

The Fraud of Bourgeois Christianity: The Prophets and the Economic Doctrine of the Orthodox Church

Matthew Raphael Johnson
Johnstown, PA

Have you ever wondered why the Prophets are rarely read? It is because they were extremely harsh, very “judgmental” in the silly sense, and refused to compromise. They believed in total economic equality, the forgiveness of debts and rejected private property. The prophets would be sent to the loony bin today and without fail called “unChristian.” Their language was violent, their politics firmly social nationalist and saw individualism as a form of polytheism. Why did Christ offer little in political or economic ideas? Because the prophets had already done so.

The Political Theory of the Orthodox Church in the Prophets

In the prophesy of Amos we read,

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent.
They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the poor
as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.
Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.
They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge.
In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines (2:7-8).

Those condemned to eternal punishment are creditors that will not forgive debt. The centralization of power means that they can attract women seeking security in times of dearth. It is both serfdom and prostitution. They control the courts. They are ecumenical and “non-judgmental” in theology since “every altar” is the same to them. Since it is all the same, they have no morals. They mix Yahweh with Assyrian or Babylonian religions when it is convenient. “Convenient” means that which will justify their wealth. These are not 'relics” of a bygone age but the American way of life.

In Hosea 4: 2-3, the same,

There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.
There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds,
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Because of this the land dries up,
and all who live in it waste away the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky
and the fish in the sea are swept away (4: 2-3).

These two passages begin our grasp of what Christian ethics are. The first quote leads to the second. The charging of rents (the broad definition of usury) leads to destruction both in that it calls down the anger of God and also leads to irrational use of resources. The society is doomed either way. God will abandon all who justify acts of injustice. Classes are illegitimate, as are jewelry and other unnecessary things. God will raise up another (Egypt or Assyria) to destroy Israel for this. Every prophetic utterance is like this. Nothing could be

harsher.

What does Hosea mean by “break all bounds?” The natural limits built into creation. Some of these include: Man works for his family, not the state. Man has one wife and is dedicated to her. One obeys their parents because they sacrificed for you. We are permitted only to take only what you need and to leave the rest for the poor and most of all, never profit at another's expense. These limits are rational and found in creation. They are part of natural law since to transgress these as a matter of policy is to destroy the society. Limits are part of natural law and are not arbitrary distinctions.

Lack of faith and love too mean destruction. “Love” in Hebrew is “Ahava.” It has the same root as the verb “to give.” This refers to self sacrifice as well as giving without expecting repayment. Love in this sense is never indulgence, but sacrifice. Moderns define love as some syrupy “romance” at least in part to avoid the fact that it would require them to part with their wealth and the power it brings.

Heresy, adultery (often connected), inequality, buying off judges or bureaucrats, and the desire for gain cannot co-exist with Christianity. The prophets laid this all out. Christ quoted the prophets and used their words. He acted just like them. Their authority is overwhelming, and yet, following them takes work. So they remain ignored. Inspired Scripture, but ignored.

Samuel speaks about the coming abuse of power, both political and economic:

These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day (I Samuel 8:11-18).

This is not a condemnation of monarchy per se, but about the abuse of power and the results of a society without love. Centralization of wealth means centralization of power. As an oligarchy is formed, they require greater modes of symbolic justification and manipulation. Oligarchy cannot rule as such. The above passage is the nature of oligarchy and is more relevant to economic than political elites. In Tyre, for example, the moneyed class had far more power than the royal house. What is the response to such a regime? The prophet Elijah gives a clue:

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. You shall say to him, “Thus says the Lord: Have you killed, and also taken possession?” You shall say to him, “Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood.” (I Kings 21:17–19)

The only sin is to speak diplomatically. Power distorts perception and the holder's

sense of self. Naboth was a poor man facing a state growing in power. Using one's position to extract rents (which this passage deals with) is the essence of an unnatural form of life. To extract rents is to violate the law of proportion, love and the natural limits of offices, objects and life itself. Christ spoke like the prophets. He did not care for convention and openly insulted the elites of his day. He assumed that the view of the prophets was widely known, so there was no point in rehashing it.

Hence, the prophetic books, nothing but the harshest judgments from front to back, are the criterion. The sins usually are inequality, corruption, adultery and fornication, homosexuality, attacks on the family, refusing to raise children properly, trading wares with the Tyre merchant republic, and according to Isaiah, making alliances with foreign powers.

Jesus did not develop a political view; he did not even develop an ethical view. There is very good reason for this: it is because the prophets had already done this. For the most part, it is reasonable to hold that Christ assumed his hearers understood the prophets and intimately knew them and their work. For the most part, the prophets were political and ethical theorists.

