

Contemporaneous Aspects for the Mission of the Church to be Found in the Prophetic Message

Viorel Cristian Popa¹

Abstract

The paper aims to present some aspects from the distant era of the prophets of the Old Testament that are still relevant in our times. Reading through the books of the Bible that describe the lives and deeds of the prophets of the Old Testament, one can easily observe that they played a fundamental role in preserving monotheism and moral conduct of the chosen people, and this is the fundamental role that the Church must play in the contemporary society that is under such grinding pressure, especially in terms of morality. Many of the problems the prophets took to solving are identical with those of today, and therefore their example is telling and necessary for the pastoral activity of our days. The contemporary of their message transforms them in prophets of today and all days.

Keywords: prophet, mission, justice, cult, contemporary

A careful study of the content of the books of the prophets from the Old Testament makes obvious that the activities of the prophets touched on a vast array of social, moral and religious matters. Even if their approach was one confined to the particular situation of the people of Israel and conditioned by the social realities of the prophetic time, their message still can be brought into contact with the current social issues. That is because our Christians are still confronted with situations and problems that were severely criticized by the prophets almost two millennia ago.

We have to cultivate an increase of interest in the contents of the books of the prophets in order to grasp their contemporary, their true reality for the Christian communities, which are confronted with religious or social situations similar in nature with those found in the biblical Israel of the times of the prophets. In this regard the attitude and the words of the prophets constitute a true source of inspiration and hold real value for the contemporary Christian community in its mission to service.² An especially important part of the social-moral activity of the prophets is their fight for the reestablishment of the Hebrew society on the foundations of law and justice,³ which were disregarded and neglected due to the religious confusion.⁴ Below we highlight some important aspects of prophetic activity for Church's mission:

¹Orthodox Theological Faculty, University of Oradea, 1 University Street, Oradea 410087, Romania. vios77@yahoo.com.

²Mircea Basarab (1979), 428.

³See on the subject Viorel Cristian Popa (2011), 435-441.

⁴Vladimir Prelipcean (1949), 64.

1. The fight against injustice

The corruption of the law and of social relations is typical for the society of the writing prophets, and it constitutes one of the counts of indictment which motivated the prophets to their divine judgment and intervention. The frequency with which this abuse appears - for instance in Amos' writings stands witness for the gravity of the situation in Israel.

And indeed, the prophet reproaches the Israelite society the conversion of the unlawful into the lawful and the total disregard of justice: "Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!" (Amos 5, 7; 6, 12). The same prophet says: "They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth" (Amos 5, 10). So this is the situation in which the people of the North Kingdom found themselves in the times of Amos the prophet. The one who tried to make himself the echo of justice was despised by the aristocracy of that decrepit society. The one who put sincerity at the foundation of his actions was loathed, the rightful ones were oppressed, and the poor were denied access to the places where he could have searched for justice: "For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins, you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate" (Amos 5, 12).

Amos undoubtedly points to concrete cases that were well known to his contemporaries and, to a certain degree, they were typical cases because the listeners of his message do not need other details. It is possible that with his insistence on the loathing of the law's defenders and the disdain for those who speak honestly, Amos indicates the contempt of the wealthy, for those who, in a trial, tried to claim the truth and assumed the role of the righteous. Such an interpretation leads us to the conclusion that the laws were ruthlessly and skillfully maneuvered so that injustice and corrupt interest could prevail.

Transgressing the law represents a turning point in the fall of Israel; we're talking about the moment in which the law can no longer exercise its benevolent role in the lives of men and society as a whole, and the manifestation of justice in the social relations is annihilated.

For some contemporaries of prophet Amos, the law lost its proper meaning, and the role of justice to impartially rule over society was modified and used abusively, to favor the interests of a privileged social group. Justice as an institution which should ensure the enforcement of, and the obedience to the law, became the defender of the interests of the aristocracy. This institution aimed at reinforcing the positions of the wealthy and ensured that all efforts to reinstate the rights of the poor would fail.⁵

In their reproaches, the prophets of the Old Testament show that the discrepancy between just and unjust, between good and bad determines the distinction between wealthy and poor.⁶ The Israelite administrative and legal apparatus thus contributed to the progressive social differentiation, to the consolidation of positions acquired through looting, oppression and injustice and to the deepening poverty of those who were worse off in the society.

The sinful lust to seize as many material goods makes the rulers of the time to embark on more and more unjust acts. The prophets raised vehemently their voices against this state of affairs, and announced heavy punishments against those who intentionally act unjustly: "Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth" (Isaiah 10, 1-3; Micah 2, 1; Habakkuk 2, 9).

