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The Prophets and Political and Social Problems

Any one that even casually reads the prophetic books of the Old Testament will see at once that the prophets took a very active interest in the social problems of their day and pointed out a way to their solution. The question is whether what they say on these problems still applies to conditions in the twentieth century, 2,500 and more years later than these prophets lived. A categorical denial of the applicability of Old Testament prophecy to our present-day conditions would come into conflict with such clear Scripture-passages as Rom. 15:4 and 2 Tim. 3:16. On the other hand, an interpretation which overlooks the restrictions which God Himself has placed upon an unqualified, unlimited application of these Old Testament prophetic utterances to modern times would be just as wide of the mark.

The ability to teach, which is one of the chief requisites of a Christian preacher, 1 Tim. 3:2, demands that he be able rightly to divide the Word of Truth, 2 Tim. 2:15. The Old Testament is the Word of Truth, the inspired Word of God, and every commandment given to Israel had to be obeyed, and every promise given to Israel was sure to be fulfilled. Yet this Word of Truth must be "rightly divided" by the New Testament pastor. The pastor must be able to judge whether a given command or promise still applies in our day. He must be able to distinguish whether a prophetic message was intended for the Old Testament times only or for a particular individual only or whether it expresses a general truth applicable at all times and under all conditions. The specific circumstances connected with each prophetic proclamation or act or mode of procedure must be carefully weighed and considered in order to ascertain whether God wanted to teach a lesson for all times or whether He passed judgment on, or had a special message for, or gave advice concerning, a very specific

case; what in this specific prophecy or prophetic act may be applied to another case, because it expressed a general principle; what is applicable only to that specific case happening at that particular time and under its own peculiar circumstances. It will be readily conceded, *e. g.*, that we have no authority to go to the Red Sea and expect the waters to part at the lifting up of a rod in our hands, merely because the inspired record tells us that Moses by divine command separated the waters of the Red Sea in this manner and enabled the Israelites to cross it dry-shod. Circumstances alter cases. In this case the circumstance that we have no such command and no such promise presents a situation altogether different from that which Moses encountered when leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

There are in particular six points which a pastor must keep in mind as he studies the prophets, their proclamations, their lives, and their deeds for the purpose of obtaining light from them on the difficult problems confronting him with respect to social conditions of our day.

1. The prophets were the inspired spokesmen of God.
2. The prophets were called by the Lord immediately and often given special messages or duties to perform.
3. The prophets offered no plans of their own for social and other reforms.
4. The messages of the prophets were directed chiefly to God's own people in the Old Testament, having a theocratic form of government.
5. The prophets preached the Word of God without addition or diminution.
6. The prophets were loyal to their Lord, doing their duty without fear or favor.

While Points 1—4 are largely negative, calling attention to some of the many current misrepresentations of the prophetic office and misapplications of their mission and message, Points 5 and 6 direct attention chiefly to the positive lessons to be learned from a study of the lives and writings of these men of God.

I

The Old Testament prophets of the Lord were the inspired spokesmen of the Lord God.

Modern critics regard the prophets of the Old Testament not as the divinely appointed messengers, proclaiming no more and no less than the oracles of the Lord, but as far-seeing, sagacious statesmen, fervent patriots, undaunted social reformers, who saw the wrongs of society, fought them without fear or favor, and

with keen insight into the underlying causes sought to find ways and means to remedy these evils. The theories of these critics present the Old Testament prophets as differing, if at all, only in degree, not in kind from the heathen prophets, philosophers, and moral reformers. One glance at the writings of the prophets ought to convince every reader that the Old Testament prophets lay claim to a far more exalted mission. When Amos was told by Amaziah no longer to prophesy at Bethel, Amos answered: "The Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go prophesy unto My people Israel," Amos 7:15. Similar expressions, such as "The Lord hath spoken"; "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel," are found scattered throughout the books of the prophets times almost without number.

The Old Testament prophecies also carry the irrefutable proof of their divine origin in their fulfilment. No human penetration could have foretold the fate which was in store for Zedekiah, the king of Israel, as did the two prophets speaking more than 500 miles apart, Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in distant Babylon, Jer. 32:4, 5; Ezek. 12:13. Both were right, because both spoke by inspiration of the Lord, the Ruler of the destinies of man, Jer. 52:9-11. Mere political farsightedness could never have surmised that the Babylonian Captivity would last exactly seventy years, Jer. 25:11. The keenest statesmanship was unable to foretell more than a hundred years before the actual event that a king named Cyrus would issue a decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt and the foundations of the Temple be laid, Is. 44:28—45:7. Need we add the Messianic prophecies? Such prophecies (which could easily be multiplied) prove that the Old Testament prophets were indeed spokesmen of God, of Him who alone can foretell the future because to Him alone are known all His works from the beginning of the world, Acts 15:18.

