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Prophets, 1960.

THE INSTITUTION OF "PROPHET" (Nabi) AS SUCH, AND BY THAT NAME, AND OF "BANDS OF PROPHETS" (Hebel Nebiim or Lahakat Nebiim), SEEMS TO HAVE MADE ITS APPEARANCE IN ISRAEL AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONARCHY, ALTHOUGH SEERS AND SOOTHSAYERS EXISTED FROM EARLIEST TIMES. DURING THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES, WHICH LASTED OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS, WE HAVE ^{no cant reference to} ~~NO RECORD OF~~ ANY PROPHET. THERE IS ONE REFERENCE IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES (6:8) TO AN ANONYMOUS PROPHET. DEBORAH IS REFERRED TO AS PROPHETESSES (Judg. 4:4). IT IS LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THESE ARE THE APPELLATIVES OF A LATER TIME WHICH ARE HERE PREDATED. SAMUEL, WHO PRESIDED AT THE FOUNDING OF THE MONARCHY AND ANOINTED THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL, IS CALLED Nabi BUT THE WRITER TAKES PAINS TO POINT OUT THAT "HE WHO IS NOW CALLED A PROPHET (Nabi) WAS FORMERLY CALLED A SEER (Ro'eh)", (1 Sam. 9:9). MOSES, ~~AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT~~, IS SELDOM REFERRED TO AS Nabi. HE IS CALLED THE "MAN OF GOD" OR "SERVANT OF YHWH". IN ONLY ONE LATE INSTANCE (Deut. 34:10) DOES THE PENTATEUCH APPEAR TO CLASS HIM WITH PROPHETS, BUT EVEN THERE THE PURPOSE IS CLEARLY TO POINT OUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIM AND THE OTHER PROPHETS: "AND THERE HAS NOT ARISEN A PROPHET SINCE IN ISRAEL LIKE MOSES, WHOM YHWH KNEW FACE TO FACE." THE CONTRAST IS EVEN MORE SHARPLY DRAWN IN (Num. 12:1-8): "HEAR MY WORDS: IF THERE IS A PROPHET AMONG YOU, I, YHWH, MAKE MYSELF KNOWN TO HIM IN A VISION, I SPEAK WITH HIM IN A DREAM. NOT SO WITH MY SERVANT MOSES;... WITH HIM I SPEAK MOUTH TO MOUTH, CLEARLY, AND NOT IN DARK SPEECH:..."

IT IS QUITE LIKELY THAT THE INSTITUTION OF Nabi IS OF NON-ISRAELITISH ORIGIN. THE NOUN Nabi IS PROBABLY A LOAN-WORD OF NON-SEMITIC ORIGIN. THE RATHER OBSCURE NARRATIVE IN CHAPTER 10 OF 1 SAMUEL MAY, IN THIS CONNECTION, BE INSTRUCTIVE. SAUL MEETS UP WITH A "BAND OF PROPHETS" AT GIBEATH-ELOHIM "WHERE THERE WAS A GARRISON OF THE PHILISTINES." THE PHILISTINES WERE NOTED FOR THEIR PREEMINENCE IN DIVINATION, SORCERY, AND MAGIC. ISAIAH CHIDES HIS PEOPLE "BECAUSE THEY ARE FULL OF DIVINERS FROM THE EAST AND OF SOOTHSAYERS LIKE THE PHILISTINES" (Isa. 2:6; see also 1 Sam. 6:2, 2 Kings 1-2). SAUL MEETS A COMPANY OF SUCH DERVISHES "COMING DOWN FROM THE HIGH PLACE WITH HARP, TAMBOURINE, FLUTE, AND LYRE BEFORE THEM, ENGAGED IN PROPHECYING." INFECTED BY THEIR FRENZY, SAUL PLAYED THE PROPHET IN THE MIDST OF THEM. THE PEOPLE WHO SAW HIM SAID TO ONE ANOTHER: " 'WHAT HAS COME OVER THE SON OF KISH? IS SAUL ALSO AMONG THE PROPHETS?' AND A MAN OF THE PLACE ANSWERED, 'AND WHO IS THEIR FATHER?' " THIS AMBIGUOUS PHRASE SEEMS TO SUGGEST THAT THE BAND OF PROPHETS BELONGED TO ANOTHER PEOPLE, ^{and another cult} AND THE SPEAKER EXPRESSED AMAZEMENT THAT SAUL WOULD ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH THEM.

THE INSTITUTION OF "GUILDS OF PROPHETS" WHO WERE ATTACHED TO A SANCTUARY, AND WERE PRESIDED OVER BY A SUPERIOR, WAS COPIED BY THE ISRAELITES FROM THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION SOME TIME AFTER THEY SETTLED IN PALESTINE. IT HAD BEEN AN

ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF THE RELIGION OF CANAAN AND PHOENICIA FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL. THE PHILISTINES IN ALL PROBABILITY BROUGHT IT WITH THEM FROM THEIR ORIGINAL HOMELAND IN THE GREEK WORLD, FROM CRETE OR ASIA MINOR, WHERE SACRED TEMPLES, NOTABLY THOSE OF APOLLO AND DIONYSOS HAD SUCH ^{guilds} ~~ASSOCIATIONS~~ OF ECSTATIC PROPHETS ^{attached to} ~~CONNECTED~~ WITH THEM.