⁵Mireca Basarab (1979), 427.

⁶Vladimir Prelipcean (1949), 64.

The prophets understood to fight for the realization of the idea of social justice and for the reinstatement of a prosperous and secure society. This ideal needed to take shape in an existence lived in peace and dignity.⁷ It was thus necessary that "... every man will be seated under his vine and under his fig-tree" as written by Micah (4, 4). Every time the prophets spoke about the future they did nothing more than to call for the people to be responsible, in the present, in the face of God. The responsibility of today is crucial for the future.

2. The calling for doing justice

If the prophets raised their voices vehemently against injustice, they put no less conviction in calling for doing right⁸ and bringing the society back to normal: "Learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" or :„Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed" (Isaiah 1, 17; 56, 1).

We find similar calls to do what is right in the words of prophet Jeremiah: „O house of David! Thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn, with no one to quench it, because of your evil doings" (Jeremiah 21, 12; Jeremiah 22, 3). These words demonstrate the insistence with which the prophet intervenes in solving the major problems of the Israelite society of his time, which shows that what was going on was not at all in compliance with the commandments and the Law of God.

The prophets request everywhere that, in accordance with the divine commandments, governance take form in the spirit of justice. The realization of justice must be a characteristic of a normal social life. Justice is the fundamental aspect that must normalize the relations between men, between man and the community, regardless of the social status. This time, prophet Ezekiel appeals to the kings of Israel to do what is right and to obey God's commandments: "Thus says the Lord God: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and do what is just and right. Cease your evictions of my people, says the Lord God. You shall have honest balances, an honest share, and an honest bath"⁹ (Ezekiel 45, 9-10).

For those who do this, the prophets announce a good life, pleasing in the eyes of God: "... Israel make justice and righteousness, then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord" (Jeremiah 22, 15-16) Here the rightful judgment and justice itself are identical with knowing God, a fundamental aspect for a good personal and public life in Israel, an aspect that a lot of times was marginalized or even forgotten.

3. The justice in connection with love

Prophet Hosea, Amos'contemporary, brings to the fore a new element: unlike Amos, who has a more rigid concept of justice, he sees it in connection with love. This relation generates a true social force. In Hosea's view, mere doing the right thing is not sufficient for social wellbeing. That is why he says: "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love" (Hosea 10, 12).

The prophet calls for love because it sweetens and, at the same time, tames the harshness contained in the concept of righteousness.¹⁰ In his prophecy, Hosea sees God as the all-merciful. God is love, and this divine love is to be found in the good that God bestowed upon His people in the course of its pretty tumultuous history.

⁷Dumitru Abrudan (1983), 147.

⁸Burcuş M. Teodor (1966), 579.

⁹Efa (abth) measureunits for cereals (38, 80 l), bath, measure unit for liquids, (38 l).

¹⁰Vladimir Prelipcean (1949), 64.

The love and the good of God must constitute an impulse, must produce emulation to do good and to love one another in the members of the chosen people. In just a few words, prophet Hosea expresses it: "But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God!" (Hosea 12, 6). There is a strong connection between faith in God and brotherly love. Only where there is brotherly love can thus exist just and peaceful social relations.¹¹

The prophet Micah expresses the same truth in even stronger terms: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6, 8). True piety cannot be mingled with injustice and wickedness: "bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation— I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them" (Isaiah 1, 13).

That's why the prophet Zechariah call for the people to do the right things in the spirit of the truth: "These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render judgments that are true in your gates and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord " (Zechariah 8, 16-17).

4. The return to God

The return of the law and justice in the human relations in connected with the return to God. This is what He asks in the wording of prophet Amos: "Seek the Lord and live... .Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5, 5, 14-15).

Taking into account all of the above, it becomes clear that the idea of social justice and the fight to materialize it is one of the fundamental traits of the prophetic activity. The books of the prophets are especially full of venomous diatribes against those who do injustice. From the content of the prophetic books we see that the source of current injustice is the greedy egoism of some, brought to the point of ferocity. These acts of injustice are by no means the result of some natural law or of fatality.¹² Against this egoism the prophets mobilize an unforgiving vehemence: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!" – cries Isaiah – "Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from my sight; cease evil doings, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow!" (1, 10,16-17).

