

WERE THE PROPHETS SOCIAL REFORMERS WHO WERE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN IMPROVING SOCIAL CONDITIONS?

Pre-exilic prophets not initiators of social reform. Priests are the standard bearers. True, Josiah inquires of Huldah the prophetess concerning the book, and prophets are present in the covenant assembly - but theirs is not the role of actors and executors, let alone initiators. Furthermore, neither Huldah nor the prophets assembled can, with confidence, be counted among those imbued with the ideas of literary prophecy. The message of Huldah bears all the marks of the conventional Torah viewpoint: -----
(Kaufman, p.

The social order of the Hebrew kingdoms being what it was, the prophets in the name of Yahweh rejected outright the form of constituted society, its power and its purposes, just as emphatically as they rejected the form and purposes of the perverted religious cult. . . . The prophets' message concerning society was not evolutionist or reformist but revolutionary. And they were social revolutionaries because they were religious conservatives, seeking to revive the essential ethics and social creativity of historic Yahwism. (Scott, p. 172)

One misunderstanding is the frequent association of the Hebrew prophets with one school or another of economic reform or political theory. The Hebrew prophets knew nothing of socialism, syndicalism, anarchism or any other economic or political "ism". They were, of course, impassioned champions of social justice; they attacked vehemently and bitterly the malefactors of wealth, the abusers of power, the greedy and the unscrupulous of their times. But they did so not by way of advocating one economic formula or another; they had no economic formulae of any kind. If we find a political system implied in their preachments, it is a theocracy. (Cohon, 221)

. . . prophecy was intimately associated with politics from the very first moment it appeared in Israel. (Anderson, 187)Ⓞ

In reaction to the traditional Christian estimate, which tended to deprive the prophets of their distinction as historical individuals, nineteenth-century biblical scholarship gave birth to the image of the prophet as social reformer. With the supernatural element lopped off, this seemed a perfectly tailored substitute, especially amenable to the spirit of the times in which men were striving for their rights against vested economic, political, and social wrong. . . .

Sometimes in their enthusiasm those social champions of Christianity unknowingly transposed the motivations and presuppositions of the prophets into those of liberal humanitarian reformers. While the prophets' affinities with modern reformers are significant the two are often far apart in the form their insights take. ((Gottwald goes on to contrast the reformers with the prophets)). . . The prophets thought not of mass forces of social, economic, and political disintegration or integration, of security and welfare measures, of rehabilitation and reform, but only and always of the realm of personal responsibility before God, of the relentlessly personal and, by that very token, the communal demands of covenant. (Gottwald, 276)

The pith of Hebrew prophecy is not prediction or social reform but the declaration of divine will. (Gottwald, 277)