IT IS FROM THE TIME OF THE PHILISTINES AND ONWARD THAT WE FIND MANY GREEK-PHILISTINE-CANAANITE PROPHEPIC FEATURES AMONG THE HEBREW PROPHETS. ESPECIALLY ARE THEY IN EVIDENCE IN THE ELIJAH-ELISHA PERISCOPE IN THE BOOK OF KINGS.

PRIOR TO THEIR ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN AND THE ~~CONF~~FEDERATION OF THE TRIBES, THE ISRAELITES POSSESSED NO ORGANIZED PRIESTHOOD AND NO GUILDS OF PROPHETS. ISRAELITISH GUILDS OF PROPHETS MADE THEIR APPEARANCE SUBSEQUENT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONARCHY AND GREW IN NUMBER AND ACCEPTABILITY IN THE SUCCEEDING CENTURIES. ^{King} AHAB INQUIRES FROM A COMPANY OF ABOUT FOUR HUNDRED PROPHETS WHETHER HE SHOULD GO TO BATTLE AGAINST RAMOT-GILEAD (1 Kings 22:6). ELISHA, UNLIKE HIS MASTER ELIJAH, WAS LEADER OF SUCH A COMPANY OF PROPHETS WHO WERE UNDER HIS CHARGE.

IN LATER TIMES WHEN THE INSTITUTION OF PROPHEPIC GUILDS, ^{which} ~~was~~ BORROWED FROM THE CANAANITES OR PHILISTINES, HAD BEEN FULLY HARMONIZED WITH THE CULT OF YHVH, IT WAS GIVEN A MOSAIC ORIGIN.

BUT THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE INSTITUTION OF NABI IN ISRAEL WAS LATE AND THE DEUTERONOMIST SUGGESTS THAT IT WAS FINALLY SANCTIONED AS A YHVH-ISRAELITE COUNTERFOIL TO THE LONG ESTABLISHED CANAANITISH INSTITUTION. THE PEOPLE ASKED FOR IT, EVEN AS THEY CAME TO ASK FOR A KING TO RULE OVER THEM. NEITHER WAS PART OF THE EARLY SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS TRADITION OF THE TRIBES UPON THEIR ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN.

NOT ALL THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL WERE MEMBERS OF PROFESSIONAL COMPANIES AND BELONGED TO AN ORGANIZED CRAFT. NATHAN, AHIJAH, MICHAIAH, JEHU, AND ELIJAH STAND OUT AS STRONG PERSONALITIES WHO MOVE ALONE AT THE BEHEST OF THEIR MISSION.

NONE SENSED THE SHARP BREAK WITH TRADITIONAL "PROPHECY" AND THE NEW DEPARTURE WHICH THEY INAUGURATED AS MUCH AS THE ^{real} PROPHETS THEMSELVES, WHO MOVED ALONE.

AS LONG AS THE NEhIM REMAINED MEMBERS OF A SCHOOL, THEY PERSISTED AS THE MONITORS OF THE DIVINATORY TRADITIONS OF THE CULT. IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACTED HIMSELF FROM THE GROUP AND STOOD OUT ALONE, UNATTACHED AND UNALLIED, AND BECAME CONSCIOUS OF A PERSONAL AND DIRECT DIVINE COMMUNICATION, THAT THE CLASSIC PROPHET WAS BORN. THE "ALONENESS" OF THE PROPHET IS FREQUENTLY POINTED OUT IN THE BIBLE. MOSES RECEIVED HIS REVELATION ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS. ELIJAH TRAVELED A DAY'S JOURNEY OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS WHERE HIS REVELATION CAME TO HIM; AND AGAIN

AFTER FORTY DAYS' WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS, WHILE ALONE AT MT. HOREB, JEREMIAH SAT ALONE BECAUSE GOD'S HAND WAS UPON HIM.

THE PROPHET HAD NO TEACHER AND NO DISCIPLE WHOM HE TRAINED TO SUCCEED HIM. ^{*Elisha seems to be the one exception*} PROPHECY, UNLIKE PRIESTHOOD, WAS NEITHER AN OFFICE NOR A PROFESSION. IT WAS NOT INHERITED OR TRANSMITTED. THE PROPHET WAS A SINGLE HUMAN BEING, ONE OF THE COUNTLESS UN-ORDAINED MANY, BELONGING TO NO SPECIAL PRIVILEGED CLASS, WHOM GOD CHOSE, IN A WAY QUITE UNMISTAKABLE TO THE CHOSEN ONE, TO TRANSMIT HIS WILL TO MEN. THE REASON FOR HIS PARTICULAR CHOICE REMAINED A MYSTERY TO THE CHOSEN ONE. OFTEN THE PROPHET REBELLED AT THIS CHOICE. THE HAND OF GOD, LAID UPON HIM, WAS TOO HEAVY. HE FELT HIMSELF TOO YOUNG, TOO INEXPERIENCED FOR THE MISSION. OR, HAVING TAKEN THE FIRST FEW STEPS UPON THE HARD AND BROKEN ROAD WHICH THE SERVANT OF GOD MUST WALK, HE FOUND HIS MISSION TOO DIFFICULT. FOR MEN HATED, MOCKED AND PERSECUTED HIM BECAUSE OF THE WORD OF GOD WHICH HE BROUGHT TO THEM. HE FELT HIMSELF TRAPPED AND ENTICED. HE WANTED TO RUN AWAY OR AT LEAST TO KEEP SILENT. BUT THE WORD OF GOD WAS LIKE A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP ON HIS BONES AND HE ONLY WEARIED HIMSELF TO HOLD IT IN, FOR HE COULD NOT.

