

**Bourgeois Life and the Orthodox Mind: The Importance of the Prophets (2006),
Voice of Reason – Matthew Raphael Johnson**

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“The Day of Yahweh shall be darkness, not light,” as the prophet Amos says to the unfaithful Israelites who “whored after other/foreign gods.” He, as all the prophets, condemns in harsh terms the smug pseudo-religious of his day who believe themselves to be righteous while behaving like pagans. Zephaniah writes on the same topic, “That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm. . . .for he will make an end, a terrible end.” In other words, those who seek the “coming of Christ” to take them in the “rapture” are in for a surprise; God will destroy them, their ideology and their bourgeois institutions.

The institutions of bourgeois capitalism are incompatible, at their root, with the life of Orthodox Christianity. This is the central point of the prophets for modern times. The substance of “modernism” among the half-converted Orthodox in America is a basic secularism, the reduction of the truths of Orthodoxy to the injunction to “be good,” and a marked refusal to permit the truths of the faith to penetrate the very recesses of life except in the most facile ways. And yet, that too, is incompatible with Orthodoxy. “Goodness” and “holiness” are two different things, often conflicting with one another. St. John the Baptist, Jeremiah and Elijah were holy, but not good by “middle class standards of then and now. They were harsh, judgmental, condemnatory, violent, and uncompromising: illiberal in every degree. They were condemned by their own faithless generation and either exiled, murdered or otherwise maltreated. Orthodox can expect little more, as Christ himself promises.

Few read the Old Testament any more. This is no accident. New Calendar clergy refuse to have anything to do with it, for it brings Christ into his social and religious context, a context, without which, makes nonsense out of Christ’s sayings. Christ, in other words, makes no sense without his Old Testament context, one which he took for granted. The Old Testament is the moral, social, political and economic basis of Christianity, while the New Testament revolves around Christ’s identification with the Father, and the building of the church around this fact. Christ’s mission was based around this identification, but, in

addition, included specific dispensations from the Old Law, but not a rejection of it in its entirety (which, of course, would include the 10 commandments). A firm knowledge of the Old Testament, therefore, is absolutely necessary for an understanding of Christ.

One of the reasons why the semi-converted refuse to read the Old Testament is the prophets, the true models of Orthodox manhood in modern times, differ in every conceivable way from the life of bourgeois modernity. These men were revolutionaries, and refused to accept the continuing compromise between Baalism and Yahwehism. Of course, the ideas behind the fertility rites of Baalism are identical to modernity and its institutions. And it is around this nexus—the idea of Baalism being the manipulation of natural forces for the benefit of the elite—that the prophets wrote and acted. In other words, moderns cannot accept the Old Testament without rejecting their own lifestyle.

The prophets were everything that middle-class modernity condemns. They were loners, uncompromising in their rhetoric, uncaring for their own safety, uncaring about financial or social prestige, in a word, “irrational” by both Baalist and modernist standards. While many in the new calendar parishes of Orthodoxy are satisfied with being “good,” defined exclusively in negative terms, e.g. we are not murderers, counterfeiters, bootleggers, child beaters, and therefore, we are “good,” the true Orthodox struggle for holiness. The True Orthodox, however, must fight to become holy, and to do that, we must always have the example of the inspired prophets in mind, flee from the middle class and its ideology, and struggle in asceticism according to our strength.

Back in 1952, a book was published called *The Relevance of the Prophets*, by R.B.Y. Scott, professor at the United Theological College in Montreal, and it is a book that it worth its weight in gold. This book lays out the social and economic context for the prophets and their condemnation of the Israelite social order, which, ipso facto, is the critical economic vision of Christianity. What is striking is that the context is identical to modern America. He writes,

The unity and integrity of [Israelite] society were strained in the transition from mobility to permanent settlement, from a simple to a more complex culture, from small kinship groups to the large political society comprising many of non-Israelite blood; from a mainly pastoral economy to one predominantly agricultural and commercial, from a property system where possessions were held in common (or in trust) to a system of private ownership where wealth gave power to the individual, and stratified society. Most notable of all was the incompatibility of the ethics of Mosaic Yahwism with the institutions of the Canaanite religion (161).

