

Considering the Case for “Prophetic Ethics”: Surveying Options and Recognizing Obstacles¹

By M. Daniel Carroll R.*

Introduction

Evangelicals have always shown interest in the prophetic books. Because of our commitment to the Bible as the Word of God, we have been very diligent in our study of this literature: we work at uncovering their historical background, some learn Hebrew and work at exegesis to better mine their treasures, and all of us try to learn their theological message in order to communicate and apply that truth. In some circles—especially at a lay, popular level—the fascination with eschatology has generated a variety of detailed scenarios about the future based on some of these prophetic books, particularly Ezekiel and Daniel.

Interest in the prophetic is commendable. At the same time, however, the prophetic books can and should orient us in another important area of our existence and faith, an area which often has been overlooked: social ethics. It is ironic that we as evangelicals, who are committed to a high view of the authority of the Scripture and who are proud of our biblical knowledge, have not given this fundamental part of the prophetic message the attention it deserves. It is time that evangelicals reread the prophetic literature and recognize its contemporary relevance. *Theologically*, in light of our commitment to the Bible, it is inexcusable to ignore this important task. *Missionologically*, it is crucial that we do so in order to be able to reflect better upon our calling and obligations in a fallen world.

Sometimes when evangelicals have entered the public arena to speak out or act on issues, it has been sobering to witness how unprepared we have been to articulate clearly a substantive and sensitive (even sensible!) biblical position. This has repeatedly been the case in Latin America, where I have spent much of my life. While it is true that there has been phenomenal church growth in several countries south of the border, the lack of adequate biblical and theological thinking in the analysis of sociopolitical problems and in the elaboration of viable solutions has been equally evident. Over the last two

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Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

decades there has been a growing desire among Latin American evangelicals to have a more visible profile, but the results thus far have not always been encouraging. One could mention, for example, the controversial presidencies of Efraín Ríos Montt and Jorge Serrano Elías in Guatemala, the manipulation of Peruvian evangelical leaders in 1990 by Alberto Fujimori during his successful election campaign, the consistent inability of evangelicals to offer an appropriate theological orientation during the bloody civil wars that our countries suffered for so many years, and the recent machinations of some evangelical politicians in the Brazilian congress.²

This is not to say that in Latin America evangelicalism has not had a constructive impact on many individuals, families, and the social fabric. Sociological and anthropological studies acknowledge the positive results of conversion and church attendance: the strengthening of marriages, the efforts to improve the educational levels of the younger generation, greater honesty in the workplace, the increased valuing of women, abstinence from alcohol consumption, and a greater willingness to be charitable to the needy.³ Nevertheless, these personal and familial "ethical impulses" rarely are guided by any sort of sustained theological thinking; rather, they are more the product of a vague Christian ethos.

In contrast, North American evangelicals have a long history of sociopolitical thinking and involvement. One wonders, though, how widespread such biblically informed considerations might actually be. In certain sectors of the evangelicalism in the United States there is a strong emphasis on accentuating and marketing the pragmatic and quantifiable at the expense of the reflective. Seminars, conferences, all sorts of publications, and even seminary curricula can seek to reduce the Christian life to a manageable set of easy steps and formulae, or they highlight numerical growth and economic success as signs of divine blessing. Many of these trends may not be of much help in exploring how to live out the ethical implications of the biblical message in an increasingly postmodern and post-Christian world. Not a few churches, groups, and believers prefer the simple, the emotive, and the immediately practical. In its worst manifestations, all of this can lead tragically to a superficiality that celebrates its ignorance.

In our complex context, here and abroad, how might a return to the prophets for ethical guidance help? What might being "prophetic" mean? The following discussion will survey how various movements and thinkers from different parts of the globe have appealed to the prophets. Subsequently, we will mention some possible reasons why evangelicals have not made use of the prophetic literature for ethics.

Prophetic Ethics in Contexts of Injustice

In this section we present six examples of those who have looked to the prophets for ethical insight and inspiration. The first two come from the “Majority” or Two-Thirds World—that is, those parts of the earth that represent the vast preponderance of the human population. One example is drawn from Latin America, the other from Africa. The next four examples represent the thinking of authors from Great Britain and the United States. The problems of each of these contexts, of course, are not the same, but every example exhibits a desire to plumb the prophetic in the face of serious social ills.