They can be reduced to several propositions that are central to how we – modern Christians – are to approach the dominant modernist legal and political order.

1. God alone will provide – political and economic systems, of themselves, are of minor importance. System or ideology cannot bring salvation.
2. Money corrupts. The worst thing that an Israelite can do is hope in the power of money. Money corrupts in that it becomes an idol – it is taken as an end in itself, and is seen as giving security.
3. Moral worth is the utmost demand of Yahweh. Even more than the offerings at the temple. The great prophet Amos writes in a famed passage:

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. . . Ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. (Prophesy of Amos: 5-21-28).

4. Finally, that a basic political and economic equality is a part of the just social order. The prophets seem to imply that money, of itself, is evil, because the distinction between wanting money, wanting to keep money, and believing in money as some sort of idol, while conceptually distinct, are not really distinct in how human beings behave.

Israel is judged for its lack of social justice. It had become an oligarchy that bought the courts and closed off economic life for most. The poor and needy were oppressed and denied justice in the courts (Amos 5:7-15). Debt forced them into slavery (Amos 2:6-7; 8:6). The goods of the poor are confiscated (Amos 5:11) in repayment, and their possessions taken as collateral, which violates the commandment of Exodus 22:25-7 (Amos 2:8). Trade is dishonest, with prices manipulated and unfair weights and measures used (Amos 8:5). In brief, these are various forms of usury or the charging of rents based on political or social access. To avoid these strictures by arguing that “bond servitude” no longer exists is to be knowingly dishonest. Debt servitude is a way of life for most.

Injustice is both the cause and effect of heresy. The withdrawal of divine grace means the cooling of love. Social bonds disappear. Jeremiah states that the just should “Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done...” (Jeremiah 21:12). The modern might conveniently interpret this to refer to crimes, but in fact, it is in reference to usury. To steal from someone is to take his money or lands without good cause. Charging rents is the opposite of a good cause and is the result of oligarchy: the rule of money.

Solomon, in introducing the gods of Tyre into the temple, brought in the social ethics of commercial Tyre. The results were rent-seeking and forced labor. Josiah saw his sons using forced labor and condemned them. A ruler can only be judged in his treatment of the poor. “To rule” is not to make laws (since no such concept existed at the time, laws were discovered, not “made”), but to administer over a ruling class (Jeremiah 22:15–16). The social system – not merely political rule – is the issue. Instead of following the lifestyle of Josiah, they sought “only dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion” (Jeremiah 22:17). “Extortion” is another word for rent.

The prophetic message is part of the Scriptural inheritance because of their stress on justice and a just social order. There is clearly Christian social theory, and it is the prophetic one. The worst thing a Christian can do is go through the idols of the nations and partake of their evil and arbitrary definitions of justice. Conservatism, liberalism, libertarianism, Marxism, materialism, evolutionism and all the other ideologies of the nations exist apart from the prophetic utterances concerning justice. There seems to be no reason to go beyond the fairly detailed political prescriptions of the prophets.

The Old Testament has several polices that are commanded as a matter of doctrine. First, the poor may gather food from any farm after the harvest that has been left behind. There is a tax, levied every third year, that goes to assisting the poor of the realm. The fallow period, that is every seventh year, is totally open only to the poor. Whatever grows in the fallow year from seeds left behind previously belongs to them. Loans and grants without interests are legally required from the wealthy directly to the poor. No interest was ever permitted among brethren as a violation of the law of love. Importantly, all debts are canceled every seven years and even gains in ownership of capital (land, in this case) are brought back to their original family homestead every 49 years (Exodus, 20-23 and Deuteronomy 4-31).

There is no “free market” ideology in Christendom unless it meets with these criteria. Justice, not efficiency, is the main value for production. Economic justice leads to God's presence (that is grace and favor) while injustice leads to his contempt. The prophets are loaded with condemnations of greed, profiteering, bribery and inequality. The problem is that the Israelites imitated the nations around them. They were embarrassed that they were poor in comparison to the people of Tyre, and hence, sought to imitate them. Yet, God says again and again that money and power do not lead to happiness or justice. They always lead to the opposite. The famous Church father Ambrose, the teacher of Augustine, says this:

How far, ye rich, will you carry your insane cupidity? . . . Why do you reject nature's partnership of goods, and claim possession of nature for yourselves? The earth was established to be in common for all, rich and poor; why do ye rich alone arrogate it to yourselves as your rightful property? Nature knows no rich, since she brings forth all men poor. For we are born without clothes and are brought forth without silver or gold. Naked she brings us to the light of day, and in want of food and covering and drink; and naked the earth receives back what she has brought forth, nor can she stretch men's tombs to cover their possessions (*De Nabuthe*

Jezraeltita, ch 1).