The difference between the social classes and the contrast between the simple life of the ancestors and that of his contemporaries troubled Amos, the prophet who came from a rural environment. He was used to a life according to the laws his ancestors vowed to obey in every aspect. Equality of people and care for the poor, proclaimed in the Mosaic covenant contrasted with the exploitation of those in need and the foolish accumulation of wealth.¹³ So wide spread was injustice that any attempt to fight against it or to take the side of justice were considered doomed to fail from the outset:¹⁴ "Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time" (Amos 5, 13).

The Christian church, founded on the prophetic message and the teaching of the Savior must stand against injustice, and the position cannot be different than that taken by the one of the prophets. A stern reaction, similar to that of the prophets with regard to the luxury and wealth of their contemporaries, which were determined to live so they could eat, must be that of the Christians of our times in the face of the new forms of luxury and wealth obtained by dishonest means. The church asks its believers to live a rational life, in full conscience of the purpose for which they were created, to avoid injustice and oppression of their fellow men and to roundly condemn all abuse that contradicts the spirit of justice.

¹¹Vladimir Prelipcean (1949), 65.

¹²Dumitru Belu (1957), 849.

¹³Robert R. Wilson (1998), 216.

¹⁴Mircea Basarab (1979), 425.

For the prophets as well as for the Christian church, the world around us in which the prophets as well as the church exert their mission is conceived as a history of divine action. "In the Israelite prophecy, in general, the world appears as the gradual, grand unfolding of the divine plan, revealed from a perspective with dimensions exceeding human conceptions."¹⁵

From this perspective, the Christian Church sees the preaching of the prophets as being inspired by God, and seeks to orient its social activity according to the same point of view. In his/her social behavior, the Christian of today also has, at the core, the belief in one God, the creator of the universe, a just God, that wishes for justice and love to spring out of human interactions.¹⁶ In the words of prophet Jeremiah, God said: "I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (9, 24; Isaiah 22, 17; 32, 17).

In the New Testament, crowning the sayings of the Old Testament prophets, we encounter the Saint Evangelist Mathew and the word of our Savior: "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (6, 33). And the Saint Apostle Paul said it also: „For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Ephesians 5, 9). The relationship between God and believer, if it is honest and true, will be factually reflected in the just relations with his fellow men in his community. In its efforts to bring about righteousness and humane relations between the members of the community, the Christianity of today must see a model in the prophets who have cast for centuries their influence upon our behavior towards men.¹⁷ An American theologian said that the prophetic mission is not merely educational.

The reforms asked for in the prophetic writings are the expression of the influence of the Holy Ghost on history and, from this perspective, have a normative character. At their core, the ideas mirror the divine will to elevate human kind to higher levels of freedom and wellbeing.¹⁸

The shepherds of the new Israel, the Christian priests who received the calling to be the interpreters of the will of God must be driven by a similar consciousness. From this point of view, the priest's mission is a prophetic one, an area of mission in the Church even by aspect of priesthood. The priests have the duty to be fully engaged in solving the problems which confront the sons and daughters of this century. There can be no doubt that the main preoccupation of the shepherds of souls is to serve their spiritual interests. However, the priests have the duty to take interest also in the transitory interests of the believers.¹⁹

Speaking of the emulation of the biblical prophets, we do not talk about trying to match them. We shall not and cannot imitate them fully. The look of these inspired men, their oriental specificity, the conditions in which they fulfilled the mission of their sermon, some aspects of their way of talking all pertain to the times in which they lived. However, we can still take inspiration from these masters of the word, or we can borrow what is of eternal value. The prophetic qualities can never be ignored, such as: the zeal to bring people to obey the godly commandments, the fearful courage, the total engagement in the tumult of daily life and the love for the people, this last one is proof of the love for God, for Whom they served as messengers.²⁰As for the social relations, the sermon of the prophets of the Old Testament shows sympathy and humanism for the poor and oppressed, while raising harsh criticism against the rulers of the time, those who gained wealth illicitly.

¹⁵Carl Friedrich Geyer (1957), 141.

¹⁶Mircea Basarab (1979), 435.

¹⁷Mircea Basarab (1979), 436.

¹⁸Walter Rauschenbusch (1964), 8-9.

¹⁹Ștefan Slevoacă (1980), 12.

²⁰Ștefan Slevoacă (1980), 14.