The “Majority” (or, Two-Thirds) World

When most think of socially engaged theologies, Liberation Theology comes readily to mind, and it is there that we begin. Latin American Liberation Theology has utilized the Old Testament prophets in two principal ways. On the one hand, liberation theologians and biblical scholars cite prophetic texts to substantiate the “preferential option for the poor” and their critique of unjust social and economic structures. Interestingly, they have not used the same textual method.⁴ For instance, José Porfirio Miranda employed source and tradition criticism to uncover what was for him the essence of the prophetic message: the absolute demand for justice.⁵ Croatto utilized contemporary literary theory to speak of *relecturas* (i.e., re-readings) of the Bible from the perspective of the poor;⁶ on other occasions, redaction criticism has been his tool to contextualize his studies in the book of Isaiah.⁷ Articles in *Revista de interpretación bíblica latinoamericana (RIBLA)*, a journal published in Costa Rica, demonstrate the methodological diversity among liberationists. No matter the textual approach chosen, however, all these biblical efforts are driven by a common cause on behalf of the oppressed.

Second, Liberation Theology has challenged Christian churches and leaders to take up a “prophetic voice.”⁸ To be prophetic, in this view, means denouncing injustice in solidarity with the poor, raising their consciousness about their suffering and the possibility for change, and announcing the hope of an achievable, historical utopia that would bring a new sociopolitical, economic, and cultural order to Latin America. In a recent issue of *Revista latinoamericana de teología* Rafael de Silvate compares the persecution of the prophets in ancient Israel with the killing of six Jesuits in 1989 on the campus of the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador.⁹ He lists several reasons why prophets—both then and now—are rejected: they condemn an idolatrous religion that legitimates the government’s ideology and does not question its

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

injustice, and they announce the ethical demands of the God of Life. Those Jesuits assassinated (martyred) by the Salvadoranean army paid for their convictions with their life:

Over against the frequent accusation that they got what they deserved, that they stuck their nose where they did not belong, that they suffered the consequences of their sin, what the persecution and martyrdom of the prophets does is clarify the significance of their life: a life in communion with the Suffering Servant and, therefore, in communion with God himself and his feelings of solidarity with suffering humankind.¹⁰

For di Sivatte, their sacrifice continues to motivate those who have the courage to take up the prophetic mantle.

This focus on the prophetic also surfaced on the other side of the world, in another context of extreme political tension and social violence. In the Republic of South Africa, to the complexities of oppression was added the poison of racism. To protest apartheid, in 1986 a significant number of Christian leaders signed *The Kairos Document*.¹¹ The document describes the three basic theological options taken by the churches in that country and argues for the need to embrace the third, a “prophetic theology.”

First, there is the “theology of the state.” This theological stance defended the status quo of the apartheid regime on the basis of passages like Romans 13:1-7 and taught that Christian citizens should obey the authorities. It never questioned the inequalities of that society; any civil disobedience was labeled as communist motivated. Second, and in contrast to the first, “Church theology” did admit the unfairness of the system. It sought reconciliation between the warring parties and, accordingly, decried the use of violence by those who opposed apartheid. It failed, however, to recognize the institutional violence perpetuated by government forces; it was unable to appreciate that justice at all levels was a prerequisite for authentic reconciliation, and it naively believed that governmental reform and personal conversion would provide a sufficient solution to the national crisis. “Prophetic theology,” the third option, was different. It underscored the importance of social analysis to better understand the multiple evil mechanisms of the context; it read the Bible for insights to help confront injustice; and it looked to Christian history for models of movements that had brought significant changes to their own situation. South African churches were to be beacons of light in the dark world of apartheid and point people to the kingdom of God.