There is nothing new here. Modern conservatives have had a tough time explaining this way except to say “the Old Testament is not relevant.” Since Christ has no political ideology, they then can claim that the field is open to their greed. These are dogmas of the church, not hints as to the nature of social justice. This is why the prophets are not read much. Quite often, “patristic Orthodoxy” avoids these passages.

Ambrose's vehement condemnation of private property was identical in the prophets. Nature is given to humanity (or more specifically, to the people of God), not to be used as a mechanism of control, but for the satisfaction of man's limited needs. Silver and gold are not themselves valuable, only the agreement of humanity gives it this value. Israelites (whether Old or New testament, it's all the same people) are not to put their faith in riches. Ambrose writes elsewhere:

You consider it a luxury to lie on ivory beds, and do not consider how much greater a luxury is the earth, that spreads for the poor man beds of grass whereon there is sweet repose and gentle slumber, which he who stretches himself out in a golden bedstead seeks the whole night through and does not find. Oh how much happier does he think you, sleeping while he lies wakeful! I pass over what is much more important—that the righteous man who endures poverty here will enjoy abundance there, and that he who has been heavy-burdened with toil here will have his recompense there, whereas he who has received his good things here cannot hope to have them restored to him there. For poverty saves up its wages for the future, wealth consumes them in the present (*Hexameron*, VI, 8, 52 (MPL, XIV, 279-280)).

It is common to hear the phrase, “money is not bad in itself, only the worship thereof.” This is a cop-out. Some use the phrase “it's the love of money that is condemned.” What is the opposite of love? It must be the contempt for money, or at the very least indifference. Upon hearing that statement uttered by a wealthy man, ask for a few thousand dollars. When he refuses, ask them why.

Seeking after money beyond basic needs is deadly sin, since, beyond those needs there is nothing but pride. To define success as having more money than the average is sinful, since even the average have too much in modern life. Advertisers and media elites create theological opinions today, not the churches. To seek after money as a means for personal security is equally sinful, since God alone is the source of security. Prayer services cannot be accomplished while those involved have money; that money must be given away.

Communion should be denied to those hoarding money beyond their daily needs. The standard is extremely high. There is no difference between the pursuit of money and loving money; one pursues only what one loves and will certainly give away what one is indifferent to. Ambrose writes in the *Hexameron* that wealth is intrinsically evil:

And the reason why he made this his prayer the same passage tells us; for it is enough for a man to have what is sufficient for him. But riches, just as they overload the belly with viands, overload the mind with cares and anxieties. . . . We must, then, avoid and flee from the temptations of the world, so that the poor man may not become desperate nor the rich man insolent. For it is written: "When thou shalt have driven out the nations and shalt begin to enjoy their lands, thou shalt not say: My power and the

might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” So is he who ascribes his riches to his own merit, and therefore, like a man who fancies himself to have already passed his test, knows not his own error, and drags sin after him by a long rope. For if a man will believe that making money is only a matter either of luck or of low cunning, he will have no occasion for self-glorification; for where one of these is concerned there exists no need for labor and no ground for praise; and where cunning is concerned, there exists merely avarice unashamed, which does not understand where to set bounds to the quest of pleasure (Hexaameron, VI, 53 (MPL, XIV, 280)).

This is an excellent summary of Ambrose's ethics. Suddenly, “Patristic Orthodoxy” does not seem all that interesting and the result is such passages are ignored and sexual sins alone are mentioned. The market is a myth. The “self made man” exists because unions have been destroyed, wages are going down and demand for jobs had made workers desperate. Credit has made it possible to live far beyond one's means. Often, if the product is not a necessity, it is bought due to media pressure of social sanction. The ability to respond to demand is not inborn, but comes from experience. Knowledge of the products sold is not innate, but that too comes from education. The regulatory system and macroeconomic system ensures the “self made” man is anything but – he's the product of a social world.

The Book of Hosea and Economic Prostitution

The simplicity of the people and the worship of Yahweh was sullied by external prosperity. This prosperity led to the worship of Baal, and therefore, the introduction of immorality in marriage, politics and religion that served to destroy the happiness of Hosea's time. Prosperity is not a good thing. It destroys. The infidelity of Gomer is paralleled by the infidelity of Israel, but this infidelity has settled agriculture as its cause. Prosperity is a curse.