The institutions of Baalism are perennial, in that they represent nature in its lowest form, a series of "blind" forces to be manipulated by the individual for private profit. This is the basis of modern economics and modern science. As Israel, and modern societies, became settled and wealthy (in the aggregate), the institutions of Baalism became more and more attractive, for they promised only success in their world. As modern Orthodox go from church to the stock broker or lawyer, the Israelite went from his ancestral shrine to that of Baal, asking for favors according to their ruling passion: sex, money, power, reputation. Sometimes, as Scott lays out, the shrine to Yahweh and Baal were identical in content, and almost impossible to differentiate. Sometimes, Baal was called "Yahweh," and Yahweh was worshiped according to Canaanite rites. Because the worship of Baal dealt with fertility issues, the institution of the temple prostitute became important and a source of wealth for the pagan priesthood. Hence the phrase, "whoring after foreign gods," a phrase so common to the prophets. As modernist Orthodox believe that the god of the Catholics and Muslims is the "same" as their god, the identical problem of conceptual confusion exists in the Old Testament, and is roundly condemned by the prophets, who, with a few exceptions, remain unread.

The Baalim, actually a title, meaning "Over-lord" (in the sense of "property owner") and was common to all fertility gods and goddesses, demanded sacrifice. But the meaning, and its modern consequences, have been covered over by academic mystification and pious clerical verbiage. The sacrifice of children existed as a means of securing success, as in America, where abortion is a sacrifice to secure personal success and "career advancement." The technophilia of Baalism itself demands sacrifice, as seen in America, where the advent of the automobile and the superhighway has led to an estimated 1.2 million deaths per year worldwide, about the size of the population of Nebraska. But because of the benefits it brings to the population, this huge sacrifice is tolerated and deemed "unavoidable." In other words, the form of sacrifice has changed from one that was ritualized (as in Canaan), to one that is merely a "part of social life" as in modern America. As the prophet Zephaniah writes, "At that time I will punish those who are at ease. . . and their possessions shall be plunder and their houses a desolation, neither their silver or gold can save them" (1:12-13).

Consistently, the True Israelite (of whom the True Orthodox are direct spiritual descendants) was continually at war, judgmental and uncompromising, against this whoring and perversion of Yahwehism, and its conceptual and material confusion with Baalism. Pure Yahwehism was a nationalist, (basically) egalitarian and communal religion of spiritual cleansing and worship, while Baalism was merely a form of control over nature for personal gain. There was to

be no compromising with this, according to the prophets, no matter what the authorities and “smart money” said about it. Scott writes,

The Canaanite civilization imitated that of the great powers of the Nile valley and Mesopotamia; it was particularly influenced by commercialism of its immediate neighbor Phoenicia. It was an urban centered, power-organized commercial and agricultural society, under despotic monarchies, sustained by the sanctions of a polytheistic nature religion. . . .the prophets quarrel with their social order was that it did not enshrine and sustain the human and social values integral to Yahwism, but on their contrary destroyed them. (166-7)

In modern times, both “power ideologies” liberalism and conservatism, serve the Baalim, in that the “conservatives” attempt to bracket economic justice into the mystification of the “free market” (itself almost a divine force, a sort of Baal in its own right), while the “liberals” seek the destruction of family bonds for the “liberation of the individual,” with abortion and child neglect as its “acceptable sacrifice.” As always, the church, then remains alone, isolated in a heterodox and alien land, while being forced to see most of its clerics and elite go “a-whoring” with some fashionable ideology or party. The parallel here is unmistakable, and the sin is horrid in its implications.

The prophets, as always, did not merely write their condemnations. They, quite literally, to use a modern phrase, “got in the face” of the ruling class and condemned them in the most shocking and sharp terms imaginable. They spat on “middle class prudence” and moderation. They were possessed by the spirit of Yahweh, and were thus motivated to throw all caution by the wayside as a result. What does that mean for us? And why is no one asking? The prophets were hated by the world, or that worship of power, respectability and money so dear to our modern ecumenists at their lavishly funded “conferences” and “seminars.” Amos says (3:10) that what is “respectable” actually turns out to be robbery with violence, speaking of the yuppies of his day. So when this writer discovered (and was the first to report) that the OCA was taking money from corporate America to promote ecumenism, this writer merely sought to imitate the rhetoric of Amos. The people and the ruling classes, chafing at the constant rhetorical harassment of the prophets, either imprisoned or murdered these holy ones. Micah says, “Her [Israel’s] rulers give decision for a bribe, and her priests give instruction at a price, her prophets practice divination for cash.” And likewise Hosea, “There is no truth, no kindness, no knowledge of God in the land [of Israel]; cursing, lying, murder, theft, adultery break out, and crime follows crime.”