Prophecy in the Old Testament was not merely an offspring of "a peculiar form of mystical apprehension of the divine, the merging of self in the Godhead and a mysterious absorption therein," which was "wide-spread through the Oriental hither-Asiatic world of antiquity as far as Greece," where "we see it in the great tragedians and in men like Plato," as Kittel informs us. (*The Religion of the People of Israel*, pp. 124, 125.) Nor was it "the power of forming an ideal, of seeing and describing a thing in the fulfilment of all the promise that is in it," combined with "two other powers of inward vision, . . . insight and intuition, insight into human character, intuition of divine principles, clear knowledge of what man is and how God will act," as George Adam Smith would have us believe. (*Expositor's Bible*, Vol. III, Isaiah,

p. 622.) They were indeed what they claimed to be, the spokesmen, the mouthpieces, of the Lord God of hosts.

Here, then, there is an essential difference between the prophet of the Old Testament and a preacher of today. No preacher can lay claim to inspiration in the sense in which the Old Testament prophets of the Lord were inspired. What the Old Testament prophet spoke in his official capacity was the oracle of the omniscient, all-wise, and omnipotent Ruler of the universe. What the preacher says, must be based on the Word of God as revealed in Scripture, and for such utterances, advices, reprimands, etc., he can and must claim divine authority so long as he speaks the Word of God, the message of the Bible. In all matters not revealed in Scripture the preacher must (always, of course, in the light of the Word of God) base his judgment, his advice, etc., on his own observation and that of others who have given time and thought to such matters, both himself and these authorities being fallible men, liable to make mistakes, obliged to change their views and opinions. To claim in any of the matters on which the Bible has not passed judgment for any utterance or plan proposed a divine obligation or to doubt the Christianity of any one who will not agree with his propositions nor stand ready to carry them out to the letter, will prove nothing more than the conceit of such a person. The prophets of the Lord could demand immediate and absolute obedience to their word, for the Lord spoke by them. The preacher of our times can not, unless he can prove that the Word of Scripture demands that his plan be carried out in every detail. Where God has not revealed His will, human wisdom, human reason, human justice, human charity and good will must endeavor to find a solution of the many vexing problems, a remedy for the many evils of the day best adapted to the existing conditions and circumstances, and every one concerned must be willing to grant to others at least a measure of that wisdom and of that understanding of the problems of our day which he claims for himself.

In the Old Testament times the prophets of the Lord could foretell the fate of their nation in so detailed a manner because through them the omniscient Ruler of the world spoke. Amos tells his audience: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets to His servants, the prophets," Amos 3:7. We have no such promise for our times. It is impossible for any man to foretell whether a nation or an individual will be visited by divine judgment in this world and this time or whether their punishment will be delayed until the judgment of that Great Day. We have neither stood in the counsel of the Almighty, nor has He revealed to us what, *e. g.*, the outcome of the present war will be. We cannot tell whether any one or all of the Western European

nations or Western civilization will be utterly destroyed, or whether the Eastern countries and their civilization will suffer a setback. Nor can we foretell whether God may not grant to any one or to all of the nations and people engaged in the bitter struggle another day of grace, another opportunity to turn to their God and Savior. God has not commanded any one of the nations to submit to the demands of the enemy, as He demanded the unconditional surrender of the Jews to king Nebuchadnezzar, Jer. 25:1-14; 34:1-22. Nor has God told any one of these nations to resist to the utmost, as Hezekiah was charged to stand his ground against Sennacherib, Is. 37. There is no divine command that the neutral nations remain neutral nor that they come to the assistance of one or the other nations at war. All these problems must be settled by reason and common sense. The demand that Christianity obligates any one nation to come to the assistance of one or the other of the contestants, the cry that is again being raised in some circles: "God wills it"; "Dieu le veut," bespeaks both presumption and folly. Aside from the consideration that Christianity is not defended with the sword, that demand and that cry imply that he who raises it has stood in the council chamber of God, that he is, like the prophets of the Lord, an inspired messenger; for nowhere in His written Word has the Lord revealed to us just what is His will with reference to participation or non-participation in this present warfare, just what are His purposes, and what He has decreed as the outcome of the gigantic struggle.