It is interesting to see how some evaluate all those efforts today. In an article titled “Where Have All the Prophets Gone?” J. G. Strydom lists the things that anti-apartheid prophets had denounced years before, such as political repression, the corruption of the judiciary, lack of equal educational opportunities, structural violence, and religious hypocrisy. Then he contrasts those stirring convictions and brave actions of yesteryear with the deafening silence of those same individuals before similar maladies under the new government.¹² The South African official state of affairs indeed had changed, but much of the social sickness remains. Some of those heroic voices now are compromised by positions of power and comfort; others perhaps thought that with the fall of the white government their mandate had ended. Here we have a lament for the prophetic voice of an earlier time, one that at present lacks moral authority.

Great Britain and the United States

We begin this section with an author from Great Britain. In *Prophecy and Praxis* Robin Gill, professor of ethics at Edinburgh University, seeks to answer the question: Is it possible for the Christian Church to maintain a prophetic voice in society, when its ideas and structures have been so thoroughly influenced by that very same society?¹³ In many ways, he says, the mores and actions of Christians are indistinguishable from those around them. What is more, the Church continues to lose its socio-cultural and political status. These realities complicate the prophetic task, which Gill takes to be the explicit proclamation of the implications of the Christian faith in every sphere of life. Those limitations signify that prophecy in this specific sense will be limited to a few individuals and cannot be the role of the established Church. What does correspond to the Church is permeating society with the general moral values of the faith. This can be an ironic (and often frustrating) undertaking, since the Western world continues to respect these values to some degree, even as it consciously and inexorably marches to a comprehensive secularism. This mission of reminding the populace of these fundamental truths is slow work and requires a long term vision; yet, it is just as important to society’s health as what the prophets must do. In the end, therefore, Gill envisions two kinds of prophetic activity—one individual, the other institutional.

The call to be prophetic is found as well in the United States. Glenn Tinder portrays what he calls the “prophetic stance.”¹⁴ His starting point is John 3:16 (“God so loved the world...”), which in his mind establishes the dignity of each person and God’s solidarity with humankind. These twin notions are the basis of the believer’s political obligations. The prophetic stance understands

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

this, but at the same time is realistic. It is realistic, because it acknowledges the consequences of the Fall: There can be no actions done from totally pure motives, nor can there ever be a perfect society. It is realistic, too, because eschatology relatives everything. In light of a future sovereignly directed by God, all human projects are finite, flawed, and sooner or later must pass away. For Tinder, this stance is individual, not institutional. It is characterized by a close observation of the world and a careful deliberation about the meaning of history. It also understands the importance of patience and civility for responsible service to the community.

The activist and theologian Jim Wallis presents his notion of a "prophetic vision" in his book *The Soul of Politics*.¹⁵ Wallis tries to position himself between what he sees as two extreme Christian tendencies. On the one hand, there are the conservatives, who refuse to show due disquiet for political, racial, and economic injustice; they prefer to limit their concerns to personal spirituality, family issues, and select doctrinal disputes. On the other hand, there are the liberals, who can be naïve in their support of social change and who minimize the need for personal conversion. Each side of the divide could do with renewal.

In the Bible Wallis finds two elements that define the prophetic vocation that could secure personal and social transformation: the courage to proclaim the divine demand for justice and a creative imagination that can offer an alternative vision to the destructive reality in which we live.¹⁶ Key ingredients of the prophetic vision include the "conversion" to compassion for the poor, advocacy for minorities that goes beyond the assimilation agenda of the majority culture, support for the equality of women, ecological sensitivity, and the conviction that the future is not closed and that things can be changed. Wallis believes that individuals and social movements that have this vision are emerging from many cultures and religions.

Our last example of the prophetic comes from Os Guiness' *Prophetic Untimeliness*.¹⁷ By "prophetic untimeliness" Guiness means the ability to discern the times and live faithfully. This skill requires a clear understanding of the profound implications of the Creation and the Fall, which is the biblical foundation for a worldview that allows one to be both for and against society. From this perspective, it is possible to stand with integrity against a culture that moves at a crazy pace and that is driven by seductive and self-destructive fads. In their desire to be relevant and popular, Christians can slide too easily into compromising their principles, unaware that there are elements of their faith and the lifestyle demanded by God that can never be negotiated. Guiness's impassioned indictment merits quoting:

