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AN ANALYSIS OF THE WESTERN CONCEPT OF PROPHECY AS EXEMPLIFIED IN REINHOLD NIEBUHR, MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AND CLARENCE JORDAN

By

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To My Wife

Kathy

who helped in many ways; some can be measured and most cannot.
She patiently typed, encouraged, prodded, assisted,
and made life bearable in this process, and

To my four children

Joshua, Alyssa, Hannah, *and* Micah

who cheered me on and forgave me
when I was busy and could not focus on them.
My family provided a large motivation
to finish writing these pages. Thanks!

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ABSTRACT

Using the sociological methodology which was introduced by Max Weber, particularly his concept of "ideal type," this study identified eight objective criteria and characteristics which can be applied to a case study to determine whether or not that subject is indeed "prophetic." The criteria were identified from Weber's observations of prophets and prophetic tradition from the ancient period, particularly eighth-century Israel and Judah. This "ideal type" is used as a tool to examine the lives of three modern Christian leaders: Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clarence Jordan. The purpose of this analysis is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of prophecy which establish the criteria to qualify someone as a prophet?
2. Is the Western concept of "prophecy" exemplified in the persons and ministries of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan?

When analyzing the person's life and work, an analysis of a subject's life and message can determine whether his life and message meet the criteria of a prophet. There is compelling evidence that significant aspects of classical biblical prophecy were present in the life and work of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan, to various degrees.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to develop a concept of religious typology which is grounded in western civilization and exemplified by three modern religious leaders. A popular usage of the word "prophet" implies that a person predicts the future, however a more comprehensive definition of prophecy is used in this study. Using the sociological methodology which was introduced by Max Weber, particularly his concept of ideal type, this study identified eight objective criteria and characteristics which can be applied to a case study to determine whether or not that subject is indeed "prophetic." The criteria were identified from Weber's observations of prophets and prophetic tradition from the ancient period, primarily eighth-century Israel and Judah. This ideal type is used as a tool to examine the lives of three modern Christian leaders: Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clarence Jordan. The purpose of this analysis is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of prophecy which establish the criteria to qualify someone as a prophet?
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When analyzing the person's life and work, an objective analysis of a subject's life and message can help determine whether his life and message meet the criteria of a prophet. It is evidenced that aspects of classical biblical prophecy were present in the life and work of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan, to various degrees.

This problem is worth studying because one of the continuing strains of the Western religious expression is the prophetic tradition. This tradition has been important from the pre-biblical to contemporary periods. An understanding of the western concept of prophecy is an important aspect of contemporary religious community and its clarification would constitute a significant contribution.

Many of the terms which are used in this study are tools from Weberian methodology and his social theory. Max Weber's life (1864-1920) and work are a significant contribution to the social sciences, and his theories have changed the way twentieth century scholars study religion in particular, and the humanities in general. Max Weber helped us to understand that society can be studied from a scientific viewpoint. It is from this Weberian perspective that western prophecy has been studied.

In order to aid his "value-orientation" methodology, and in order to invigorate the concepts utilized in his method, Weber developed an intellectual tool which he termed the "ideal type." It seems that when Weber is describing ideal type he spends more time telling what it is not than what it is. Weber says it is not a "'theory' or a 'hypothesis,' nor is it a 'description of reality,' an 'ethical imperative,' or an 'average man.'" [1]

> The concept of the ideal type, then, constitutes a "...conceptual construct (*Gedankenbild*) which is neither historical reality nor even the 'true' reality...(but is) formed by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sided emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct." [2]

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[1] Thomas W. Segady, *Values, Neo-Kantianism and the Development of Weberian Methodology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 112.