II

Another point which must not be overlooked in an effort to establish the proper relation of the prophets to our modern social problems is the fact that the prophets of the Lord were without exception called into this office directly (*immediate*) by the Lord. Nothing is farther from the truth than the statement, so frequently found in the writings of modern critics on this subject, that the prophets of Israel only believed themselves to be the spokesmen of God, that they followed an inner impulse to preach and proclaim the word and will of God. A prophet who merely felt that God had called him was not acknowledged by the Lord as His messenger, but very distinctly disowned and repudiated by Him. "I have not sent these prophets; yet they ran. I have not spoken to them; yet they prophesied. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith," Jer. 23:21, 31. Not a single prophet of the Lord took this office upon himself on his own initiative. A prophet of God and a prophet of one's own choice are contradictory terms. That impulse came not from within but from without, from God the

Lord Himself, and quite frequently without the inclination and contrary to the expectation of the prophet. When Moses wanted to become the savior of his people before the Lord's time had arrived, his effort was a failure, and he had to flee. When God was ready to send him, Moses was altogether unwilling until the Lord proved to be stronger than he and prevailed, as He did centuries later when Jeremiah, Jer. 20:7, endeavored to advance his extreme youth as an argument why he ought not to be sent as the Lord's prophet, Jer. 1:6. Jonah tried to run away from the Lord. Amos would have been perfectly content to remain a herdsman, Amos 7:14, 15. And even Isaiah expressed his willingness to be the Lord's messenger only after the Holy One had asked, Who will go for us? Is. 6:8.

A prophet could not simply resign from his office at his own pleasure. A prophet once called by the Lord had to remain in His service until it pleased the Master to release His servant from his obligation. Elijah, wearied and tired of his office and longing for his death, was told that the Lord had more work for him to do, and Elijah went and did as the Lord ordered him. Jeremiah, who bitterly complained to the Lord and went so far as to charge Him with having been unto him as a liar, was rebuked by the Lord but not dismissed from his office, Jer. 15:18-21.

The Lord did not only directly call these men into His service; He assigned to each one a particular sphere of activities and specific duties. The prophets fully realized the true nature of their peculiar relation to God. They were fully aware that the Lord did not at all times and under all circumstances use them as His spokesmen. For that reason they were extremely careful not to claim any divine authority for their own private views, or to palm off their personal opinion as the revealed will of God. They knew that there was an essential difference between their own conclusions and convictions—be they ever so correct and ever so fully in conformity with God's written Word—and the oracles of God given to them by direct revelation and inspiration. When Elisha was summoned by Jehoshaphat in order to tell the king God's will, he did not give an answer at once, nor did he advance his own personal view. Jehoshaphat had not asked for that. He wanted to hear the Lord's word. Elisha asked for a minstrel and while the minstrel played the prophet realized that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him, and then, and then only, he spoke. He had received an oracle which on the face of it seemed foolish, irrational. Yet it was God's word, and therefore the prophet, as God's spokesman, announced what God wanted him to tell the king. 2 Kings 3:11-25. When the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem petitioned Jeremiah to ask the Lord whether they

should go to Egypt, he promised to do that. Patiently he waited ten days until the word of the Lord finally came to him, Jer. 42:7. Ezekiel tells us that, while the elders of Israel sat before him, the hand of the Lord fell there upon him, Ezek. 8:1, the word of the Lord came upon him, Ezek. 14:2; 20:2. The prophets knew exactly when they were actuated by the Spirit and when they were voicing their own opinions. Not once did they insist that their own personal advice in matters pertaining to public worship, to civic and social legislation, be followed. On the contrary, they were ready to retract their personal advice as soon as the Lord revealed to them that He had different plans. Cf. 2 Sam. 7:1-17. And even though the message they were to proclaim to their people was altogether against their personal inclination, though it caused their hearts to cry out in anguish and their eyes to weep bitter tears (Jonah 4:4-11; 2 Kings 8:10-13; Jer. 8:21 to 9:1; 14:1 to 15:21), they nevertheless changed not a word; they spoke just what they were told to speak. They knew that God had called them, had placed them into their office to be spokesmen of the Lord, and they were ever that, nothing more, nothing less, the mouthpieces of Jehovah.

Here again there is a difference between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament preacher and pastor. Much as these two offices have in common, there are essential points in which they differ. A Christian pastor has not the same office nor always the same message nor always the same sphere of activity as the prophet of Israel. Not the same office, for the Christian pastor is not an inspired spokesman of God, nor is he directly called. Not always the same message, for it is not God's will that the Christian pastor always proclaim and do all that the prophets of the Old Testament preached and performed. Even in the Old Testament not all the prophets of the Lord had the same sphere of activities, nor were they assigned the same duties. Amos was sent to the Northern Kingdom, Jonah to distant Nineveh. Jonah fled from the Lord. That was rank disobedience; yet if he had gone to the Northern Kingdom and preached repentance there as fervently and zealously as Amos, and if Amos instead of going to the Northern Kingdom had traveled to far-off Nineveh and preached willingly what Jonah had done only reluctantly, both would have been guilty of sinful disobedience, both would have been fugitives from the Lord. They would not have been doing what the Lord had commanded but setting their own will against that of their Master. Repentant Jonah again received the command "Arise, go to Nineveh, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." And to Nineveh penitent Jonah went and preached.