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JUST HOW HE BECAME AWARE OF HIS SELECTION ALSO REMAINED A MYSTERY TO HIM. IT HAPPENED, THAT WAS CLEAR. IT WAS A SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED PHENOMENON. THERE WAS NO DELIBERATE PREPARATION FOR IT. THE PROPHET DID NOT INDUCE IT THROUGH ANY EXERCISES OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL-CORPOREAL KIND. DEEP DOWN WITHIN HIM MUCH MAY HAVE BEEN GOING ON, FOR A LONG TIME, OF WHICH HE MAY HAVE BEEN QUITE UNAWARE. BUT THE REVELATION ITSELF IS AN ACT OF GRACE, EMANATING FROM WITHOUT AND NOT FROM WITHIN. IT IS NOT ACHIEVED BY THE PROPHET ~~THROUGH THE PROPHECY~~ ^{conscious fulfillment} THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS FULFILLMENT OF CERTAIN PREREQUISITES. THE RATIONALISTIC PHILOSOPHER, MAIMONIDES, CONTENDED THAT PROPHECY REQUIRED PREPARATION AND THAT THE PREREQUISITES FOR IT WERE MENTAL, MORAL AND IMAGINATIVE (intuitional) PERFECTION. BUT THIS IS NOWHERE INDICATED IN THE BIBLE.

WHEN THE REVELATION ONCE TOOK PLACE IT REMAINED AN UNFORGETTABLE AND TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE. THE PROPHET KNEW THAT HE HAD BEEN IN DIRECT COMMUNION WITH GOD. HE HAD RECEIVED A CLEAR MESSAGE, NOT A MYSTERIOUS ORACLE REQUIRING DECODING, BUT A MESSAGE OF CLEAR COGNITIONAL CONTENT. AND THE MIRACLE OF IT WAS THAT HE, A MAN, BELONGING TO NO CASTE OF HOLY MEN, POSSESSED OF NO DIVINE "GIFTS", AND WITHOUT ANY PREVIOUS CONSCIOUS CONDITIONING, HAD BEEN SINGLED OUT AS THE CHANNEL FOR A DIVINE REVELATION TO MANKIND.

HE HAD SUDDENLY BEEN RAISED AND SET "OVER THE NATIONS AND THE KINGDOMS TO ROOT OUT AND PULL DOWN, TO DESTROY, TO OVERTHROW, TO BUILD AND TO PLANT". WITH THE CLASSIC PROPHET, THE IMPERSONAL AND ANONYMOUS RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARY OF SOME LOCAL DEITY AND SHRINE YIELDS TO THE STRONG, RELIGIOUS PERSONALITY. MAN RISES TO THE DIGNITY OF A CONSCIOUS AGENT OF GOD, BECAUSE OF GOD'S NECESSITY TO EMPLOY MAN IN THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS PLAN. THE FOLKIST STAGE IN RELIGIOUS EVOLUTION COMES TO AN END.

IN THIS CONCEPTION OF THE PROPHET, ONE MAY READ THE ^{religious} ~~JEWISH~~ PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY. SPIRITUAL RELIGION IS NOT AN AUTOMATIC FOLK CREATION, THE UNCONSCIOUS EVOLUTION OF A PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS CULTURE PLAYED UPON BY THE CROSS-CURRENTS OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FORCES. NO CONSTELLATION OF SOCIAL FACTORS AND NO IMPACT OF HISTORICAL EVENTS PRODUCED THE PROPHET. SPIRITUAL RELIGION IS THE PRODUCT OF REVELATION -- A SERIES OF REVELATIONS -- OF GOD, THROUGH MAN, TO MANKIND. THE SOURCE IS ALWAYS GOD, NOT MAN. WHAT THE PROPHET PROCLAIMS IS NOT A PRIVATE CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL MORALITY BUT A MESSAGE FROM GOD. WHAT IS REVEALED IS LIKE HEAVENLY FOOD GIVEN TO THE PROPHET TO EAT. "THY WORDS WERE FOUND, AND I DID EAT THEM", IS THE WAY JEREMIAH EXPRESSES IT. EZEKIEL USES THE SAME METAPHOR: "AND THOU, SON OF MAN, OPEN THY MOUTH, AND EAT THAT WHICH I GIVE THEE. "