5. The fight against the formalism from the divine cult

Another aspect of the preaching of the prophets that must be brought in today's light is the fight against dry ritualism, against the formalism in the cult. After Moses received the Law on the Mount of Sinai, that is after the definitive restoration of monotheism in Israel, the essence of religiosity became the formalism of the cultic ceremonies, the offerings that were brought to Yahweh, at first in the Tabernacle, and then on the altars of the Temple of Jerusalem. For instance, if a man or a woman went astray from the prescriptions of the Law, he or she was considered absolved once the smoke of the vegetal or animal products raised to the sky. The mistake relied not only in the exterior form of the cult itself, but the form becomes wretched when it is perpetuated in a life whose whole structure is in stark contrast of the one symbolized by the external form of the cult.²¹ Through its external act, the cult expressed one thing, and a complete different thing was happening in the daily life of the chosen people. The prophets raised their voices exactly against this formal, exterior and cheap type of religiosity. Their attitude remains to this day an example because, sadly, formalism is still manifest in the life and manifestation of contemporary Christianity.

The prophets showed that the praise welcomed by God must have the foundation of a clean heart. Piousness does not become formal, it consists out of morality, righteousness and brotherly love: "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1, 11-12, 15-17; Micah 6, 6-8; Amos 5, 21-22; Hosea 4, 12-13, 16-17; Malachi 1, 10-12, 14; Jeremiah 6, 20). The Prophet Jeremiah reproaches to his contemporaries that, in spite their offerings to God, "They all speak friendly words to their neighbors, but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush" (Jeremiah 9, 8). The conclusion of the prophet demolishes the foundation of formal sacrificial practices: "Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult?" (Jeremiah 11, 15).

Many of those who bring these offerings had their hands stained by their crimes, and far from picking up the right path, were still thinking of committing other crimes. There is good reason for the Prophet Isaiah to speak harshly to them. Said the Lord through the words of the prophet: "Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by memorization" (Isaiah 29, 13). This attitude of the prophets was not a denial of the mosaic cult and of its external forms. On the contrary, the Lord's prophets declared themselves defenders of the spirituality of the cult and of the strict observance of legal prescriptions in cultic matters. Something valid in the times of the prophets and that will stay valid till the end of times is that the forms of the cult must be joined by kindness and the purity of heart. That is why the prophets called for what is essential in faith – knowledge of God and observance of His will.

Speaking about the realities of Israel, the prophet Amos expresses his disapproval with the forms of cult, with the multitude of sacrifices and their institutionalization. The prophet brings to people's attention the exodus, characterized by simple and direct relations between the people and God which were bereft of the formalism that made them so uselessly cumbersome in his time. As a matter of principle, the prophets see the forms of cult practiced by their contemporaries as a wrong evolution determined by the pernicious influence of pagan cults. The protest present in the prophetic message was often interpreted as a religion of the prophets in contradiction with the forms of the cult present in Israel at that time. There seems to be no interest in fulfilling God's will and observing his commandments by participating in this cult, because the engagement of the Israelite in these cultic acts were merely formal.²² Seen in their spoken context, the words of the prophets lead us to recognize that they did not reject any form of cult as a matter of principle, but criticized in general that which their contemporaries got wrong in the notion of the cult, and this was the image they rejected.

²¹The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 3, (1982), 902

²²Ernst Würthwein (1963), 116.

They raised their voices against the conflated ritualism that eliminated the personal relationship between God and the worshipper and that could make way for formalism that would damage the relations between individuals. The Judaic cult was on a wrong path. It had reached a point in which it became even politicized, since sanctuaries were the meeting place of formalism and ritualism of the rich with the intention of bragging about the political system and the social organization of the people.²³ The situation depicted could not be more contemporary. For instance, in present times, during political campaigns, our leaders “are” faithful more than ever, but as soon as they reach their goal they forget God and the Church. This all looks ostensibly like an attempt to fool God and the Church community. That is why in the light of contemporary events, the attitude of the prophets is exemplary.

As for obtaining salvation, the prophets of the Old Testament recognize the inefficacy of the sacrificial and Old Testament prescriptions. They are mere external acts. The struggle to free a guilty conscience remained futile; in the soul of the one bringing a sacrifice, there was no improvement. This was not pleasing the eyes of God. On the contrary, it appeared as an offence to the greatness of the Lord. It was an act that followed only the letter of the Law, but not its spirit.