In its place [that is, of a properly Christian worldview] a new evangelicalism is arriving in which therapeutic self-concern overshadows knowing God, spirituality displaces theology, end-times escapism crowds out day-to-day discipleship, marketing triumphs over mission, references to opinion polls outweigh reliance on biblical exposition, concerns for power and relevance are more obvious than concern for piety and faithfulness, talk of reinventing the church has replaced prayer for revival, and the characteristic evangelical passion for missionary enterprise is overpowered by the all-consuming drive to sustain the multiple business empires of the booming evangelical subculture.¹⁸

“Resistance thinking” (a term Guiness takes from C. S. Lewis) is what is called for, not uncritical cultural adaptation, conformity, and assimilation. He declares that prophetic untimeliness is distinguished by the deep conviction that it cannot fit in; it is impatient and dissatisfied with the world. Guiness ends with a call to return to the Church’s historical roots and to the transcendent (and timeless) truths of the Christian faith.

One could multiply examples of those who are call for a return to a prophetic vocation or to a prophetic ethics. These voices from around the world and from across the breadth of theological and ecclesiastical persuasions have a profound sense of social malaise and are convinced that a word from God must be heard—both to denounce sin (however that is conceived) and to offer hope of a different future. In the prophets these authors find exemplars of spokespersons, who stood up for the right even in the face of strong opposition, and an ethical message that transcends the frontiers of ancient Israel. It is not our concern to evaluate these various proposals. Rather, the point is to emphasize that the prophetic literature can serve, and is serving, as an important ethical source. The question to which we now turn is why evangelicals in the United States have not made more use of the prophets in their own ethical thinking. We suggest that there are at least two reasons for this neglect.

The Marginalization of the Prophets in Evangelical Ethics

Limiting Old Testament Ethics to the Law

To begin with, when evangelicals go to the Old Testament for ethics, they usually restrict their attention to the Law. For instance, in his work on Old Testament ethics Walter Kaiser declares categorically, “The heart of Old

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

Testament ethics is to be placed squarely on the explicit commands found mainly in the Pentateuch, but to a lesser degree in the Prophets and Wisdom Books."¹⁹ His book is organized around the theme of holiness, which he feels is the key concern of the first five books of the Bible. Chapters are dedicated to analyzing the four prominent collections of laws: the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21), the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:33), the Holiness Code (Lev. 18-20), and Deuteronomy. In several publications Christopher Wright presents his own ideas about how best to use the laws that determined the structure, and hence the morality, of Israelite society.²⁰ His extrapolation of the Law to contemporary society develops along (and here I use his terminology) paradigmatic, typological, and eschatological lines. He has devoted his efforts particularly to the Jubilee (Lev. 25) and the implications of that legislation for today. For both Kaiser and Wright, then, the Law provides the foundation for the ethics of the rest of the Old Testament.

Of course, the Law does play a crucial role in Old Testament ethics. Nevertheless, in the field of Old Testament ethics research, others study the narratives of the Pentateuch (and other parts of the Old Testament) and do not limit themselves to the law codes.²¹ Recent publications take the entire Hebrew canon into consideration.²² For our part, we would want to underscore that, although the Law in some measure does sustain the ethics of the prophets, there is no need to minimize their contribution to a more complete Old Testament ethics.

This tendency to focus almost exclusively on the Law is also evident among those who are more theologians than biblical scholars and cannot be limited to any one school of doctrine. It is most obvious in Reformed thought. Historically, Calvinistic circles have spoken about three uses of the Law: First, the Law is a tutor that leads us to repentance and thus to Christ; second, it can serve as a moral guide to society; and third, the Law reveals the will of God to the believer, who now is empowered by the Spirit to obey it. The second use of the Law presupposes the universal relevance of the Law; its significance, in other words, is not bound by the four walls of the Church.²³ It has been those sociopolitical movements shaped by reformation thinking that have tried to establish quasi-theocratic societies in different parts of the globe. The city-state of Geneva under Calvin and his successors, the rule of Oliver Cromwell in Great Britain in the seventeenth century, the Puritan experiment in the American colonies, the Afrikaner settlement in South Africa, and some of the theological tenets behind the government of Ríos Montt in Guatemala in the early 1980's come to mind as case studies of experiments in implementing the Law in concrete ways in a post-biblical context.