IT IS GOD'S WILL WHICH DETERMINES THE OCCASION AND CHOOSES THE MEN WHO ARE TO BE THE VEHICLES OF THE REVELATIONS. THE INDIVIDUAL CHOSEN MUST, OF COURSE, BE A FIT INSTRUMENT FOR THE MESSAGE WHICH HE IS TO TRANSMIT. ONE CANNOT PLAY A PERFECT MELODY UPON AN IMPERFECT INSTRUMENT, NOR IS IT TO BE ASSUMED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL THUS CHOSEN REMAINS JUST AN UNCONSCIOUS INSTRUMENT, AN AUTOMATIC TRANSMITTER TO PROCLAIM THE MESSAGE OF GOD TO A VIOLENTLY RESISTANT WORLD, TO MEN WHO ARE OF A "HARD FOREHEAD AND OF A STIFF HEART" REQUIRES CONSCIOUS COURAGE, CONVICTION, FERVOR, FAITH, SPIRITUAL PASSION AND A CAPACITY FOR SUFFERING. THE PROPHET MUST INTERPRET THE MESSAGE WHICH HE RECEIVES, AS A GREAT ARTIST INTERPRETS THE MUSICAL COMPOSITION OF A GREAT COMPOSER. HE MUST GIVE A FAITHFUL, PENETRATING, REVERENT AND CREATIVE RENDITION OF THE CREATOR'S MANIFEST INTENT. THE PROPHET WAS FAR MORE THAN A CONDUIT FOR IDEAS RECEIVED. HE HIMSELF BECAME INTELLECTUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED IN THEM. HIS TASK WAS NOT ONLY TO TRANSMIT AND TO PROCLAIM, BUT TO PARTICIPATE IN ACTS OF NATIONAL REDEMPTION! OFTEN THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PROPHET'S OWN PRIVATE LIFE BECAME THE OCCASION OF A REVELATION FROM GOD. THE PROPHET HIMSELF BECAME THE PARABLE, HIS PERSONAL TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS WERE EMPLOYED BY GOD AS THE PLASTIC MATERIAL OUT OF WHICH A SPIRITUAL REVELATION OF UNIVERSAL SIGNIFICANCE WAS FASHIONED. IN SUCH INSTANCES, THE PERSONALITY OF THE PROPHET GLOWINGLY INTERPENETRATED HIS PROPHECY AND THEREBY BECAME A REVELATION NOT MERELY OF DIVINITY, BUT ALSO OF HUMANITY.

THE PROPHET WAS NEVER SUBMERGED IN HIS PROPHECY, HIS PERSONALITY WAS NEVER EXTINGUISHED IN THAT OF GOD. THERE WAS NO DISSOLUTION OF THE PROPHET'S EGO. THERE WAS A SURRENDER TO THE WILL OF GOD, BUT NOT A SURRENDER OF IDENTITY. THE GULF BETWEEN "THOU" AND "I", BETWEEN GOD AND MAN'S SOUL, REMAINS. THE PROPHET WAS NOT A MYSTIC IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE. HE REACHED OUT FOR NO ECSTATIC IDENTIFICATION OF SELF WITH GOD. HE DID NOT PURSUE THE "VIA PURGATIVA" -- THE MYSTIC WAY OF SELF-ABASEMENT AND SELF-MORTIFICATION IN AN EFFORT TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE SHACKLES OF SELFHOOD. HE ALWAYS REMAINED HIMSELF, EVEN AFTER HE HAD BEEN CHOSEN. HE EVEN FOUND HIMSELF, AT TIMES, IN SHARP MENTAL COLLOQUY WITH GOD, CRITICAL, BECAUSE UNENLIGHTENED, CONCERNING GOD'S MANAGEMENT OF HIS UNIVERSE. TO PERFORM ADEQUATELY THAT WHICH HE WAS COMMISSIONED TO DO REQUIRED CONTINUOUS RE-ENFORCEMENT OF HIS OWN INNER LIFE, THE CONSOLIDATION OF HIS PERSONALITY. FOR HIS LIFE WAS A LIFE OF SWORDS. SKILL IN ATTACK, RESOURCEFULNESS IN CONTROVERSY, IMPRESSIVENESS IN UTTERANCES, SUBTLETY IN TECHNIQUE -- ALL THAT AND MUCH MORE -- FOR ONE SHOULD NOT UNDER-ESTIMATE THE PRACTICAL SAGACITY OF THE PROPHETS, NOR FAIL TO MAKE ALLOWANCE FOR A LARGE MEASURE OF SOPHISTICATION -- HAS TO BE ADDED TO THEIR MATCHLESS COURAGE IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THEIR RUGGED AND POWERFUL NATURES.

HERE ARE NO WISTFUL DREAMERS OR DEVOTEES OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE OR SELF-CONSUMING MYSTICS. THESE ARE MEN OF STRIFE AND CONTENTION. THESE MEN STRUCK AT LIFE AND LIFE STRUCK BACK AT THEM. THEY WERE ALWAYS "AGAINST THIS HOUSE AND AGAINST THIS CITY". THEY WERE IN AN ARENA, FIGHTING WITH EVERY AVAILABLE WEAPON. THEIR SPEECH WAS AT TIMES VERY BITTER, AND THEIR INVECTIVES LIKE SCORPION WHIPS. THEY SPARED NO ONE, EXCEPT THOSE WHOM GOD WOULD SPARE -- THE WEAK, THE POOR, THE DENIED, THE BROKEN. THE PROPHETS REASONED, PLEADED, CHALLENGED, MOCKED, THREATENED. THEY WOULD NOT COMPROMISE ON MORAL ABSOLUTES OR ON WHAT THEY WERE ORDERED TO PROCLAIM. THEY WERE LIKE "AN IRON PILLAR AND BRAZEN WALLS".