A Christian pastor will not use his office as a means of carry-

ing out his own pet plans and schemes of reform. He will not even desire to be what the Lord does not want him to be, a prophet like those sent to Israel. That would be fleeing from the Lord and pursuing his own course. All his seeming zeal and fervor would be disobedience rather than conscientious fulfillment of the Lord's will. A Christian pastor must remember that only then will he resemble the faithful prophets of the Old Testament if like them he will be constantly aware that the Lord has called him into his work and that the Lord wants him to do his work within that sphere into which He has called him. The faithful pastor's first concern is, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? For him, also as a pastor, to live is Christ, and Christ's will and word are supreme.

The Christian pastor has not always the same duties as those assigned to the prophets of the Old Testament. Samuel was told to anoint David during the lifetime of Saul, 1 Sam. 6:1-13, and Elisha received the divine command to anoint Hazael king over Syria and Jehu king over Israel, although the thrones of Syria and of the Northern Kingdom both were still occupied. These prophets were sent of God to inaugurate a political change, a change of dynasty in these kingdoms. No Christian pastor has been divinely authorized to demand such a change in the existing government of any nation, much less to take any steps toward the removal of any incumbent of a civic office, still less actually to place any one into political authority. The pastor's duty with reference to the existing government, as demanded by the call of God extended to him, is clearly and definitely stated by the Lord Himself when He says: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates," Tit. 3:1. Far from making his pulpit the starting-point of political agitation against his government, the pastor must teach his people to obey, as he himself is under divine obligation to fulfil the will of the Lord, Rom. 13:1-7. If a pastor becomes guilty of political intrigue, of inciting his people to rebellion and revolution, he cannot base this action upon the example of Samuel and Elijah; for they were obedient to the will of the Lord as revealed to them by the Lord, while he would be guilty of disobedience to the will of the Lord as revealed to him in Holy Writ. Jeremiah was told: "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant," Jer. 1:10. Christian pastors have no such divine command. They are told: "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood," Acts 20:28. A Christian pastor is not divinely called to be

the political adviser of any civic officer or political party. Nor is a Christian pastor called as the spiritual adviser of all those holding political or civic offices. As a pastor he has been assigned a very definite sphere of activity, that congregation through which the Lord has called him as the spiritual adviser of that particular flock. If a governmental official is a member of his flock, the pastor of course has not only the privilege but the duty and obligation to teach him whatever the Word of God wants him to know concerning the duties of those that hold an office in the commonwealth. Where, on the other hand, the Word of God is silent, the pastor in his official capacity must be as silent as God's Word is. Under no circumstance may he obtrude his own political views, his own scheme of a needed reform, upon his congregation or any individual member of it. Much less may he demand obedience for conscience' sake to his advice in matters purely civic. God, we repeat it, has not called the Christian pastor into the holy ministry for this purpose. As he is the ambassador of Christ, his message is to be Christ, and He crucified, and his speech and his preaching is not to be in enticing words of man's wisdom, not in reasonable arguments pro or con any civic reform, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that the faith and the life of his hearers will not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, 1 Cor. 2:4, 5.

Even the prophets of the Old Testament did not try to carry out any social reform of their own, nor did they have any social program of their own to offer to their nation.

III

Unbelieving critics regard the Old Testament prophets as founders of a new social order, based on a higher, nobler conception of religion gained by these men of God. Koenig in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* quotes Marti as writing: "It is in fact an entirely new religion that begins with Amos, Hosea, etc. In contrast to the ancient religion that seeks to coerce the deity by magical and mechanical means, it is an ethical and spiritual religion." Meinhold states that "gradually the conception of Jehovah is increasingly freed from pagan traits and ethicized," while Stade writes that "the prophets introduce to religion new thoughts and appoint new goals." Koenig, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Bewer states the same opinion when he writes: "A new epoch not only in literature but in religion began with the rise of the literary prophets; for they did not merely produce a new class of literature, but ushered in the greatest movement in the spiritual history of mankind." (Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 87.)