Excluding Prophetic Ethics for Theological Considerations

A second reason why some evangelicals do not appeal to the prophets for ethics is because their theological system either ignores or discourages it. Here we mention three instances of this phenomenon.

There are those on the charismatic wing, who tend to identify prophecy with (and therefore limit discussions to) the supernatural gift of the Early Church and the Pentecostal movement. This kind of discussion of prophecy can range from studies of a more academic sort²⁴ to the more popular, which even provide instructions for developing that gift.²⁵ Their reading of the Old Testament prophets is especially interested in discovering the various ways of receiving revelation and verifying connections between those Old Testament experiences with those of prophets of the New Testament and, ultimately, with prophets today. The realm of social ethics, which is so central to the Old Testament prophets' calling and message, simply is not an important concern of this approach.

Some within premillennialism, especially certain strands of dispensationalism, also exclude the prophets from ethical discourse. In this case, the most fundamental reason is hermeneutics. Classical dispensationalism, for example, makes a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church.²⁶ For many, this is the *sine qua non* of the theological system itself.²⁷ The Law had been revealed to Israel during the Mosaic dispensation, but the Church now lives in the dispensation of grace. According to this scheme, the Law, as the law code of an ancient theocracy, no longer has direct bearing on the life of the believer, the Church, or the broader society, even though particular laws may suggest moral principles that are applicable.²⁸ The contemporary relevance of the prophetic books does not extend to social ethics, since they, too, like the Law, deal with the problems of a theocracy of which the Church is not a part. At this juncture, a personal story is apropos. Years ago, as I was getting ready to pursue doctoral studies, a classic dispensationalist asked me what my research topic would be. I explained that my hope was to explore how to utilize the prophets (in particular, the book of Amos) to respond to the social problems of Latin America. His comment was, "The question is not *how* they should be used but rather *if* they can be used dispensationally."²⁹

This attitude does not mean that the prophetic literature is mute, however. At least for some, whatever political significance the prophets might have is related to God's eschatological plan.³⁰ Because of the classic dispensationalist interpretation of the place of Israel in the past and future plan of God, those of this persuasion regularly are firm supporters of the modern state

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

of Israel, a position with obvious implications for electoral politics and foreign policy. This fact has made this brand of dispensationalism the target of criticism from both theological³¹ and socio-historical points of view.³²

A third cause of the neglect of the prophets for ethics among evangelicals in the United States has historical roots and applies to the movement in general. This reluctance can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, to the conflict between fundamentalism and the more liberal wing of the nation's seminaries and denominations. At that time, heated debates centered around the Social Gospel and the sociopolitical responsibilities of Christians. Those of the Social Gospel side did appeal to the prophets and their social critiques.³³ As has been well documented, one of the repercussions of that controversy was what has been called the "Great Reversal," the turning away by more conservative groups from a heritage of social involvement.³⁴ They came to view with suspicion any hint that social action might be part of the task of the Church, which increasingly was narrowed to evangelism. Consequently, the profound ethical significance of the prophetic literature did not (and does not) find a hearing. This stance had repercussions for missions, too, as a more spiritualized conception of Christian mission was carried to other parts of the world by the generation of missionaries spurred on to service by that controversy. The churches that they planted and the theological institutions they founded perpetuated this reticence to engage the context socially, politically, and economically. Evangelical leaders and thinkers today in Latin America and elsewhere, while appreciative of the sacrifices of those pioneer missionaries, decry this theological legacy that disconnected them from the pressing issues of their countries.³⁵

The reasons for ignoring the prophetic literature for ethics within North American evangelicalism are varied. They include focusing on other parts of the Old Testament for ethics and overlooking the ethical material in those books because of certain theological emphases. Historical factors have also played a part. This inattention is out of step with the insights and power to lift a voice before the sins of society that others have gleaned from the prophets.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is modest. I have tried to raise an awareness of the need to go to the prophets for ethics. On the one hand, we have seen how theologians of different persuasions have recognized the contribution of the prophets to ethics. We also have looked briefly at several reasons why evangelicals have failed to do so. It behooves us to return to this key part of the biblical canon to seek guidance for mission today. There is much that we can

learn from others, and there is much more to consider about how to actually analyze the prophetic literature and apply it to the modern world.³⁶ My hope is that these reflections might help spur us on to allow the prophets to speak their word once again in fresh and powerful ways.