PROPHETS WERE ESSENTIALLY MEN OF MISSION, SEEKING NEITHER PERSONAL SALVATION NOR INNER PEACE, BUT BURDENED WITH THE SENSE OF HAVING BEEN SENT TO RECONSTRUCT SOCIETY AFTER THE PATTERN OF DIVINE JUSTICE AND MERCY. ALL THEIR REVELATIONS CONCERNED NEITHER THE NATURE OF GOD NOR COSMIC MYSTERIES. THEY REVEALED NO "SECRETS", NO PARTICULAR "GNOSIS". THEIR REVELATIONS CONCERNED EXCLUSIVELY THE PURE WORSHIP OF THE ONE, SPIRITUAL AND UNIVERSAL GOD, THE MORAL CONDUCT OF MEN -- JUSTICE, COMPASSION, BROTHERHOOD, PEACE -- AND THE WORTHY LIFE OF MEN AND NATIONS IN THE PROCESSES OF HISTORY.

NOR WERE THE PROPHETS APOCALYPTIC VISIONARIES WHO DESPAIRED OF EVER REFORMING SOCIETY AND WHO WERE AWAITING THE CATAclysmic INTERVENTION OF GOD TO USHER IN A NEW AND MIRACULOUS ORDER OF THINGS. THE PROPHE TS DID INDEED VISION "AN END OF DAYS", WHEN THE THINGS WHICH THEY WERE STRUGGLING TO ACHIEVE WOULD ACTUALLY COME TO PASS, WHEN THE GOOD WOULD FINALLY TRIUMPH OVER THE EVIL, "WHEN THE EARTH WOULD BE FILLED WITH THE KNOW LEDGE OF GOD AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA". BUT THIS BLESSED CONSUMMATION IS TO RESULT NOT FROM DIVINE INTERVENTION BUT FROM THE LABORS AND MORAL EXERTIONS OF COUNTLESS GENERATIONS OF MEN, FROM MAN'S CONSCIOUS REGENERATION.

NO PROPHET TRIED TO MONOPOLIZE THE MANDATE OF PROPHECY. ^{would that} MOSES SAID: "THE LORD'S PEOPLE WERE PROPHE TS ^{all} THAT THE LORD WOULD PUT HIS SPIRIT UPON THEM." PRIESTS WERE ALWAYS VERY JEALOUS OF THEIR PREROGATIVES. EVERY ONE, NOT OF THE PRIESTLY CLASS, WAS A "STRANGER", WHOSE VERY TOUCH CONTAMINATED THE SACRED VESSELS, AND WHOSE ATTEMPTS AT PERFORMING PRIESTLY FUNCTIONS WAS SACRILEGE AND PUNISHABLE BY DEATH. BUT THE PROPHETS WISHED FOR ALL MEN THE PRIVILEGE OF BECOMING LIKE THEMSELVES SERVANTS OF GOD. AND THAT INCLUDED ALSO WOMEN. THERE WERE NO WOMEN IN THE PRIESTHOOD, BUT THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE WOMAN PROPHET IN ANCIENT ISRAEL. THE PROPHETS LONGED FOR A RICH OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD UPON ALL FLESH.

THE PROPHETS THOUGHT IN TERMS OF MEN AND NOT OF INSTITUTIONS, WHETHER SACRED OR SECULAR. THEY WERE FULLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF WHAT WE CALL INSTITUTIONALISM, BUT THEY WERE NOT HOSTILE TO THEM AS SUCH, EITHER TO THE TEMPLE, THE PRIESTHOOD, THE STATE, THE CULT, THE RITUAL, OR THE LAW *only when they were mis-used.*

THE PROPHETS DID NOT CONCEIVE OF THEMSELVES AS CREATORS OF A NEW RELIGION. THE PROPHETS OF THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES DID NOT ORIGINATE ETHICAL MONOTHEISM. THEY DID NOT COME AS INNOVATORS. THEY WERE CONSCIOUS OF AN OLDER SOURCE FOR THEIR FAITH. THEY AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES WERE AWARE OF A LONG-ESTABLISHED COVENANT WITH ~~YHWH~~ ^{YHWH}, THE SOLE CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, WHOSE WORSHIP ENTAILED GREAT MORAL DISCIPLINES. THE ORIGIN OF THIS FAITH WAS GENERALLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE SAGA OF THE *Patriarch and more especially with the* EXODUS, WITH MOSES, AND THE REVELATION AT MT. SINAI. THE PROPHETS REFERRED FREQUENTLY TO A TORAH, A BOOK OF DIVINE INSTRUCTION, WHICH WAS EVIDENTLY WELL-KNOWN IN THEIR DAY. THE PROPHET HOSEA CHARGED THE PEOPLE WITH HAVING FORGOTTEN THIS TORAH OF GOD. ISAIAH CHARGED THEM WITH HAVING REJECTED IT. JEREMIAH CHIDED HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY SAID: "WE ARE WISE, AND THE TORAH OF THE LORD IS WITH US", WHEREAS THE PEN OF THE SCRIBES HAD WROUGHT IN VAIN BECAUSE THEY HAD REJECTED THE WORD OF THE LORD.

