

《圣经》与美国神话

Bible and American Myths

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[英文提要]

The author examines the origin of American myth, its influence and manifestations in religion, politics, and other aspects of culture from the 17th century to the late 20th century. He also discusses the critique of American myth made by North American writers in the late 19th century and after World War II.

American myth largely originates from the apocalyptic vision of 17th century Puritan theology expressed in the New World in utopian and millennial terms. The last day of time was no longer seen as the end of all temporal kingdoms but rather as “Good Tidings of Great Joy” of a worldly “New Jerusalem”—none other than the New England which was pushing out its frontiers westward. American divines applied biblical promises about the coming millennium to America, as if New England had become a heavenly kingdom in the here and now. So effectively did Puritans accomplish their mythic vision that they provided the basis for what we have come to regard as the myth of America. However, as late as the second half of the 19th century, many American writers began to vigorously resist the Puritan mythic consciousness.

In the 20th century, the prominent versions of the old Puritan

myth persist at the political rather than religious and literary levels. In American politics of the 20th century, there exists the incentive to ground complex agendas in simple myths and symbols. Speechwriters make calculated cleavage between mythic biblical language and the actual content of the Bible in order to have political advantages. And what televangelists preach are mostly a foundational confusion of God and Mammon.

Writers after World War II criticize severely the lack of correspondence between the “biblical” myth of America and the Bible. For example, Margaret Atwood attacked false biblicism and pointed out that it might lead to tyranny and stifle religious liberty. And the recent southern writers contributed shrewdly to a contemporary but biblically informed critique of false cultural biblicism.

在地球上美国的土地上,上帝为夏娃和她的子孙提供了一切……他给予他们以光荣的拯救,使他们得以摆脱暴政和压迫……他带领他们走向迦南的福地,那是他赐予他们、并让他们永远继承的地方。

塞缪尔·舍伍德(1776)

我们美国人是特殊的的人,是上帝的选民——是这个时代的以色列人。

赫尔曼·梅尔维尔(1849)

美国是当今的应许之地。

伊丽莎白·克莱尔·普罗菲特(1993)