We understand, of course, why modern theologians have

arrived at conclusions like those listed above. Modern theology takes pride in calling itself scientific theology and in laying claim to an unbiased, purely scientific approach to the Bible. In reality modern theology is hopelessly caught in the meshes of the theory of evolution and applies this man-made theory to the Bible, the Word of God. Since evolution explains to the satisfaction of these people the various phenomena in the visible world, they cannot see any reason why evolution will not show the way to the correct solution of all the various problems in the history of religion, of the relation of God to man and man to God and his fellow-men. With this preconceived theory they approach the Bible, which to them is no more than the repository of the religious experiences of the prophets of Israel. Since their theory does not fit the facts as presented in the Bible, they feel compelled to alter these facts, to change their historical sequence, to deny the veracity and reliability of the records as we have them today, to regard as interpolations all passages which do not suit the particular form of evolution accepted by the critics. And they throw the blame for this hotchpotch manner in which the present records are said to have come down to us upon the shoulders of the various editors, or redactors, of the Old Testament writings, who arranged them as they saw fit, in accordance with their crude, unscientific views of the history of their religion. Modern scientific history of religion must recognize as one of its chief duties the reestablishment of the correct chronological sequence of these various prophetic utterances so "carelessly" thrown together in our present Bible. It must seek to ascertain, by a careful study of the history of Israel and the surrounding nations and by a careful comparison of the religion of Israel with that of its contemporaries, just which prophet was the first to proclaim a certain religious or ethical truth and in what manner later prophets, adding to, or diminishing, these truths, changing them by either spiritualizing or externalizing them, gradually shaped and modeled what may be called the religion of the prophetic age of Israel. Needless to say, such a procedure is not only unscientific; it is blasphemous, since it dares to deny the reliability of that Bible of which Christ says: "Scripture cannot be broken."

While there may be little danger in our circles of accepting these unfounded theories emanating from unbelief, a warning may not be out of place against adopting the terminology and phraseology of modern criticism merely because these terms and phrases seem to lend to our presentation the air of learning and scientific accuracy. Using the terms which are constantly employed by the Modernists and which on that account have acquired a very specific connotation and are intimately linked up with the modernistic

approach, will naturally expose us to the charge of siding with these enemies of the Bible. This is, however, not the greatest danger. These terms stand for something definitely anti-Biblical. Using them constantly, speaking the language of avowed opponents of verbal inspiration, expressing our thoughts in the terminology of unbelief, there is ever present the possibility of absorbing with the terms their sinister connotation, ever threatening the danger of adopting together with the phrases their vicious meaning, and of, unconsciously at first, gradually drifting away from the safe moorings of a Scriptural approach to these matters into the open, uncharted, treacherous sea of human opinions, unbiblical theories, anti-Scriptural speculations. For this reason it may serve a good purpose if we examine in the light of God's revelation some of the statements found in representative modernistic writings on the part the prophets of Israel took in shaping the religious, political, and social life of their nation. We shall find that, quite in opposition to the views of modern theologians, the prophets really had no social program of their own to carry out; that they merely emphasized and applied afresh to the ever-changing conditions the unalterable truths laid down by the Lord God of Israel in His covenant book, the Pentateuch, written by Moses, the man of God.

In telling of Amos's contribution to the religious thought of Israel, Bewer, to name just this one representative of religious evolutionism, writes: "The priests and the people" (of Amos's time) "believed that Yahweh's requirement was the cult and that He would be pleased with them if they fulfilled this. Amos insisted that God's sole requirement was social justice. God had never required any sacrificial cult from His people at all, only righteousness, nothing else!" (Bewer, *Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 91.) In proof of this statement Bewer refers to Amos 5:21-25. From premises such as these Bewer and other historians draw the conclusion that already these grand old prophets had laid down the pet principle of Modernism, "Not creeds, but deeds." Not insistence on dogmas and rituals, but social justice, mutual love, and good will, civic righteousness, broad-minded toleration of the opinions of other men, were the things that really counted in pure religion and undefiled.

The premises are wrong, and therefore the conclusions are without foundation. The Lord does not say that He hates feast-days and will not accept burnt offerings or regard peace-offerings. He adds one significant word, the little word "your"; I hate, I despise, your feast-days, your solemn assemblies, your meat-offerings, your fat beasts, thy songs, thy viols. The spirit of hypocrisy, of externalism, in which these sacrifices were offered, made them so detestable to the Lord. Again, the Lord does not

say that He has never required any sacrificial cult. In v. 25, the last one quoted and printed out by Bewer, God asks: "Have ye brought sacrifices and offerings unto Me in the wilderness?" emphasizing "unto Me," and going on immediately in v. 26, which is neither printed out nor quoted by Bewer: "But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun, your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." That was the sin of Israel in the wilderness: they sacrificed to idols, instead of bringing their offerings to the true God, as He had commanded them to do. Amos did not oppose and condemn the ancient sacrificial cult, as little as did Isaiah, who in language almost identical with that of Amos speaks of vain oblations, which are an abomination to God, Is. 1:10-15. Both Amos and Isaiah rebuke externalism which relied on the outer performance of sacrifices and regarded that as sufficient to appease the wrath of God and obtain His favor.