THE PROPHETS REGARDED THEMSELVES RATHER AS MEN WHO, IN A GRAVE HOUR OF NATIONAL CRISIS, ~~HAD~~ RECEIVED A COMPELLING REVELATION TO WARN THE PEOPLE TO REPENT AND RETURN. THEY DID NOT

ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO INDIVIDUALS ABOUT PRIVATE OR PERSONAL MATTERS, AS DID THE EARLIER NEBIIM. THEY ADDRESSED THEMSELVES TO THE NATION AS A WHOLE, AND TO THOSE WHO CONTROLLED ITS AFFAIRS. ISALAH, JEREMIAH, EZEKIEL AND OTHERS OF THE PROPHETS SPOKE OF THEIR PROPHECIES AS TRUMPET-CALLS IN TIMES OF DANGER AND WAR. "SHALL THE HORN BE BLOWN IN A CITY AND THE PEOPLE NOT TREMBLE? THE LION HATH ROARED, WHO WILL NOT HEAR? THE LORD GOD HATH SPOKEN, WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Their overwhelming conviction was that
~~but~~ SALVATION CAN COME ONLY THROUGH INNER SPIRITUAL CLEANSING *on the part of the nation*

THROUGH THOROUGH-GOING REFORM AND FUNDAMENTAL RENEWAL. "WASH YOU, MAKE YOU CLEAN, PUT AWAY THE EVIL OF YOUR DOINGS FROM BEFORE MINE EYES; CEASE TO DO EVIL; LEARN TO DO WELL; SEEK JUSTICE, RELIEVE THE OPPRESSED, JUDGE THE FATHERLESS, PLEAD FOR THE WIDOW."

THE ETHICAL EMPHASIS OF THE PROPHETS AND THEIR INSISTENCE UPON THE PRIMACY OF ETHICS THROUGHOUT ARE SUPERB. *the* NATIONAL GUILT *which called* ~~CALLING~~ FOR ~~CONDIGN~~ PUNISHMENT *was* INCURRED NOT ONLY BY THOSE WHO ~~FORSAKE~~ *forsook* ~~YAHVEH~~ AND WORSHIP *ed* OTHER GODS OR BY THOSE WHO WORSHIP *ed* ~~YAHVEH~~ *YHWH* ALONG WITH OTHER GODS -- A FACT WHICH ~~GENERALLY~~ CONCEDED EVEN IF NOT GENERALLY HEEDDED -- BUT ALSO BY THOSE WHO GRIND THE FACES OF THE POOR, WHO BUY THE NEEDY FOR A PAIR OF SHOES, WHO JOIN HOUSE TO HOUSE AND FIELD TO FIELD TILL THERE BE NO ROOM FOR MEN TO DWELL IN, WHO MAKE THE EPHAH SMALL AND THE SHEKEL GREAT, WHO SELL REFUSE FOR CORN AND WHO OPPRESS THE STRANGER, THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOW."

NATIONAL DISTINY WAS THUS MADE DEPENDENT UPON LOYALTY
TO MORAL ^{principles -} ~~IDEALS~~ -- TO VERY EXACTING MORAL ^{standards.} ~~IDEALS~~. A NATION
CANNOT SURVIVE -- NAY MORE -- A NATION SHOULD NOT SURVIVE WHICH
DOES VIOLENCE TO THE DIVINE LAW OF JUSTICE AND COMPASSION.

THE PROPHETS LOVED THEIR NATION. THEY WERE NOT ALWAYS
HARD AND FORBIDDING, WRITING "WITH A PEN OF IRON, AND WITH THE
POINT OF A DIAMOND". THEY COULD SPEAK WITH INFINITE TENDERNESS
AND EXQUISITE LOVE OF THEIR PEOPLE. NO PATRIOT EVER FELT FOR
HIS NATION A DEEPER AND MORE GLOWING DEVOTION THAN HOSEA. EVEN
WHEN THEY CHASTISED THEIR PEOPLE, THEY YEARNED FOR THEM WITH
AN OVERWHELMING LOVE. WHEN JEREMIAH, SAID THE RABBIS, WAS
COMMANDED BY GOD TO TAKE THE CUP OF WINE OF FURY AT HIS HAND
AND MAKE THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TO DRINK OF IT, HE CURSED THE DAY
THAT HE WAS BORN. "I AM LIKE THE HIGH PRIEST", HE SAID, "WHO HAS
TO ADMINISTER 'THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS' TO A WOMAN UNDER SUS-
PICION OF ADULTERY, AND WHEN HE APPROACHES THE WOMAN TO MAKE HER
DRINK, HE BEHOLDS -- HIS OWN MOTHER. "