The Book of Hosea is about loyalty, a word far more useful in this context than the endlessly amorphous “love.” It is about loyalty in that the personal tragedies of Hosea are precisely that which awakens him to the study of prophesy, and to become the only (writing) prophet of the northern kingdom. This book is about adultery, heresy and syncretism, all, according to Hosea and the entire bible tradition, the same thing. Hosea takes Gomer as his wife with the understanding that he will reform her, showing Israel how to also be reformed. None would listen, and Gomer took lovers to the chagrin of her suffering and martyric husband.

This work deals with the period of Israel's life around 746 BC when the infamous Tiglath-Pileser took the throne of Assyria and engaged in a whirlwind of conquest (Smith, 1925: 69). Hence, as the Israelites are falling into immorality and heresy, God has raised a major power that will soon demand tribute from a prostrate Israel. It is the immorality of the Israelite political class that has invited the Assyrians to attack the area. As Israel stands in disunity and riches, the Assyrians stand under the control of a talented war leader. Assyria is the tool of God in bringing Israel to repentance. In chapter two of Hosea, we read:

Yes, their mother has played the harlot; she that conceived them has acted shamefully. “I will go after my lovers,” she said, “who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.” Since she has not known that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, And her abundance of silver, and of gold, which they used for Baal, Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; I will snatch away my wool and my flax, with which she covers her nakedness. So now I will lay bare her shame before the eyes of her lovers, and no one can deliver her

out of my hand. I will bring an end to all her joy, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her solemnities. I will lay waste her vines and fig trees, of which she said, "These are the hire my lovers have given me"; I will turn them into rank growth and wild beasts shall devour them (2:10-14).

Rent is often extracted through the possession of a beautiful body. It is one of the most common forms of exploitation in modern life. Men line up, even hurt each other, for the privilege of being mercilessly exploited by a woman. Temporary access to her body is the only goal. If men wanted friendship and companionship, they'd get a dog. The charging of rents for access to one's body is a severe sin and is part of the sin of usury.

This is one of the most telling passages in the early part of the work. Several things are meant here. The mother playing the harlot brought personal pain to Hosea, but this is also a metaphor for the heresy of the Israelites, who have begun to worship Baal. The Israelites needed to learn agriculture from the Canaanites, and hence, also began to adopt their gods (Smith, 1925: 78).

Israel began to see Baal, the "god of the land" and private ownership, as the real reason for the fertility of the land. But Baal worship was both a cause and an effect of the turning away from the love of God. Baalism was the religion of the rich, the powerful, the "this-worldly" approach to life. Once the Israelites began to develop class ties, a small rich oligarchy and a large proletariat, the worship of Baal was sought to justify this new arrangement. The work of Amos was to condemn this. Hosea sought to show its affects more clearly.

Yahweh says it was he who gave Israel her prosperity, a prosperity that was clearly becoming the downfall of this now divided state. Even worse, Israel at this time was in a state of anarchy, with kings and military rulers following one another in quick succession. The political leadership, infected with paganism and riches, no longer concerned themselves with the common good, and morality was removed from political decisions (Emerson, 1994: 180-181).

Hosea's wife was named Gomer, and was a temple prostitute of the Baal cult (Smith, 1925: 72). Hosea acted with respect to Gomer in identically the same way that God wanted to work with Israel. Hosea then separated himself from her, hoping that she would repent and come back to him. At the same time, God separated himself from Israel, hoping for the same thing. Hence, a time of punishment and abandonment must precede the salvation of Israel. Hosea despairs of this, seeing that Israel would not know help even if it were offered, so estranged from the true faith had they become (Emerson, 1994: 83).

As the passage states above, this time of punishment was had hand, and the humiliation of Israel will come in the form of the Assyrian armies. "For the people of Israel shall remain many days without king or prince, Without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or household idols. Then the people of Israel shall turn back and seek the Lord, their God, and David, their king; They shall come trembling to the Lord and to his bounty, in the last days." (Hosea 3: 4-5).

Hosea writes in God's name in Chapter 8:

They made kings, but not by my authority; they established princes, but without my approval. With their silver and gold they made idols for themselves, to their own destruction. Cast away your calf, O Samaria! my wrath is kindled against them; How long will they be unable to attain innocence in Israel? The work of an artisan no god at all, Destined for the

flames-- such is the calf of Samaria! When they sow the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind; The stalk of grain that forms no ear can yield no flour; Even if it could, strangers would swallow it. Israel is swallowed up; he is now among the nations a thing of no value. They went up to Assyria-- a wild ass off on its own-- Ephraim bargained for lovers. Even though they bargain with the nations, I will now gather an army; King and princes shall shortly succumb under the burden (Hosea 8: 5-10)

Now, not only has the state separated itself from Yahweh, but the priests have as well. Hence, both politics and religion have been divorced from morality and truth, and crass self interest has taken over. But this is at the same time the very essence of immorality and paganism – prosperity without purpose, politics without principle, and life without meaning. Truth no longer exists, and hence, syncretism and ecumenism have taken over, bringing in the gods of Canaan and Assyria right into the worship of what they think if Yahweh. This is ignorance of the truth, the law and the tradition (Emerson, 1994: 192).