And here again neither Isaiah nor Amos were the first to condemn ritualism. David, 250 years before, knew that mere external sacrifices were not sufficient to cleanse him from sin, that God demanded above all the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, Ps. 51:16, 17, and fifty years before that Samuel had told Saul: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams," 1 Sam. 15:22. And some 400 years before Samuel, Moses had told Israel: "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no more stiff-necked," Deut. 10:16; cp. Deut. 30:6. The earliest record of God's plan of salvation for sinful mankind spoke not of civic and social righteousness but revealed the dogma of redemption through the blood of the Woman's Seed. Not ethics without doctrine but ethics based on doctrine, and on the doctrine of the vicarious atonement brought about by the self-sacrifice of the Son of God, to whom all divinely instituted sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward, were the requirements imposed upon His people by the God of Israel.

Micah's statement "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" (chap. 6:8) is not "the best epitome of prophetic religion which the Old Testament contains" (H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Old Testament, Its Making and Meaning*, p. 93) nor the high-water mark of Old Testament religious experience, as it has been called, least of all a new religious discovery. It merely repeats, in almost identical words, what Moses had said centuries before, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord, thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul?" Deut. 10:12. And it is Law, not Gospel; it tells us what God requires of us, not

enabling us, however, to live up to this requirement. The high-water mark in the Old Testament is not any law, but the Gospel, which points out salvation to the sinner, reveals the Savior to the lost and condemned criminal, makes known the Redeemer to a perishing world. And this Gospel is not the high-water mark of religious experience, as Modernists use this term; it is the pinnacle of God's revelation. Its message of grace in the Redeemer is the only reason why God condescended to speak to man and the chief purpose for which He sent His prophets to Israel.

Hosea's contribution to the religion of Israel did not consist in spiritualizing and refining it by "his joining of love with righteousness also in the relation of man to man" (Bewer, *op. cit.*, p. 99) as well as in the relation of God to man and man to God, nor in toning down the stern message of justice proclaimed by Amos by stressing the love and mercy of God, which in the end would triumph. Nor did he emphasize love and mercy because, as Oesterley alleges, he "was, at any rate in his youth, subject to what recent psychology would call a 'sex-complex.' Such natures as his have a peculiar intensity and passion, which run through all their life, and often, when duly 'sublimated,' give them an extraordinary power and impressiveness. . . . So, in the agony of his own spirit and in the deathless love he knew, he found an image of the heart of God, broken by the constant rejection of His love and by the endlessly repeated apostasies of His people." (Oesterley-Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, p. 351 f.) No; Hosea merely repeated and expanded and emphasized anew that love of God to His Church and of the Church to her God which Solomon 250 years before Hosea had pictured in language of exquisite beauty in the Song of Songs. In an age when there was little love of God and man found in Israel, Hosea very properly stressed that love of which David had sung in Ps. 45, that love of God toward man which already Moses had brought to the attention of Israel when he told them of God's undeserved love, Deut. 7:6-21; 10:15; when he described that marvelous self-revelation in the words "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," Ex. 34:6, 7. Unless his people could again be imbued with a living and saving knowledge of this love of God past understanding, there was no possibility of rekindling in their hearts and lives that spirit of unselfish love which was so essential to the existence of God's chosen people, that love which already Moses had required, that love which Moses required as the first and chief duty of Israel in their relation to God, Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 11:1; 30:6, etc., and to man, Lev. 19:17, 18, 34; Deut.

10:18, 19. That was the reason why Hosea so continually emphasized love in his messages to his nation. His contribution to Israel's religion was not the adding of a new string to an ancient and outworn harp but playing a new melody on that age-old harp, a melody emphasizing what the people to whom God had sent him particularly needed.

Amos, Isaiah, and Micah were not the first to plead the cause of the downtrodden, the oppressed, the poor. Amos and Micah were the friends of the poor people not because they themselves were poor, of common stock. We know nothing about their financial status, and there is no reason to assume that Isaiah was a poor man. They did not merely speak out of their own experience, nor were they the first to utter their protest against the abuse of wealth and power, of social prestige, of financial superiority, of civic authority, and of political influence. Read the Book of Psalms, of Proverbs, of Ecclesiastes, written 100 to 200 years before the age of the literary prophets, and you will find language very similar to that employed by the so-called social prophets. And again, it was Moses who already had legislated against these very evils. Read what Moses by inspiration of the Lord has to say on the oppression of the poor, in passages such as these, Ex. 22:26, 27; 23:9; Lev. 19:13, 33, 34; 27:8; Deut. 24:10-22; 27:17; on commercial dishonesty, Lev. 19:35-37; Deut. 25:13-16; on bribery, Ex. 23:7, 8; Deut. 10:17; 27:25; on perversion of justice and judgment, Ex. 22:21-24; 23:1-7; Lev. 19:15, 16; Deut. 10:18; 19:15-21; 27:19. Read the constructive legislation on the prevention of pauperism and the amelioration of poverty, Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25; Deut. 15:1-11; on humane treatment of slaves, Ex. 21:1-11, 26, 27 (cp. particularly v. 5: "I love my master; I will not go out free"); 23:12; Deut. 15:12-18. Read the many passages found scattered throughout the Mosaic legislation impressing upon the Israelite the duty of showing loving consideration to all his fellow-men, such passages, e. g., as Lev. 19:14, 17, 18; Deut. 22:1-4; 27:17-19. Already in the Law of Moses the fundamental principles of justice and equity and charity are laid down in clear and unmistakable language, and in such passages as Lev. 26; Deut. 7 and 28 the blessings to be showered down upon a believing Israel and the curses to strike a disobedient people are described in a manner and in language which served the prophets of all times as their model, so that we often find either the blessing or the curse repeated word for word in the writings of the later messengers of God. The Mosaic legislation and the Mosaic declaration of the principles underlying a proper regulation of social life were the texts on which the prophets, inspired messengers of God, based their messages to the people of their day, applying these never-

