Prophetic Witness

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Week 3

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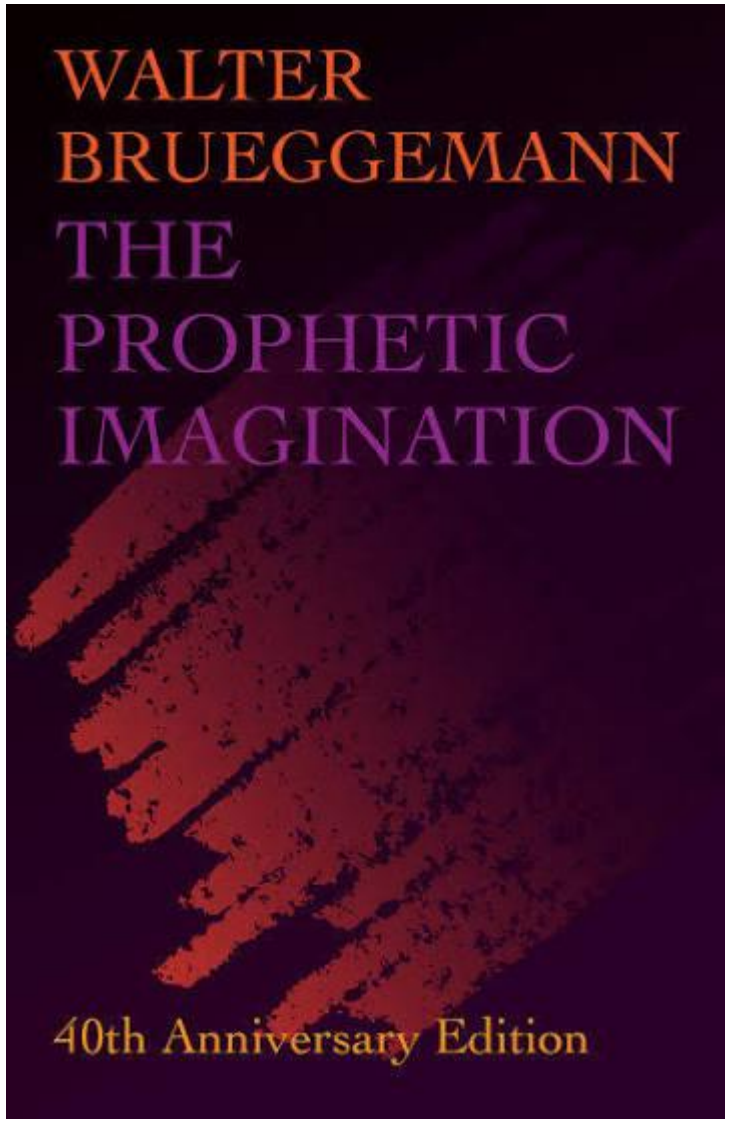

The Alternative Community of Moses

The task of prophetic ministry
is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a
consciousness and perception alternative
to the consciousness and perception
of the dominant culture around us.

… addressing…the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient,
of having our *alternative vocation* co-opted and domesticated. (p.3)

- to *critique* the present ordering of things (liberal tendency)
- to *energize* persons and communities to the promise to which the community of faith may move and to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give (conservative tendency)

Ministry of Moses

- Represents a radical break with the social reality of Pharaoh's Egypt (p.5)

- The newness and radical innovations of Moses and Israel in this period can hardly be overstated… (p.5)
- …*the appearance of a new social reality* is unprecedented. Israel in the 13th century is indeed ex nihilo (out of nothing). And that new social reality drives us to the category of revelation. Israel can only be understood in terms of the new call of God and God's assertion of an alternative social reality. Prophecy is born precisely in that moment when the emergence of social political reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause. Theological cause without social political reality is only of interest to a professional religionist, and social political reality without theological cause need not concern us here. But it is being driven by the one to the other that requires us to speak of and wonder about the call to the prophetic. (p.6)

Breaking with *Triumphalism and Oppression (p.6)

* Triumphalism is an attitude or feeling of victory or superiority such as :
  the attitude that one religious creed is superior to all others
  smug or boastful pride in the success or dominance of one's nation or ideology over others
(See *merriam-webster.com*)

- The radical break of Moses and Israel from imperial reality is a two-dimensional break from both the *religion of static triumphalism* and the *politics of oppression and exploitation*.
- Moses dismantled the religion of static triumphalism by exposing the gods and showing that in fact they had no power and were not gods. Thus, the mythical legitimacy of Pharaoh's social world is destroyed, for it is shown that such a regime appeals to sanctions that in fact do not exist. The mythic claims of the empire are ended by the disclosure of *the alternative religion of the freedom of God*.
- Moses discloses that Yahweh, the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality and is captive to no social perception but acts from his own person toward his own purposes.

Breaking with Triumphalism and Oppression (p.6-7)

- At the same time, Moses dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a *politics of justice and compassion*. The reality emerging out of the exodus is not just a new religion or a new religious idea or a vision of freedom but the emergence of a new social community in history, a community that has historical body, that had to devise laws, patterns of governance and order, norms of right and wrong, and sanctions of accountability.

- The participants in the Exodus found themselves… involved in the intentional formation of a *new social community* to match the vision of *God's freedom*. That new social reality, which is utterly discontinuous with Egypt, lasted in its alternative way for 250 years.

Breaking with Triumphalism and Oppression (p.7)

- The gods of Egypt are the immovable lords of order. They call for, sanction, and legitimate a society of order, which is precisely what Egypt had. In Egypt… there were no revolutions, no breaks for freedom. There were only the necessary political and economic arrangements to provide order, "naturally," the order of Pharaoh. Thus the religion of the static gods is not and never could be disinterested, but inevitably it serves the interests of the people in charge, presiding over the order and benefiting from the order. And the functioning of that society testified to the rightness of the religion because kings did prosper and bricks did get made.
- Moses introduced not just the new free God and not just a message of social liberation. Rather, his work came precisely at the engagement of the *religion of God's freedom* with the *politics of human justice*.

Breaking with Triumphalism and Oppression (p.7-8)

- We are indeed made in the image of some God. And perhaps we have no more important theological investigation than to discern in whose image we have been made. Our sociology is predictably derived from, legitimated by, and reflective of our theology. And if we gather around a static god of order who only guards the interest of the "haves," oppression cannot be far behind. Conversely, if a God is disclosed who is free to come and go, free from and even against the regime, free to hear and even answer slave cries, free from all proper godness as defined by the empire, then it will bear decisively upon sociology because the freedom of God will surface in the brickyards and manifest itself as justice and compassion.

Breaking with Triumphalism and Oppression (p.7-8)

- …it is enough to insist that Moses' paradigm for prophet, carry the alternative in both directions: A religion of God's freedom as alternative to the static imperial religion of order and triumph and a politics of justice and compassion as alternative to the imperial politics of oppression.
- The point that prophetic imagination must ponder is that there is no freedom of God without the politics of justice and compassion, and there is no politics of justice and compassion without a religion of the freedom of God.
- Yahweh Makes possible and requires an alternative theology and an alternative sociology. Prophecy begins in discerning how genuinely alternative Yahweh is.