Hosea holds that the turning away from Yahweh has resulted in the following forms of corruption. Trust has been removed from human relations. All that is left is power. The priests have removed themselves from the service of God, and sought the protection of Baal, the god(s) of power and property. The politics not only of Israel, but the entire area of Palestine have sought only self-interest, and hence, the petty squabbling has left the area completely open to Assyrian intervention (Emerson, 1994: 185). religion has been divorced from morality and has become an empty ritualism. There is no content other than a syncretistic and ecumenical approach to doctrine, where the gods of the foreigners have an equal claim to loyalty than the God that brought them out of Egypt. There is no moral sense in the land, and hence, the work of Hosea is one of endless frustration, both in terms of the unrepentant Gomer and the unrepentant Israel. They do not know enough about their ancestral religion to offer any resistance to the new “gods.” Assyria, then, becomes God's form of punishment.

The inhabitants of Samaria fear for the calf of Beth-aven; The people mourn for it and its priests wail over it, because the glory has departed from it. It too shall be carried to Assyria, as an offering to the great king. Ephraim shall be taken into captivity, Israel be shamed by his schemes. The king of Samaria shall disappear, like foam upon the waters. The high places of Aven shall be destroyed, the sin of Israel; thorns and thistles shall overgrow their altars. Then they shall cry out to the mountains, “Cover us!” and to the hills, “Fall upon us!” Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel. There they took their stand; war was not to reach them in Gibeah (Hosea 10: 6-9).

The real issue is the relation between prosperity to loyalty and love. It is a strange concept that the very prosperity that God has given to Israel is precisely the cause of their undoing. It is a form of pedagogy from God to man, showing them by example. But at this time, the Israelites do not understand he examples. Heresy has hardened into immorality that cannot be broken except by the armies of the Assyrians. The harsh punishment delineated in the quotation above is the only way that the people can smash the idols and go back to the image-less worship of the One God.

The people seek the support of Baal to justify their wealth, but do not see that it is a violation of the singular rule of God. Yahweh is still worshiped, but in a form that

would have been unrecognizable to the ancestors of this wretched generation (Jordan, 1902: 99). “I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; Yet, though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer” (Hosea 11:4).

H.G. May (1932) postulates that the typical fertility rituals center around the dying and rising god each year. This is true enough, but May holds that it is this metaphor that Hosea uses to speak of Israel. This is a time of Israel's death, both in terms of morality and the literal sense, as the Assyrian invasion is soon to come. But God does not abandon his children, though he does punish them. The irony of the worship of Baal will fall on the heads of Israel as God himself uses this imagery to punish Israel, then to raise her up after the punishment, severe though it is, brings the Israelites back to their senses (May, 1932: 76).

This also strongly suggests that the real purpose of Hosea in marrying Gomer is to reform her as—among other things—an object lesson to the Israelites of his time. The prostitution is connected with the heresy and ecumenism of the priestly class, but disaster can be averted if they were to reform their ways. It seems clear that the Israelite were not necessary aware that they were heretics, but that only Baal was an inferior God to the inaccessible Yahweh, one interested in more “practical” things such as farm management and the money economy. The entire purpose here is to show that heresy is a function of the money economy, an economy that sees no morality except in what can be bought. Hence, institutions such as marriage or temple worship also partake of the same Bohemian spirit.

What is so striking about the book of Hosea is brought out in some detail in Hirschfeld's (1928) treatment of Hosea's marriages. He holds that the idea of idolatry is connected intimately with the concept of unchastity. In other words, the central conception of the Canaanite fertility cults were the prostitutes and the orgies, all of which was meant to symbolize the fertility of the land as connected with human fertility and sexuality (Hirschfeld, 1928: 276).

What also should be noted is that the dying and rising God, identical in nearly all traditions of the area, is not actually a religion or form of worship in that it is not transcendent. This idea of transcendence is what made Israel unique in the region and provided her with her reason for being. The “religion” of the Baalim is nothing other than a mystification and fetishization of the normal and natural movement of the seasons. It has nothing to do with the transcendent, which itself, has nothing to do with the concerns of the money economy or international politics. Israel saw that the prosperity of the Canaanites and the unity of the Assyrians came with some form of pagan fetishization, and naturally, the ruling classes sought to imitate this surface prosperity.