Although the Law and the ceremonial prescriptions were renewed through the Savior Jesus Christ, and are now life-giving, many Christians from our communities think that observing some pious acts like fasting or lighting candles in the liturgy, the memorial service for the departed, etc. represent the whole and the essence of religious life. Many Christians of nowadays hence resemble closely the old Hebrews in the formalism of their observance of the cult by following just the external aspects of the sacred cult. In this respect, the words of the prophet Amos (6, 8) or Isaiah (29, 13) are more than current. In things concerning the exterior cult and its interior experience, a re-catechization of our believers is deemed necessary. Many of them attend the holy service simply because that’s what their ancestor have done, without knowing the symbolism and the realities presented in the cult, which leads to the absence of interior participation or, in the best case, makes it a peripheral act. Our liturgies are watched as mere plays with two main characters or as lay customs that people learned from others, just as they were perceived by the Jews from the times of Isaiah (29, 13).

Clarification is needed after the example of the prophets and further more of our Savior Jesus Christ who was a fearless opponent of those who were “straining out the gnat, and swallowing the camel”.²⁴ The sacred cult must be put back at the height of its own dignity again. The liturgical universe was sadly threatened in the course of time by the storms outside and within. The crises of the values that affected the last Christian century are widely recognized and overly-analyzed. If most of the authentic values disappeared or fell out of sight, how could one think that the liturgical life, the most fragile and sensitive world, this divine reality descended in the confines of the humane through secret and divine love and purpose, could have remained unaffected and untouched? Moreover, the essential moments in the existence of the world are liturgical, and we need only name two of them: the Old Testament of Sinai and the Eucharistic Supper. Both had the same great enemy, the formalism.

The Saint Apostle Paul said that “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3, 6). This remains true for every field of human existence, but nowhere is it more true than in the liturgical universe.²⁵ In the West as well as in the East, liturgy, in most cases, never crosses the level of mere competent missionary work. It is true that, in the orthodox world, it maintained its form almost without change, and we are proud of the beauty and length of our service. It is a symptom of the fact that the people in the countryside tend to judge a service by its length, but do not live the event in their spirit.²⁶ Formalist religion, the sterile and empty ceremony is the rust that eats away the power of faith. People need guidance and teaching to be able to distinguish what is essential in the acts of piety and what is a duty of secondary importance, layman custom and peripheral act.

²³Mircea Basarab (1979), 429.

²⁴Ștefan Slevoacă (1980), 14.

²⁵Alexander Schmemmann (1992), V.

²⁶Alexander Schmemmann (1992), VI.

The true believers must be kept from committing the sin of the Pharisees which were “whitewashed tombs” that cleaned the outside walls of the bowl and of the cup, but on the inside were full of wickedness and mischief. The rebuke will never be forgotten: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23, 23). Bringing a balance to the two components of the sacred cult, the exterior rituals and the internal experience is necessary.

The interior life is the true domain of the religious. God must be worshiped in “spirit and truth”. It requires the heart of man, and not just his exterior prostration. The ceremonies of our cult are good, are beautiful, are worthwhile to be kept and followed, but first it is required to do the most important aspects of God’s law: justice, purity, love, holiness. Christianity cannot be a caricature as some understand it, reducing it to a mere collection of ascetic rules and cheap rituals. Christianity must be the beacon guiding the steps of the faithful in their everyday life.²⁷ The religious cultic ceremony is never a simple expression of the communion, but a way to keep it alive.²⁸ This can explain the perennial communion in the people of Israel, in spite of them being scattered all across the Earth. Sacrifices and offerings in the cult have their origin in the gifts that, in a broader sense, are nothing else but offerings. The gift becomes true offering through God’s servants, while following of a ceremony, when it is consumed for the Lord, as a sign of complete obedience to Him.²⁹

The offerings are un-imposed gifts. They are the result of natural religious sentiments, innate to human nature. At the core of these material gifts must lay the pure thought and the genuine intention of making good on them. They should help people “increase in virtue”, as John Chrysostom puts it. The pure thought and the good intention makes the offerings worthy in the face of God. Because God, in the act of our giving, appreciates the good will and not the gift per se, which He does not need. Saint Irenaeus said: “Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the offer or that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure, and thus moves God to accept [the offering] as from a friend”.³⁰ Salvation will come through casting off evil from the souls of the faithful. Only then will the good take the place of the evil for kind rule over everything. This is not impossible as long as we know that evil is an accident that came to be because of disobedience and temptation. Only after all the creatures are freed from the egoism nurtured by sin, will the beginning of the times of justice, peace and brotherhood will become apparent.³¹ It is for the coming into being of the age of universal peace, anticipated by the prophets of the Old Testament, of a world of justice, brotherhood and faith in God, free from formalism and oppression that we need Christians of today, we need zealous, dignified priests, priests who will have the courage and calling to “bring back, in the limits of the absolute, the threatened Christian liturgical universe”.³²