THE PROPHETS COULD COMFORT WHEN THE HURT WAS GREAT.
IN DARKNESS AND IN EXILE THEY COULD KINDLE THE BRIGHT LAMPS OF
HOPE WHICH SUSTAIN THE HEARTS OF WEARY MEN. "COMFORT YE,
COMFORT YE, MY PEOPLE... ARISE, SHINE, FOR THY LIGHT IS COME...
WHEN THOU PASSEST THROUGH THE WATERS, I WILL BE WITH THEE...
FEAR YE NOT, NEITHER BE AFRAID... I WILL NOT CHIDE FOREVER, NOR
WILL I ALWAYS BE WROTH... I WILL MAKE THY TRANSGRESSION TO VANISH
LIKE A MIST... I WILL TURN YOUR CAPTIVITY AND GATHER YOU FROM

ALL THE NATIONS... BEHOLD, I WILL OPEN YOUR GRAVES AND CAUSE YOU TO COME UP OUT OF YOUR GRAVES, O MY PEOPLE... FEAR NOT..."

BUT STRONG AS WAS THEIR LOVE FOR THEIR PEOPLE, STRONGER WAS THEIR LOVE FOR GOD AND THEIR LOYALTY TO HIS MORAL LAW. GOD'S MORAL LAW COMES FIRST, AND IT PERMITS NO EXEMPTIONS ON THE GROUND OF PATRIOTISM. NOT MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR WRONG BUT MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR -- PERISH! "EXECUTE JUSTICE IN THE MORNING AND DELIVER THE SPOILED OUT OF THE HAND OF THE OPPRESSOR, LEST MY FURY GO FORTH LIKE FIRE AND BURN THAT NONE CAN QUENCH IT." THE STATE IS NOT ABOVE THE LAW, NOR IS THE RULER, OR ANY CLASS OF SOCIETY.

MEN FEARED AND HATED THESE PROPHETS. MEN ACCEPTED THE FACT OF PROPHECY, BUT THEY PREFERRED THE WELL-BEHAVED PROPHETS, THE PROFESSIONAL "SONS OF THE PROPHETS", WHO KNEW HOW TO WINNOW WITH EVERY WIND AND WHO UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF THEM. IT IS ALL VERY WELL TO BRING MESSAGES FROM GOD, BUT THERE IS, AFTER ALL, SUCH A THING AS TACT AND PROPRIETY!... ONE SHOULD NOT BE A "TROUBLER OF ISRAEL". ONE SHOULD NOT OFFEND THE AUTHORITIES OR CAUSE PEOPLE TO LOSE THEIR CONFIDENCE IN THEIR LAY AND ECCLESIASTICAL SUPERIORS. IT MAY BE ALL RIGHT FOR A RUDE SHEEP-GRAZER AND DRESSER OF TREES LIKE AMOS TO PREACH HIS FANATICAL IDEAS AMONG THE WILD HILL-FOLK OF JUDEA, BUT HE IS SHOCKINGLY OUT OF PLACE AT THE KING'S SANCTUARY AND

THE ROYAL HOUSE AT BETHEL, DECLARED AMAZIAH, THE HIGH PRIEST, WHO KNEW ALL THE PROPRIETIES, WHEN THE NATION CLAMORED FOR WAR, THE PROPHET SHOULD BRING IT INSPIRING MESSAGES OF VICTORY, WHEN THE PEOPLE CROWDED THE COURTS OF THE TEMPLE, BRINGING THEIR GENEROUS OFFERINGS, AND CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUPPORT OF SO MANY DESERVING PRIESTS, ONE SHOULD NOT DERIDE AND INSULT THEM FOR THEIR PAINS AND REMIND THEM, AT SUCH AN INAPPROPRIATE TIME, OF THEIR DIRTY MORAL LIVES. WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO WHEN A HAIRY MAN, OUT OF THE DESERT, GIRT WITH A GIRDLE OF LEATHER ABOUT HIS LOINS, FACES UP TO A KING, A KING, MIND YOU, AND A QUEEN; AND TELLS THEM THAT THE DOGS SHALL LICK THEIR BLOOD, BECAUSE, FORSOOTH, THEY HAD CARRIED THROUGH, IN THE CUSTOMARY MANNER OF ROYALTY, A LITTLE MATTER OF EXPROPRIATING A PIECE OF LAND WHICH BELONGED TO A COMMONER, AND IN THE PROCESS, KILLING ^{that} ~~THE~~ COMMONER.

AND SO THESE PROPHETS, THESE SCOURGES OVER HUMAN SIN AND COMPLACENCY, WERE HATED, PERSECUTED AND SLAIN. THEY DID NOT CARRY MUCH WEIGHT IN THEIR DAY; HERE AND THERE, AT A DECISIVE MOMENT, A PROPHET MIGHT SUCCEED IN AFFECTING THE COURSE OF HIS PEOPLE'S DESTINY, BUT AS A RULE, THEY WERE COMPLETELY IGNORED. THEY WERE NOT, HOWEVER, COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN. THEIR WORDS AND THEIR DEEDS ECHOED DOWN THE AGES. WHEN THEIR WORDS CAME

TRUE, MEN RECALLED THEM AND BEAT THEIR BREASTS IN CONTRITION FOR HAVING "MADE THEIR HEARTS AS AN ADAMANT STONE, SO AS NOT TO HEAR THE TORAH AND THE WORDS WHICH THE LORD OF HOSTS HAD SENT BY HIS SPIRIT BY THE HAND OF THE FORMER PROPHETS."