For O.R. Sellers (1925), the question of the motives of Hosea for his prophesy and his marriage are brought out. He holds that Hosea married Gomer for one of three reasons: 1) To make an object lesson out of her. She was a prostitute, and Hosea knew this. Realizing she would be unfaithful, Hosea married her with the idea of showing Israel her sins. 2) That Hosea married her with the idea that she will be reformed, which itself is another object lesson, one with a happier ending. 3) That Hosea married Gomer because he truly loved her, and hence, had no sense of prophetic or symbolic purposes behind the marriage (Sellers, 1925: 245).

It seems that Sellers lands on the first alternative: Hosea had the desire, for the sake of the reformation of Israel, to make of himself a martyr, not merely by setting himself up to be hurt (we can assume he had a strong physical attraction to her), but by placing himself in the position to become an unpopular gadfly. Nevertheless, this paper

holds that the second option makes the most sense. Hosea writes:

I am the Lord, your God, since the land of Egypt; You know no God besides me, and there is no savior but me. I fed you in the desert, in the torrid land. They ate their fill; when filled, they became proud of heart and forgot me. Therefore, I will be like a lion to them, like a panther by the road I will keep watch. I will attack them like a bear robbed of its young, and tear their hearts from their breasts; I will devour them on the spot like a lion, as though a wild beast were to rend them. Your destruction, O Israel! who is there to help you? Where now is your king, that he may rescue you in all your cities? And your rulers, of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? (Hosea 13: 4-10)

This passage, to the extent that there is a clear parallelism between Hosea and Yahweh, strongly suggests that Hosea is clearly hurt. Hosea has fallen in love with a woman who was quite a risky emotional investment. He thought he can save her, and was led to a life of pain due to her adultery, and having children with her lovers. It seems that if the motive was to deliberately set himself up for adultery was present, the hurt would have had to be feigned, since he would have known the consequences in advance. But the sheer anger of Hosea, and the God who is parallel to this pain, strongly suggests that he really wanted to save her, to make an object lesson of her to the rest of Israel. It failed, and hence, like God bringing the Assyrians, Hosea needed to resort to harsher punishments.

The message of Hosea is the following: heresy and syncretism are identical to the loss of morality and moral unity in the face of foreign and domestic intrigue. Morality is the basis of national survival, and morality, in turn, is based on the true worship of God. Paganism is the religion of power, of the will of the stronger, and hence, is adopted whenever classes come to the fore. Often, Amos is read along with Hosea, since they both fought the same enemy, though with different foci. Hence, there is close parallel between the development of national wealth and settled agriculture with the reversion to paganism and sexual immorality. Prosperity is a curse and not a blessing. Prosperity is the development of classes and class prejudices. The law of Moses countenances no such invitations to disunity.

Amos and the Sins of Jeroboam

Outright denial of the inspiration of the "violent and intolerant" Old Testament is common among the modernist semi-Orthodox. The Book of Amos is a powerful work of prophesy not only in condemnation of Israel in his day, but a prediction for the same evils that will create chaos in Christ's Church, that of the Orthodox communion.

King Jeroboam of Israel reigned from 786 to 746 BC. Like most Israelite or Judean kings of the era, they were more concerned with profitable trading relationships and military alliances than with the worship of the One God. The reality is, then and now, that such military or economic relationships actually mandate the public acceptance of the gods and traditions of the trading or military partner. Thus, over time, Israel was inundated with foreign gods. The prophets, or rather their necessity, were the result.

The kings of Israel were rather "reasonable" people, concerned with money and national security, and armed with the belief that God certainly is not concerned with such minor details. But issues of national security, so important to Ahaz or Jeroboam, derived from the fall of Israel from the City of God, the community called and created by God, to the city of Man, or the city of chaos, the lower order of nature and power, ruled over by Baal and

Asteroth. Profitable trade led immediately to concerns of national security, hence, the second reason for the prophets, the rejection of egalitarianism for the Israelites and the acceptance of a “realistic” quasi-capitalist order modeled after the Phoenicians.

The Old Testament requires a family based, egalitarian order, not a hierarchy of wealth or aristocratic power. This is the basic social order of Christianity, and most certainly, is another powerful reason why the old law is rarely dealt with in Orthodox circles. Once Israel fell from grace and became just another minor empire, major inequalities existed among people, something taken as merely “realistic” by the ruling classes. But as always, such inequalities continued to feed to the unending quest for money and security, a state which inevitably leads to the paganization of the society. Hence, the prophets are clear: The acceptance of inequality among Israelites is the first step on the slippery slope to evolutionism and paganism.