Scott writes further,

The monarchy and the royal, establishment, the temple priesthods with all its paraphernalia of their cult services, the cities and palaces which are the outward and visible sign of wealth and power, the judges and the elders who had betrayed their trust, the army boastful of its prowess—each will be struck down in a way appropriate to rebuke its pride. The arrogance of power and possession is most hateful in the eyes of Yahweh, for it is the mark of a spirit of individuals and society which neither fears God or has any regard for man.

Modern Orthodox compartmentalize their lives, and, in a literal sense, it then lacks integrity. Their economic life is separate from their religious life, partially due to self interest, partially due to ignorance of prophetic and ascetic teaching. Ultimately the modernist is a secular individual, but might have a certain respect for the church and its institutions. Orthodoxy is integral in that it unifies all elements of life under the guidance of the Spirit. And it is this disconnect that unifies the criticism of all the prophets. Keep in mind also that there were “official” prophets who took money from the temple treasury, and, of course, merely spoke what the ruling classes wanted to hear. These false prophets were also a major target of the true, as the former regularly “prophesied” success and prosperity for the kingdom, while the true prophets harshly denounced the evils of this proto-capitalist society, claiming that its injustice will destroy it.

There is no substantial difference between the worship of Baal in Israel (regardless of the name the Baal was given), and the disguised sacrifices to “Over-lord” in America. What are the facts here? The prophets denounced economic inequality, or, more accurately, the stratification of society between the poor masses and the wealthy few, and this wealthy few, in order to safeguard their wealth, turned to the fertility cults. In America, the bottom 40% of workers control a mere 0.2% of national wealth, while the top 5% control almost 60% of the national income. The prophets denounced adultery. In America, according to polls in the late 1990s, between 60% and 70% of men cheat on their wives. Interestingly, the *Journal of Family Psychology* in its 2001 offerings, showed “Individuals earning \$75,000 or more per year are more than 1.5 times more likely to have had an affair as those earning less than \$30,000 per year.” In other words, adultery is a pastime of the wealthy. The prophets condemned fornication; in America, a poll from the Pew organization showed only about 35% of Americans believed fornication to be “morally wrong.”

Passion knows no limits, both in the sense that passion is never satisfied, power is only the means for more power, as well as the more psychologically significant notion that passions melt into one another. Passions, or the internal drives to become “a part” of this lower world of particulars, have more similarities than differences. Morally speaking, there is little difference between the passion for

power over labor, power over citizens, and the sexual passion for domination over the opposite sex. For this reason, the Regime finances socially liberal organizations as well as “free market” ones, for the passion for gain in this market differs in no significant manner from the passion for pleasures on, shall we say, a more personal arena. Which means, in prophetic language, that the Regime’s sentence has been pronounced.

Scott writes, in dealing with the distinctions between the worship of God and that of Over-lord in this way: “Yahwism was concerned with the welfare of the people as a whole and with distribution in terms of justice and kindness, while the emphasis on Baalism was upon maximum production and the accumulation of private wealth.” (176) It must be understood, however, given the above, that “the nation is the people, constituted as such by the covenant and characterized by the social ethic ‘written in’ to the covenant.” As true Orthodox, we are the covenant people, therefore, we represent the “remnant” characterized by both Isaiah and Zephaniah as precisely those animated by the words of the prophets, and typified by what the middle classes would call “fanaticism,” or, in more congenial terms, those who refuse to compromise with the Regime because it is the “prudent” thing to do. The remnant is hated by the world, and this hatred can be found in the bourgeois media, webpages and books. We will be harassed and assaulted, most of all by the clergy who seem to be loved by the world, who go from success to success, and are quite comfortable with the “ways of things.” God promises, however, without exception through the entire prophetic corpus, that such people will burn, and their world will be destroyed.