¹This article is based on a lecture given at Ashland Theological Seminary in October, 2003, and retains some of the style of that presentation. This was the first of four in a series titled "The Prophets and Christian Social Ethics."

²Note the diverse evaluations by, e.g., David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Florencio Galindo, *El "fenómeno de las sectas" fundamentalistas: La conquista evangélica de América Latina*, sec. edn. (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1994); Emilio Antonio Núñez, "Latin American Evangelicals and Social Responsibility: A Case Study," in *Crisis and Hope in Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective*, ed. idem and W. D. Taylor (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1996), 372-91; Everett Wilson, "Guatemalan Pentecostals: Something of Their Own," in *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, ed. E. L. Cleary and H. W. Stewart-Gambino (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 139-62; René Padilla, "El futuro del cristianismo en América Latina: Perspectivas misionológicas," in *Iglesia, ética y poder*, ed. J. H. Yoder, L. Solano and R. Padilla (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 1998), 62-87; Samuel Escobar, "Elementos para una evaluación de la experiencia política de los evangélicos," *Kairós* 28 (2001): 85-99; Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191-280.

³E.g., Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*; idem and Virginia Garrard-Burnett, eds., *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁴For an introduction to Liberation Theology hermeneutics and biblical study see M. Daniel Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective*, JSOTSup 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 109-21, 312-19; and idem, "Liberation Theology: Latin America," in *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Rogerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 316-29.

⁵José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (trans. J. Eagleton; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974).

⁶J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

⁷ J. Severino Croatto, "Desmesura del poder y destino de los imperios. Exégesis de Isaías 10:5-7^a," *Cuadernos de teología* 8 (1987): 7-16; "Una liturgia fúnebre por la caída del tirano (Isaías 14:4b-23)," *RIBLA* 2 (1988): 59-67; *Isaías 40-55: La liberación es posible* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 1994); *Imaginar el futuro: Estructura y querigma del Tercer Isaías* (Buenos Aires: Lumen, 2001).

⁸ Néstor O. Míguez, "Profecía y proyecto histórico" and Rafael Ávila P., "La profecía en América Latina", in *Misión profética de la Iglesia*, ed. P. Negre Rigor et al (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Tierra Nueva, 1981), 69-83 and 87-103, respectively; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (trans. M. J. O'Connell; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 19-49; Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, Liberation and Theology 3 (trans. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 88-98; Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopia and prophecy," in *Mysterium liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. idem and J. Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 289-328.

⁹ Rafael de Sivatte, "La interpelación de los profetas de ayer y hoy", *Revista latinoamericana de teología* 24 (1991), 253-80.

¹⁰ De Sivatte, 278 (my translation).

¹¹ *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church. A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); cf. John W. deGruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to the Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

¹² J. G. Strydom, "Where Have All the Prophets Gone? The New South Africa and the Silence of the Prophets", *Old Testament Essays* 10, no. 3 (1997), 494-511.

¹³ Robin Gill, *Prophecy and Praxis: The Social Function of the Churches* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981).

¹⁴ Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change* (New York, NY: The New Press; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

¹⁶ Here Wallis appeals to the work of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann on the prophetic imagination.

¹⁷ Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

¹⁸ Guinness, 54.

¹⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

²⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Relevance of the Old Testament for Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).

²¹ Here and in the following note I do not limit myself to evangelical authors. See, e.g., John Barton, *Ethics and the Old Testament* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1998); Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*, Old Testament Studies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000); Mary E. Mills, *Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives on Old Testament Narratives*, Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion & Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

²² Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and the Christian Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991); Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996); John Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, edited and with an Introduction by M. Daniel Carroll R., JSOTSup 405 (London: Continuum - T. T. Clark, 2004).

²³ This championing of the Law for modern society has been especially propounded by theonomy, an extreme position that even those of the Reformed tradition reject.