As far as Amos, and later, Isaiah, were concerned, Israel was lost, fallen from grace. By Isaiah's time, Israel barely existed, as the Assyrians largely destroyed her cities, and repopulated them with their own citizens, including many Arabs. Israelite identity remained solely in the hands of a handful of motivated families and brotherhoods, largely supported by the remaining priests, but some were left without. It is almost too obvious to create parallels with aspects of Orthodox history, including our present day.

Here we see something that recurs in Old Testament history: groups of elites, whether religious or political, forgetting about Yahweh, or, more accurately, taking his patience for granted, and, in their “realistic” seeking for political support or lucrative trade ventures, oversee the moral disintegration of the covenant society, whose sole successor is the Orthodox Church.

Prophets and other righteous arise and loudly, indeed, “unreasonably” condemn such excesses, and speak of God’s wrath and anger on such leadership. The prophets are banished, often killed, labeled and socially branded as outcasts and “fanatics” as a result. Small communities remain, and are called, at different times, either the “remnant of Israel,” or, what can mean the same thing, the “seed of rebuilding.”

The point of the parable of the vines in the early part of Isaiah is precisely an allegorical recounting of this process. The Church grows large and prosperous, her ministers, whether political or ecclesiastical, take this for granted, and soon, the crash comes. But the crashes, such as the Assyrians in Isaiah's time, or the Russian raskol, Arianism, the “Turkokratia” in the Balkans, the Mongols, divisions among the Old Calendarists and Ukrainians, the Marxists, the Modernists and Masons, the ecumenists, the calendar split etc., do not exist merely as a punishment for the proverbial “sins of Jeroboam,” but to prepare the ground for regrouping and rebuilding. These crashes pull the Orthodox from seeking solace in institutions and social dominance and thus turn (literally, to convert) their eyes to heaven.

Jeremiah says, “Behold, I will cast away far off the inhabitants of the Israelite land at this time: I will afflict them, so they will be found” (Jer 10:18). Orthodox are not supposed to be “socially dominant,” or our faith turned to “institutions” or the “right synod.” The Orthodox are a remnant, they live in the City of God, which, by its very definition, exists outside of the context and matrix of fallen nature and political power, ecclesiastical or otherwise.

When the Church functions in the lower realm of power, money and social station, schisms occur. When the Church becomes a socially dominant institution, she takes God’s mercy for granted. The Church becomes mere social ritual, begins to take institutions as ends in themselves, worships perfunctorily, and becomes comfortable—the worst of curses. God has always condemned such behavior and has “shocked” the Church into positions of secondary importance so the faith turns to God, not to institutions, states, governments or armies. This is the point of persecutions: the vines of Isaiah are pruned.

The grapes are sour, and sometimes do not grow at all. Hence, things must change: the soil is exhausted, or the vines have not been pruned back enough. Sometimes, the leadership/husbandmen is/are incompetent. Therefore, they are pruned and thrust into the fire. Isaiah spends a great deal of time using this allegory, and Orthodox people, who alone have been given the Old Testament, need to take it seriously. Today, the vines are being pruned again.

If one strips away the ritualism, the incense and vestments from some of the modern believers in “patristic Orthodoxy,” what do we have? An empty shell. A man who does not know God, while being something of an expert on ritual, or Church history or patristics. This is what the prophets is trying to say. Again, Isaiah says in this regard:

For as much as the people approach me with their mouth and with their lips glorify me, but their heart is far from me, and they have feared me with the doctrines of men, I shall perform a miracle with their wise men, wisdom shall perish from their wise men and the understanding of their prudent people shall be hid. (Is 29 13-14)

If all of us were to internalize such things, making such ideas a basic part of our mental vocabulary, one will notice radical changes: Fewer worries, the lifting of depression and anxiety, more intense loves, appreciation of simpler things, separation from sin, a feeling of lightness, and feelings of accomplishment and purpose. These are just a few results of some simple lifestyle changes, changes mandated by the Law of God as manifested in the prophets. Let the OCA parish down the street build its new Church, stuff their smug faces and wear fashionable clothes like Solomon: you, Orthodox man, stay at home (if there are no other options) and read the Gospel and the Psalms in silence. As Isaiah says,

Upon the dark mountain lift ye up a banner, exult the voice, life up the hand, and let the rulers go to the gates. I have commanded by sanctified ones, I have called my strong ones in my wrath, them that rejoice in my glory. The noise of the multitude in the mountains as it were of many people, the noise of the sounds of kings of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts hath given charge to the troops of war (13:2-5).

