the David portrayed in the history of Samuel and Kings is a man constantly manipulated by others, often Joab (note especially 2 Sam 14:19–20, where it is recounted that "Joab did this to change the course of affairs"), and by Nathan and Bathsheba on one very crucial occasion (1 Kgs 1:11–31). David himself recognized

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[9]Sisk, *Principles* 296.

[10]Ibid., p. 300.

such manipulation and consigned it to his own weakness (2 Sam 3:39).

Furthermore, there appears to be some justification for characterizing David's steering of the "wheels of government" as indecisive or even fickle. Notice for example David's treatment of the wise woman of Tekoa (14:4–11). Twice he diplomatically (and noncommittally) brushes off her request for royal intervention on behalf of her condemned son, but when reminded of his special relationship with Yahweh he turns about and grants the son a reprieve. Again, mention should be made here of David's vacillation in regard to the Mephibosheth-Ziba affair (16:4; 19:24–30). Perhaps the best illustration of David's inability to provide a coherent and meaningful sense of purpose to the royal bureaucracy is found in 19:1–7. When David's grief over the death of the rebellious Absalom began (understandably) to confound and demoralize his political organization, it was Joab who upbraided the king and forced him to set an example by instilling the court personnel with a renewed sense of purpose and worth (19:7–8).

David's inability to provide decisive leadership in nonmilitary circumstances may well be related to his own doubts about the direction in which the royal government should be moving. As a Yahwist in a non-Yahwistic role he was no doubt pulled in opposite, even antithetical directions (cf. Yahweh's paradigm for kingship in Deut 17:14–20). By the same token this was true of Saul, but the bifurcated stress literally drove him insane. David escaped insanity but not the personal tragedy and public disgrace that accompanied his own inability to direct even the affairs of the royal household (cf. 1 Kgs 1:6). Individual Israelite kings came and went, but the tension peculiar to this office remained, surfacing especially on those occasions when questions of royal accession were raised (note the polarization of factions in 1 Kgs 1:1–48; 12:1–11; 2 Kgs 11:1–20).

4. *Control.* This may be understood as the ability to insure organizational performance as directed in order to achieve the basic objectives as defined. Whereas most recent scholarship views the entire process of consolidation and perpetuation of political power as the indiscriminate wielding of absolute authority or the monopoly of force, this outline makes it clear that the exercise of sheer brute force is but one part of the control function of management. Indeed, these arguments may be considered to constitute only the negative aspect of the control principle—that is, punishment. Conversely, the positive aspect of control is reward. Reward and punishment are of course in turn related to the question of ultimate power: Who has the power to deliver rewards and inflict punishment? Examples of rewards and punishments used as methods of control abound in the historical record of the developing Israelite monarchy. For the former we may cite David's practice of sharing booty (1 Sam 30:21–25)—ancient "profit sharing." The practice of permitting certain individuals to "eat at the king's table" was another reward for loyalty and service to the monarch (2 Sam 9:8; 1 Kgs 2:7; 4:27). For the latter, note how on three different occasions David punished those who had compromised his integrity by engaging in anti-Saulide activities (2 Sam 1:1–16; 3:31–37; 4:5–12).[11] Other

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[11]Note how David intended to exact punishment against Nabal for failing to graciously respond to the protection David's band offered Nabal's shepherds (1 Sam 25:10–22).

dimensions of the control function include the information gathering of spies (17:15–22), propaganda (15:1–6), and the ever-present threat of military retaliation (the vehicle for this was the strategic network of garrisons or outposts established by David throughout the empire; 8:6, 14). David's census was another attempt to exercise control, one that was ill-advised and that certainly must have drawn the wrath of many Israelite peasants as well as that of Yahweh (2 Sam 24:1–17; 1 Chr 21:1–17).[12]

One interesting aspect of this entire management functions model is that it is relatively value-free. Any questions of value enter only initially when objectives are determined. The control function presupposes no values, only a given direction. The direction function similarly presupposes no values, only a given organization. Likewise the organizational function presupposes no values, only the given plans. Hence, since values are not part of the presuppositional composition of this management functions model, it then becomes understandable how Canaanite and Jebusite "bureaucrats" can adequately administer the affairs of the Israelite state. It is even possible for them to affect the course of political events by rendering counsel and advice to Yahweh's anointed.

One value, however, does appear to be implicit in this management functions model: the seemingly unquestioned value of exercising political authority concerning the application of the above techniques, regardless of the attendant ramifications. The early Israelites designated groups whose existence did depend upon such political authority and human management as *gôy* or *gôyîm* ("a nation" or "nations").[13] Apparently early Israel understood its existence to be independent of such authority and management (cf. Num 23:7–9), and the prophet Samuel clearly enunciated Israel's folly in desiring to be "like all the *gôyîm*" (1 Sam 8:19–20; cf. Deut 17:14–20). It is no accident that this notion resurfaces in the teachings of Jesus' parables on the nature of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt 13:24–51; 25:1–30).

In light of this pervasive Hebrew tradition, the question then becomes whether the exercise of this absolute political authority is somehow reconcilable with the rule of Yahweh.[14] It may well have been the recognition of the irreconcilable natures of the rule of Yahweh and the rule of men that added to

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[12]The history of the census in the ancient Near East is filled with references to popular discontent, a fact that Joab and the commanders of the army were no doubt well aware of. E. A. Speiser, "Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel," *BASOR* 149 (1958) 17–25, notes that recording names and numbers was tantamount to exercising control. The account of Yahweh's anger over the census probably stems from the theological notion that Yahweh alone exercised control over Israel and that David's census hence constituted an infringement upon Yahweh's sovereignty.

