



Covenantal Rights: A Study in Jewish Political Theory (New Forum Books)

David Novak

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Covenantal Rights is a groundbreaking work of political theory: a comprehensive, philosophically sophisticated attempt to bring insights from the Jewish political tradition into current political and legal debates about rights and to bring rights discourse more fully into Jewish thought. David Novak pursues these aims by presenting a theory of rights founded on the covenant between God and the Jewish people as that covenant is constituted by Scripture and the rabbinic tradition. In doing so, he presents a powerful challenge to prevailing liberal and conservative positions on rights and duties and opens a new chapter in contemporary Jewish political thinking.

For Novak, "covenantal rights" are rooted in God's primary rights as creator of the universe and as the elector of a particular community whose members relate to this God as their sovereign. The subsequent rights of individuals and communities flow from God's covenantal promises, which function as irrevocable entitlements. This presents a sharp contrast to the liberal tradition, in which rights flow above all from individuals. It also challenges the conservative idea that duties can take precedence over rights, since Novak argues that there are no covenantal duties that are not backed by correlative rights. Novak explains carefully and clearly how this theory of covenantal rights fits into Jewish tradition and applies to the relationships among God, the covenanted community, and individuals. This work is a profound and provocative contribution to contemporary religious and political theory.

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