And again, Isaiah says, “Behold, the day of the Lord shall come, a cruel day, and full of indignation, and of wrath, and fury, to lay the Israelite land desolate, and to destroy the sinners out of it.” (13:9). And Jeremiah continues,

Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion underfoot; they have changed my delightful portion into a desolate wilderness. . . .they have sown wheat and reaped thorns; they have received an inheritance and it shall not profit them; you shall be ashamed of your fruits because of the fierce wrath of the Lord. (Jer 12: 10-13).

Concerning the remnant, the prophet Isaiah says,

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand the second time to possess the remnant of his people, which shall be left from the Assyrians. . .and he shall set up a standard unto the nations, and shall assemble the fugitives of Israel and shall gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four quarters of the earth (11:11-12).

And, still, the prophet's optimism remains: “And it shall come to pass. That God will give thee rest from this labor, from thy vexation, and from bondage. . .thou should take up this parable to the king of Babylon and say: How is now the oppressor come to nothing, the tribute has ceased?” (14:4).

Conclusions

The Prophets were Evangelists and have the Same Authority. They are dogmatically obligatory. For Israel as well as the US, the reversion to paganism is motivated by the desire of justify the domination of the land by a few oligarchs. What needs to be said is that the development of classes is therefore the same as sexual immorality. The settled life is one that God clearly does not want, since this settled life demands that the Canaanites become the teachers of Israel in the ways of property management, while the Assyrians and Egyptians become teachers in the ways of war. Hence God says, “I will again have you live in tents” in Chapter 12. These tents were the guarantee of equality and a dependence on God for sustenance rather than agricultural techniques and technology.

The economic vision of the Church, as the prophets and writers like Ambrose show, is a communal equality. The Christian community uses resources only to assist the poor. When one is no longer poor, any excess must go to feed those who now are poor. Capitalism, conservatism or libertarianism, since they all accept some form of *homo economius*, are sinful ideologies. In fact, all modern ideologies are sinful in that they all agree—at least—that political institutions and economic rationality are a part of justice. They are not.

The rich became rich because they are devious, not intelligent. They manipulate the labor of others in order to dominate money and its distribution. From this, public figures are bribed and the moral code of the society is perverted to justify their greed. The prophets and Church fathers speak of this over and over again – the common good, based on equality and family cohesiveness, are the main sources of Christian justice. Taking from modern ideologies is itself a lack of faith that Christ did not let us know enough through the Scriptures to develop a strong sense of justice. The fact that modern capitalism and banking are far more complex than they were at the commercial city of Tyre is also a cop out. If anything, the modern obsession with production and usury seems to demand that we “opt out” of the system – “come out of Babylon so as to not partake of her sins” is a command, not a cliché to be safely ignored.

Babylon is the materialist, capitalist world of modernity. It is the worship of money and the productive process. If you cop out and say that it is only “the love of money” that is sinful, then please send your excess to my donation button on this site. Otherwise, shut up. Solomon died a heretic. He used forced labor to build the new temple, and brought in foreign gods to seal his diplomatic victories abroad. It only led to the division of the kingdom and eventually, foreign occupation (cf I Kings 11ff). Solomon is the ultimate example of the modern mind: building for pride's sake, pomp, usury and forced labor are all conditions that are rationalized in modernity. Usury is a sin because it is a perversion of nature – material things are not capable of reproduction. Money does not grow of its own accord unless institutions force it to be so. It is forced, at the expense of all else.

Bibliography:

Scriptural Texts taken from the King James Version found here: (<http://biblescripture.net/>)

Harrison, Verna, 1990. Poverty in the Orthodox Tradition. St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, Vol. 34(1), 15-47.

“The Book of Hosea.” 1991. New American Bible. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Emerson, Grace (1994) Prophets and Poets. Abington Press.

Hirschfeld, Hartwig. (1928) “The Marriages of Hosea.” The Journal of the American Oriental Society 48: 276-277

Jordan, W.G. (1902) Prophetic Ideas and Ideals. Revell.

May, H.G. (1932) “The Fertility Cult in Hosea.” The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures

Sellers, O.R. (1925). “Hosea's Motives.” The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 41: 243-247

Smith, JM Powis. (1925) The Prophets and their Times. University of Chicago Press.

Beed, Clive and Cara (2009) Economic Egalitarianism in Pre-monarchical Israel. Faith & Economics 54: 83-105