changing principles to the ever-changing social conditions and insisting on their observance, no matter how radically the outer circumstances might differ from those under which these principles were first made obligatory upon Israel.

The Lord God of Israel Himself had laid down once for all His code of ethics in His holy Law as published by Moses. This code was briefly but comprehensively summed up by Moses, and 700 years later by Micah, as requiring no more, no less, than to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly in the fear and love of God. The unchanging I Am That I Am would not sanction any social or religious or political reform conflicting with this basic code of ethics. And it is a remarkable fact—rather let me say, since the prophets were only the spokesmen of God, it is quite the natural thing—that the message of the prophets never demanded less than this basic code required and never once went beyond the principles, eternal as God Himself, laid down in these solemn words. There is not a single instance on record that the prophets ever prescribed the exact manner in which this code was to be put into practical use in the commonwealth, just what civic laws were to be formulated in order that justice and mercy might rule in the land, just in what manner these laws were to be enforced, just what policies were to be adopted by kings and rulers in order that the nation be and remain indeed God's own holy people.

It will be interesting to cast a brief glance into the history of Israel from this viewpoint. According to all available records, not the prophets but the kings were the only ones to make any changes in the existing policies and to institute social, civic, economic, or political reforms. And only when these policies were at variance with the Law of God did the prophets voice their protest or insist on a change of policy and action.

Let us look at the reforms and changes inaugurated by pious King Jehoshaphat. The book of Chronicles devotes two separate chapters to an enumeration of the educational, social, economic, military, and political policies carried out by this king. Yet in not one instance are we told that these reforms, or any one of them, were carried out at the insistence or upon the advice or even after consultation with priests or prophets. This is the more remarkable since Chronicles stresses the activities of priests and Levites to such an extent that modern critics charge the author with deliberately misrepresenting facts in order to enhance the importance of the priestly order. Jehoshaphat was interested in public education, and therefore in the third year of his rule he sent five princes, civic rulers, nine Levites, and two priests to teach the Law of God to all the people. There is not the slightest intima-

tion that this reform was instituted at the instigation of the priests or prophets or that they regarded this ordinance as an infringement upon their exclusive rights. The king was within his rights; yea, it was his duty to have the Word of God taught to his people, Deut. 17:18-20.

Jehoshaphat knew that wise statesmanship required defensive measures against the enemies surrounding them on all sides. As his father, Asa, had prepared for war in times of peace, 2 Chron. 14:6-8, so Jehoshaphat continued this policy, 2 Chron. 17:2-6, 12-19. It is in this connection that we are told that "the Lord was with Jehoshaphat," therefore pleased with this policy of defense, vv. 3-5. In line with these measures was another step to strengthen his kingdom against foreign attacks. He saw to it that the internecine warfare whereby Israel and Judah had weakened themselves ever since the days of Rehoboam was discontinued and a truce established between the two brother nations. Again we read nothing even faintly resembling a suggestion on the part of priest or prophet that this course be adopted or a protest against this policy of defense. Yet, when Jehoshaphat associated himself with wicked King Ahab, when Ahab used Jehoshaphat as a cat's paw to regain Ramoth in Gilead from the Syrians, when he succeeded in persuading the Jewish king to undertake a joint campaign against Syria, the Lord foretold by the prophet Micaiah the dire results of this war and warned Jehoshaphat against participation in this campaign, 2 Chron. 18:4-27. Jehoshaphat neglected this warning and therefore was reprimanded a second time by the prophet Jehu, chap. 19:2. In like manner he was rebuked because of his commercial treaty with wicked Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, chap. 20:35-37. Alliances and treaties with kings of other nations were not absolutely prohibited to the Jewish kings. There is not a word of censure recorded against the alliance of Solomon and Hiram of Tyrus. Jeremiah by divine command urged the kings of Jerusalem to become the vassals of the Babylonian king. Yet Jehoshaphat's alliance with ungodly Ahab, 2 Chron. 19, and with Ahaziah, "who did very wickedly," 2 Chron. 20:35, was an alliance which threatened the very existence of Judah as God's people. In fact, as a result of this alliance the royal seed of David was almost extinguished, chap. 22:8-12. Such alliances were an abomination to God and were therefore denounced by His prophets and not because these alliances happened to conflict with the political or economic views of the prophet.