²⁴ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988); Graham Houston, *Prophecy: A Gift for Today?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989); Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

²⁵ Mike Biddle, *Growing in the Prophetic* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1996); Graham Cooke, *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2003). This tendency would be true in other parts of the world as well. Note, e.g., in Latin America, Bernardo Stamateas, *El don de profecía y el ministerio profético hoy*, Colección Pastoral y Consejería (Barcelona: CLIE, 1998).]

Considering the Case for "Prophetic Ethics"

²⁶ It is essential to distinguish between "classical" or "normative" dispensationalism and "progressive" dispensationalism. The latter does not hold to several of the distinctions of the more traditional school. For an excellent discussion of the historical developments within dispensationalism and the differences between its two principal branches, see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993). Progressive dispensationalism is well aware of the need to rethink the ethical implications of that theological system. Note Blaising and Bock, 284-301.

²⁷ See especially Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995).

²⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know about Social Responsibility* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 39-47; H. Wayne House y Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse. An Analysis of Christian Reconstructionism* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988).

²⁹ My doctoral research was published as *Contexts for Amos*.

³⁰ The significance of eschatology for ethics is a hotly debated topic among all brands of evangelicalism. Note, e.g., Peter Kuzmić, "History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views," in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. B. Nicholls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 135-64; Stephen Williams, "Evangelicals and Eschatology: A Contentious Case", in *Interpreting the Bible: Essays in Honour of David F. Wright*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 291-308; Richard Baukham, "Must Christian Eschatology Be Millennial? A Response to Jürgen Moltmann," in 'The Reader Must Understand': *Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott (Leicester: Paternoster, 1997), 263-77; M. Daniel Carroll R., "The Power of the Future in the Present: Eschatology and Ethics in O'Donovan and Beyond", in *A Royal Priesthood: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. C. Bartholomew, A. Wolters and J. Chaplin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 116-43.

³¹ E.g., Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); C. Marvin Pate and J. Daniel Hays, *Iraq: Babylon of the End-Times?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003).

³² Most recently, Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). This book updates and expands material in an earlier work, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

³³ Note Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1907), 1-43.

³⁴ David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1977). George M. Marsden is a key source here. Note his *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). A landmark critique of the lack of evangelical social concern from within was Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947). Because part of the Social Gospel debate centered on the meaning of the kingdom of God and its possible inauguration, classic dispensationalism had a special interest in the controversy. For an account, see Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 82-104.

³⁵ Part of this criticism has been leveled at the eschatology (esp. of the dispensational variety) of the missionaries, but it is clear that the mindset against social concern cannot be limited to that. It surely was part of the equation, but earlier premillennialism did demonstrate social concern. Marsden's work is clear in this regard (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*). For Latin America, note, e.g., Samuel Escobar, "El reino de Dios, la escatología y la ética social y política en América Latina," in *El reino de Dios y América Latina*, ed. C. R. Padilla (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1975), 127-56; José Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, transl. E. L. Stockwell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 27-51. Non-evangelicals also have been critical of that apolitical eschatology. See Heinrich Schäfer, "El reino de la libertad: Unas consideraciones acerca de la función de la escatología milenarista en los conflictos sociales de Centroamérica," *Pasos* 31 (1990), 11-14; Jorge Pixley, "El final de la historia y la fe popular: El reino milenario de Cristo (Ireneo y el fundamentalismo)," *Pasos* 41 (1997), 11-16. Cf. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigms in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 313-27, 498-510.

³⁶ The succeeding three lectures at Ashland Theological Seminary did offer suggestions and examples drawn from the book of Amos. For my recent publications that deal with prophetic texts and utilize various methodologies, see "The Power of the Future in the Present"; "La ética social de los profetas y su relevancia para América Latina hoy. Parte #2: El aporte del estudio del trasfondo," *Kairós* 33 (2003): 7-29; "La ética social de los profetas y su relevancia para América Latina hoy. Parte #3: La fecundidad de la 'imaginación profética,'" *Kairós* 34 (2004): 7-24; "La ética social de los profetas y su relevancia para América Latina hoy. Parte #4: La contribución de la ética filosófica," *Kairós* 35 (2004): 7-30.