[13]Cf. G. J. Botterweck and R. E. Clements, "*Gôy*," *TDOT* 2 (1975) 426–433. According to E. J. Hamlin, the Akkadian cognate *gāwum* clearly "stresses political and social rather than kinship bonds"; *IDB*, 3. 515–523.

[14]Cf. 1 Sam 8:6–18, where the question of reconciling political management functions with the rule of God is raised in connection with the Israelite demand for a king. For a stimulating discussion of this very question as it relates to Biblical thought see G. E. Mendenhall, "The Conflict Between Value Systems and Social Control," in *Unity and Diversity* (ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975) 169–180.

Saul's mental deterioration. Similarly it may account for David's limited effectiveness as the civilian director of Israel's political affairs.[15]

A second interesting facet elucidated by the management functions model is the role loyalty plays in the development of the early Israelite monarchy. Loyalty is defined here as devotion to certain abstract principles, to concrete objectives, or even to particular persons (whenever these principles and objectives are bonded with the innate human qualities providing the substance for meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships). In this regard it completely bypasses the four management functions of planning, organization, direction and control. That it is not related to the promise of reward or the threat of punishment (i.e., social control) is demonstrated most clearly in the Biblical text: David is loyal to Saul, and Jonathan to David, despite Saul's expressed intention to kill David as the rival to Jonathan as heir (1 Sam 20:1–24); Ittai the Gittite (2 Sam 15:19–22) and Barzillai the Gileadite (17:27–29; 19:31–40; 1 Kgs 2:7) remained loyal to David precisely when David was at his weakest as king; and Joab exhibits unswerving loyalty to David throughout the course of his reign (cf. 2 Sam 12:26–28). That loyalty is related to agreement or disagreement with objectives and principles is underscored by the political sentiments narrated in the account of the succession to David's throne (1 Kgs 1:38–53). In this scenario we see the traditionalists siding with Adonijah and the modernists (adapting current socio-political terminology) siding with Solomon.

While loyalty may be an added benefit in any management situation it is not mandatory or even necessary, particularly in those cases where the control function is successfully exercised. In fact, whenever loyalty transcended politics and personalities in ancient Israel it proved to be bothersome, if not threatening, to the monarchy. Observe in this context several of those occasions when loyalty to Yahweh or David actually limited the king's ability to control certain situations—for example, Uriah's refusal to sleep with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:11), Nathan's bold reprimand of David's adultery (12:7–12), and perhaps his decisive counsel against David's building of the temple (7:4–17). David's own loyalty to Yahweh proved to be self-limiting on a number of occasions: It led him into the parabolic traps set by Nathan (12:1–6) and by the wise woman of Tekoa (14:4–11), it placed in him a certain degree of passive resignation in the face of Absalom's coup (15:24–26), and earlier in his career it actually restrained him from taking the ruthless and expedient course to political power by assassinating Saul (1 Sam 26:1–12).

While one must acknowledge the role of formal religion in effecting social control (i.e., God or the gods bestowing sanctity upon the political order), the management functions perspective employed here has proven useful by drawing out instead the role that functional Yahwistic religion played in limiting the forces of social control. During the reign of Solomon the formalities of religion came to be stressed (in the temple cult), and the forces of social control

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[15] A case in point during the reign of Saul is his desperate attempt to seek counsel from Samuel via the medium in Endor (1 Sam 28:7–16). In regard to David, the significance of Absalom's revolt should not be minimized in this context. Those who joined Absalom apparently did so in the belief that he could do a better job of managing the kingdom than could his father.

and effective management ruled supreme. Yet despite this effective manage-
ment within the monarchy, there were still those "agents of loyalty" that con-
tinued to thwart the best-laid plans (2 Sam 11:6–21), undo the most sophisti-
cated organizations (1 Kgs 12:1–24), lead astray all counsel and direction (2
Sam 17:1–14), and render events totally out of human control (15:24–37).

The Hebrew prophets of course knew this, and they attributed it to Yahweh
acting in history (and therein probably lies the continuity of functional Yah-
wistic religion; cf. Amos 3:7–15; Mic 6:6–16). They insisted that moderniza-
tion—that is, the monarchy's adoption of the structures and values of the more
advanced peoples they conquered—would not result in the permanent estab-
lishment of Israel but would ironically hasten the demise of the Israelite state
(cf. Hos 6:4–11; Amos 5:11–15). The state, however, like so many organizations
that require human management in order to survive, was unwilling to ac-
knowledge and rectify the human damage done in its pursuit of self-preser-
vation (cf. Isa 1:10–24). And it was not willing to trace the negative repercus-
sions of that damage too far into the future. To do so would be to question the
value of exercising the prerogatives of political power (or management func-
tions), thereby challenging the very right of the state (or organization) to exist
(cf. Jer 1:9–10). This is one reason why the operational view of the future
maintained within most organizations—whether commercial, political, or re-
ligious—must be relatively shortsighted.[16]

The only response that a dispassionate bureaucrat or organizational man-
ager can give to someone who raises the issue of human damage, foresees the
negative consequences, and raises the question of absolute values is not unlike
the response Hezekiah gave Isaiah when informed of the impending destruction
of Jerusalem: "So what, as long as there will be peace and security in my days"
(2 Kgs 20:19).

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[16]The Israelite monarchy also resorted to the deliberate distortion of reality so as to keep "the public"
unaware of the self-destructive nature of its administrative policies. Here Jeremiah condemns the
"lying pen" of the scribe (8:8), while both he and Ezekiel denounce the false prophets who prophesy
peace and prosperity (in the face of impending judgment and total destruction and exile) for a bribe
(Jer 5:31; 14:14; 23:16; Ezek 13:2–16; cf. Hos 9:7; Mic 3:5).