ARE THERE PROPHETS TODAY? IS THE PROPHETIC TRADITION ALIVE IN THE PRESENT-DAY RELIGIOUS MINISTRY? IF NOT, IS THE MINISTRY TO BE CONDEMNED BECAUSE IT IS NOT PROPHETIC?

THERE ARE PROPHETS TODAY, AND, AS OF OLD, THEY ARE LITTLE HEEDDED AND GREATLY PERSECUTED. OCCASIONALLY THEY ARE FOUND INSIDE THE MINISTRY, MORE OFTEN OUTSIDE. THE TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY IS NOT NECESSARILY A PREPARATION FOR A PROPHETIC ROLE, ANY MORE THAN THE PRIEST OF OLD WAS EXPECTED TO BE A PROPHET. THE PROPHET DID NOT PRESIDE OVER A CONGREGATION, OR OCCUPY A PULPIT, OR INSTRUCT THE YOUNG, OR WORK THROUGH AND WITH AN ORGANIZED FELLOWSHIP OF MEN, ^{or receive a salary} BUT THERE IS MUCH TO BE SAID FOR THE MINISTER WHO IS THE FAITHFUL TEACHER, GUIDE AND PASTOR -- A SHEPHERD NOT TOO FAR AHEAD OF HIS FLOCK. IT IS AN HONORABLE AND INDISPENSABLE PROFESSION IN THE LIFE OF SOCIETY. HE, TOO, DOES GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD -- AND AN IMPORTANT WORK IT IS, BY THEIR SERVICE SUCH MINISTERS ARE TRAINING GENERATIONS OF

MEN TO REACH UP TO THE HIGH MORAL ABSOLUTES WHICH THE PROPHETS SET. It is vital not only to reveal the word of God, but to teach it, and preach it.

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ALL MINISTERS WHO TAKE INTO THEIR PROFESSION THE QUALITY AND SUBSTANCE OF THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE, ^{even} IF NOT HIS UNIQUE EXPERIENCE AND THE OVERWHELMING SENSE OF MISSION -- WHO REMAIN TRUE TO THE IDEAL WHICH THE PROPHETS SET FOR THE PRIEST, TO TEACH THE LAW AND TO DECLARE THE JUDGMENT, THEIR LIPS KEEPING KNOWLEDGE AND MEN SEEKING THE LAW OF THEIR MOUTHS, BELONG TO THE HOLY COVENANT OF AN EVERLASTING PRIESTHOOD.

THOSE MEN, HOWEVER, WHO ARE MORE THAN TEACHERS, ^{pastors} PREACHERS, AND PEDAGOGUES, WHO ARE PRIVILEGED TO SEE THE VISION OF GOD WITH "OPENED EYES", WHO ARE SINGLED OUT FOR PROCLAMATION AND RENEWAL, "TO DESTROY AND TO REBUILD", TO CHALLENGE AND TO ATTACK, AND WHO, AT THE BEHEST OF THEIR VISION, ARE CONTENT TO GIVE THEIR BACK TO THE SMITER, TO REMAIN LONELY AND FRIENDLESS, TO BE HATED AND DESPISED, ASKING FOR NO REWARD BUT THE NEARNESS OF GOD, SEEKING NO HEAVEN BUT THE LIGHT OF ^{God's} ~~HIS~~ COUNTENANCE -- THESE ARE THE ^{true} ~~THE~~ PROPHETS. THEY ARE THE MEN OF MISSION WHO, ~~VENERATING PERSONALITY~~, SET OUT TO CHAMPION THE SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE OF MAN, TO DEFEND THE FUNDAMENTAL EQUALITY OF ALL MEN AND ~~NATIONS~~ UNDER GOD AND TO SUBORDINATE ALL HUMAN AUTHORITY TO THE AUTHORITY OF DIVINE LAW. THEY ARE THE MEN WHO VISION THE PERFECT SOCIETY, EXALTED THROUGH JUSTICE, LOVE, BROTHERHOOD AND PEACE, AND ARE PREPARED TO USE THEIR OWN BLOOD AND TEARS -- NOT THOSE OF OTHER MEN --

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TO CEMENT IT. IT IS BY THE HAND OF SUCH MEN THAT THE LORD BRINGS PEOPLES OUT OF SLAVERY, EVEN AS HE BROUGHT ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT, AND BY ^{sustained} SUCH PROPHETS ARE THEY ~~KEPT~~. SUCH PROPHETS ARE FOUND IN EVERY AGE, A FEW IN NUMBER, AND IN EVERY WALK OF LIFE, AMONG PRIESTS AS WELL AS AMONG LAYMEN. THEY REQUIRE NO ORDINATION. THEY KNOW WHEN THE VOICE SAYS: "WHOM SHALL I SEND AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?" AND THEY ANSWER QUITE SIMPLY, OR AFTER LONG AND TROUBLED HESITATION, "HERE AM I, SEND ME!"

SUCH MEN, THE RABBIS SAID, RECEIVE EACH ONE OF THEM A DROP FROM THE WATERS OF PARADISE...