Dr. Scott gives us, without realizing it, a real definition of the ecumenical mentality: “With the conquest of Canaan, Israel confronted in turn the nature worship of Baal temples and the conglomerate civilization of the land. Gradually, a new synthesis was achieved, in which Yahweh was worshiped after the fashion of a Canaanite god, and no longer exclusively” (181). Therefore, there is no real disconnect between the Baalist worship of money and material forces (fetishized into money), and the notion that “we all worship the same God,” the favorite mantra of the Regime. Further, Dr Scott also, again unwillingly, provides the definition of the Old Calendar resistance, again within a prophetic context:

That clarity and emphasis is the result of a fierce struggle against submergence by the nature-religion and civilization of Canaan. The champions of Yahwehism were forced to clarify for themselves and for their people what it was that made Israel’s own religion infinitely superior to the worship of the nature deities, and why religion was indispensable to the nation’s heritage and spiritual mission. (181-2)

The modernist Orthodox, very often, are not conscious hypocrites. They do, however, maintain religion and ethics in separate compartments, and as such, are incapable of distinguishing good from evil. Many New Calendarists (i.e. modernists) truly believe they are worshiping God, and truly want to follow the tradition. It remains however, that only 1 out of a thousand have any idea what this actually entails.

One of the great targets of prophetic wrath was the commercial city of Tyre. Tyre combined the "ethic" of New York, renaissance Florence, Novgorod, and Archer-Daniels-Midland in one neat package. Its god, of course, was a fertility god, one beloved by Satanists today, Moloch (sometimes spelled Melkart), the Devourer of Children. Israel began to consciously imitate this group of talented and technophilic seafarers, leading to the extreme and harsh condemnations by Elijah. Elijah's problem was that, for many, the "simple faithful" could not distinguish Yahweh from Moloch, just as today, the modernist cannot distinguish Yahweh from Allah. Elijah, again in a major slap in the face to middle class prudence, was forced to call down fire from heaven to kill the priests of the Tyranian cult. And it might be noted that the reason why God commanded the Israelites to "kill all in the land" when they first came to Canaan was to completely extirpate the commercial city of the Baalists, hence removing the temptation for the power hungry. Of course, this was not done, and the Israelites began "marrying those who worship foreign gods" both in a physical and spiritual sense. Ezra, of course, in reconstituting the temple many years later, will harshly condemn mixed marriages.

Even a quick reading of the prophetic texts will show that Yahweh demanded that the capitalist, international trading empires did not merely need to be rebuked and "argued with," but were to be wiped out. It was this mentality that led to the worship of money and power, and provided the legal context to live within the "blind" nature of social forces and power. This becomes fetishized into the fertility gods who demand sacrifice for their services. It is very easy for those who take their religion and history for granted to begin to "learn from" the Baalists and begin to imitate their ways. The relative poverty of the Yahweists lead to an insecurity complex, leading, of course, to the ecumenical mentality that finds "common ground" between Yahweh and Moloch. In the case of the Orthodox church, a small and comparatively weak presence in America seek the "acceptance" of the heterodox by being invited to their conferences and seminars, smiling and shaking hands with the well-funded heretics, and "learning from them." Soon, the now fallen Orthodox leadership receive grants from the major corporate financiers of the World Council of Churches, and the "professors of theology" are giving lectures to major theological seminars

worldwide. They have achieved the acceptance they have always desired, though at a price. Christ says of these people, "Beware of the Scribes, who love to walk in long robes, and be saluted in the marketplace, and sit in the first chairs, in the synagogues, and have the highest place at suppers. . ." (Mark, 12:38-39) How did the prophets, therefore, clarify the nature of the worship of God? Scott gives a preliminary answer: "Its object is not the securing of physical vitality, power and protection, but the maintenance of a relationship with God which has as its primary consequence the people's spiritual and moral vitality. It expresses submission to the divine will rather than man's effort to obtain the objects of his desire. . .It does not alter the facts and conditions of man's existence, but it enables him to face them in confidence and hope" (196-7). Which, to be more crude, means that God is not the cosmic vending machine as his devotees like to think of him.

In sum, the modern world is based on the essence of Baalism: the belief in epistemological nominalism, the manipulation of natural forces for personal gain (which, it might be added, includes both magic and science), the justification of radical class stratification, legalism and litigiousness, ecumenical religion, individualism (the necessary consequence of nominalism), "republican government," centralization of political and financial power, the continued sacrifice of lives in the name of "progress," the fetishization of commodities, deceit, secret societies, moral compartmentalization and luxury. This is the Enlightenment at its essence, which means it was merely a "renaissance" of ancient fertility paganism, though fetishized as progress and/or science.