Drunkenness was rampant in Israel as long as the nation existed, Deut. 21:20; Ps. 69:12; Prov. 23:21; Is. 28:1, 3. The prophets time and again warned against this sin and threatened God's wrath upon all drunkards. Yet there is not the slightest

intimation that the prophets ever favored total abstinence or advocated, or sought to introduce, any form of prohibition, the one regarding local option as the best remedy against this evil; another, government control of the sale of all intoxicants; a third, still a different scheme. This is the more remarkable since so many foods were declared unclean by the Levitical Law. There were the Nazarites, who by divine ordinance were to be total abstainers. The priests were strictly forbidden to drink intoxicants while on duty. There was the sect of Rechabites, who vowed to permit no liquor to cross their lips. And yet the prophets did not once advocate similar state-wide measures to combat the evil of drunkenness. Among the sins for which destruction will overcome Israel, Amos names giving the Nazarites wine to drink; yet nowhere does even this fiery prophet preach total abstinence as a solemn duty of every Israelite. And the Rechabites were commended not so much for their abstinence as for their loyal obedience to the rules laid down by their father. Jer. 35:2 ff. The prophets were as far removed from making these examples of abstinence the basis of a nation-wide plan of prohibition as they were from making that other vow of the Rechabites, to dwell in tents and not in houses, the starting-point of a back-to-nature movement, or the vow of the Nazarite to refrain from shaving obligatory upon all Israelites. They preached against the vice of drunkenness, but left the control of liquor, if there was to be any, to the proper authorities.

Prostitution was quite common in Israel, and again we find vehement denunciations of this shameful vice in the prophetic writings; yet we look in vain for but one recommendation to the authorities insisting on, or advocating, any specific legislation to root out this vile practice. Not segregation or governmental license or inspection and supervision or any other human scheme was the remedy suggested. The prophets combated this evil with the only weapon at their command, the Word of God. They regarded this Word as a power unto salvation and sanctification and left the external control of this evil again to the proper authorities.

Or take the question of slavery. During Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem the slave-owners within the city, at the recommendation of King Zedekiah, had liberated all slaves of Jewish blood irrespective of the length of their service, while the Mosaic Law demanded such liberation only after six years of servitude. This manumission had been confirmed by a solemn oath. Evidently the motive for liberating the bond-servants had not been altogether unselfish; for as soon as the siege was raised, the freedmen were again forced into bondage by their former owners, Jer. 34:8-11. Jeremiah does not fault the owners because they had

bought their brethren and held them in servitude. They had the legal right to do that, Lev. 25:39-55. Neither does he voice his disapproval of this system of bond-service, nor does he urge the king to issue an emancipation proclamation forever doing away with the system. What a splendid opportunity had the decree of King Zedekiah offered to the prophet for suggesting just such a reform! Yet that was not the concern of the prophet. Such a proclamation was demanded neither by the written Law nor by any special revelation of God to His prophet. As the mouthpiece of the Lord, he demands no more than the Lord required, nor is he satisfied with less. These men had broken a promise given to their neighbor; they had violated their solemn oath and thereby profaned God's holy name, and this is the sin for which Jeremiah pronounces the curse of God upon them, as he was told by the word of the Lord coming to Him. Jer. 34:9-22.

The prophets did not look upon themselves as social reformers. They did not take it upon themselves to advise in matters pertaining to politics, economics, sociology, etc. They had no social or economic program of their own. Not once does any prophet demand the enactment by the state, and obedience on the part of the people, with reference to any scheme of reform, any plan of social welfare, any system of politics or economics that God Himself had not already made obligatory in His holy Law, that rather any one prophet or any number of them had designed as a panacea for a certain evil. Such machinations he left to the false prophets, who were constantly meddling in affairs of the state, constantly giving advice, which may have been worthy of consideration for its prudence, its political sagacity, its popularity, but which was, after all, the product of human reason, human insight, or even human intrigue, not the revelation of God's will and wisdom. The prophet of the Lord spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, proclaimed no more and no less than the Lord had revealed to him, and spoke that Word faithfully, Jer. 23:28, without fear and without favor.

TH. LAETSCH

(To be concluded)