6. The great responsibility towards the entire creation

In conclusion, I would like to recall another important missionary aspect of the Church: that of constantly confronting the Christian with his great responsibility towards the entire creation, the responsibility given by God to the first humans immediately after their creation: “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and tame it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1, 28). This dominion does not imply the abusive intervention of man in God’s creation, but rather the responsibility and care of man for the creation of God. This aspect of the mission of the Church is of great importance for this time, in view of the massive deforestation that could bring about the endangerment of desertification of a vast territory. All that as a consequence of the deforestation in those areas. We might ask: what is the connection between this missionary aspect and the times of the prophets? Paradoxically, this aspect is presented by at least one of the prophets. We found ourselves in the period of their turn of the Jews from the Babylonian slavery in the 6th century BC.

²⁷Ștefan Slevoacă (1980), 14.

²⁸Joachim Watch (1997), 52.

²⁹Gheorghe Papuc (1957), 429.

³⁰St. Irenaeus, col.1026.

³¹Dumitru Abrudan (1975), 38.

³²Alexander Schmemmann (1992), V.

The Jews were permitted to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In 536 BC the reconstruction kicks off. The Samaritans offered to help building the temple, but were refused by the Jews, on two grounds:

1. The Samaritans did not suffer with them in the Babylonian slavery
2. They were not pure Jews, but mixed with others, against the prescriptions of the Mosaic law.

So the Samaritans sabotaged the reconstruction works which stretched the time for rebuilding the temple to 15 years. The Jews who came back from exile thought that maybe God does not think this is the right moment to rebuild the temple: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house" (Haggai 1, 2). Instead, the Jews thought of building houses for themselves, nice houses with cedar wood panels inside. Leaving the House of God in ruins brought them God's rebuke: "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (Haggai 1, 4). Another prophet raises the issue of the extension of the desert because of the massive cutting of the forest and the extensive use of wood for the luxury homes of the Jews: "the desert owl and the screech owl shall lodge on its capitals; the owl shall hoot at the window, the raven croak on the threshold; for its cedar work will be laid bare" (Zephaniah 2, 14). It's easy to see how appropriate those words are for the time we live in. The Church has the mission to carefully govern God's creation. It is known that through the fall of man, the whole creation suffered a perversion and that at the end of times it will be reinvigorated (Romans 8, 20-22). This is why we have the responsibility to bring it back to God just as He left it to us. I limited my observations to this aspect, although we know that through abusive intervention in God's creation, some species He created have disappeared. Who will take responsibility in face of God for this behavior? Hard to anticipate, for it is a behavior that lacks any justification.

Conclusion

For the Christians and especially the Christian priests, the life and the message of the Old Testament prophets are more than examples and classic examples that are worth following. Their teaching forms an integral part of our great Judeo-Christian heritage. In his earthly work, our Savior often made reference to the writings of the prophets in proving his messianic mission. Through His coming as Messiah, Christ completes and perfects the message of the prophets. When He started His holy work in Galilee solemnly announcing his messianic program, the Savior cited from the book of Isaiah about the liberation of those enslaved and oppressed: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61 ,1-2; Luke 4, 16-22).

The Christian Church considered itself, from the beginning, the "New Jerusalem" that continued perfecting the revelation of the Old Testament. The Hebrew bible was accepted and integrated in the canon of the holy writings and is the foundation of the teaching of the Church. We can thus say that the spirit of the Judaic religion did not exhaust itself in the times in which it was developed, but became permanent in the Christian experience. This is why the knowledge of the writings of the Old Testament's prophets is a fundamental duty of every Christian. For those who conceive and lead the social and economic affairs of the peoples of the world, the progressive ideas from the books of these inspired men of the Old Testament are an inexhaustible resource of generous ideas, and offer real help in their efforts to find means to improve the lives of the people. Recalling the social history of the prophets' writings, we can only notice their contemporary.

The contemporary of the Old Testament prophetic message is insured by the presence of God's word, a word that speaks to people everywhere and from any time period. The godly word revealed in the Old Testament by men chosen by God remains a never-ending source of dogmatic teachings, moral and religious precepts and canonical attitudes of social importance. The roots of the Christian religion are deeply embedded in the Law, the Prophets and Writings. Even our Lord the Savior Jesus Christ has given authority to the whole Old Testament canon through its public deeds (Luke 24, 27, 44). The revealed divine word is timeless and forever present.

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