[2] *Ibid.*

"The ideal type is thus the sum total of concepts which the specialist in the human sciences constructs purely for the purposes of research."[3] The main functions of the ideal type are to provide the means to the researcher to assess objective characteristics of the subject of study, "both in relation to other constructed ideal types, and the comparison of ideal types with empirical reality."[4]

Weber's notion of the ideal type is a usable research tool because the ideal type can be modified or "reconstructed" when in conflict with empirical data and therefore can maintain its utility. In *Ancient Judaism*, however, Weber does not develop an ideal type of an Israelite prophet. Weber seems to make scattered references of prophetic typology but nothing is systematized into a solid concept of an ideal type of an Israelite prophet. Weber discuses "Nebiim" extensively, but they are not limited to Israel in that they are common in most of the ancient Middle Eastern religions. It is an interesting exercise to use Weber's analysis of prophets in *Ancient Judaism* to develop an ideal type of an ancient Israelite prophet.

Perhaps the reason that Weber did not develop an ideal type of an Israelite prophet was that he realized that the tradition of prophecy in the ancient Near East was so diverse and had such a long history that it became relatively difficult to develop such a concept. Weber says:

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[3] Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 60.
[4] Segady, 112-113.

> All the hopeless unclarity in which figures such as Balaam, Samuel, Nathan, also Elijah, today appear to us, derives not only from the fact that here, as usual, the transition of the types was fluid, but from the tendentious expurgation and obfuscation of the old contrasts.[5]

Weber noticed that, historically, the forms of prophecy were changing. "Roeh-ecstasy" was private business in earlier times. I Samuel 9:6,7 recounts how "prophets" were asked private questions, received answers through visions, and were compensated with gifts.

> To be sure, the later tradition considers the man of God and seer particularly as one who announces the will of the god of the covenant to the respective authorities: the elders or the king or to a hero whom he wishes to awaken as a charismatic war-lord. This is already represented by Samuel and Nathan.[6]

Weber notices that even in this public tradition of prophecy, there are several prophetic types. Some heard the "word of God," others saw visions or dreamt dreams.

> Of Hosea, the first prophet (of the settled peasant tribes of the North), it is merely said that the "word of Yahwe" (debar Yahwe) came to him. Amos tells of all sorts of images which Yahwe then interprets for him (1:1, 7:1, 4:7, 9:1). Similar accounts occasionally are still to be found with Jeremiah and, in a somewhat different manner, with Ezekiel. Isaiah by contrast does not see images to be interpreted, but he sees and hears what he shall proclaim or he sees the splendor of God and then receives his commandments. In any case, audition (from god) becomes all important.[7]

The means by which the message was received by the prophet, while important in distinguishing "types," is secondary to the "fact" that the message came from God. Weber noticed another way that prophecy began to change which is related to the message. Prophets of "old" usually delivered messages which were good news or positive. "The 'man of God' henceforth became above all one who communicates the will of the god of the

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[5] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 105-106.

covenant of the holders of political power, . . . regardless of whether the oracle would please the holders of political power or not. In fact, it was given precisely when it was unpleasant."[6]

> However so important did the pattern become that it led to the creation of a special mosaic paradigm of this (Num. 11:26) in Eldad and Medad. In the legendary figure of Elijah, this type reached its climax and at the same time inclined toward the new type of the later scriptural "prophet." Elijah differed from the old "Man of God" in that he addressed his oracles, at least in part, to the politically interested "public" and not alone to the authorities: kings or elders. Elijah is the first specifically "clerical" figure of Israelite history.[9]

According to Weber's analysis, this new "type" of prophet delivered his message, which was usually unpleasant to a figure in power and/or to the public, but in any case, prophecy was not "private" any longer. This study developed criteria for what will be termed "Prophetic Type of Western Religious Tradition." These criteria have been fleshed out from a study of biblical models and applied to biblical case studies, then the ideal type is applied to contemporary Christian leaders.

The major limitations to this paper are that Niebuhr, King, and Jordan are not living. All three however have many writings and speeches, and much bibliographic information. Additionally, there are people who were close to them that are still living and available for interviewing, and interviewing become an important research tool in this project.

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[6] *Ibid.*, 106.
[7] *Ibid.*, 444.
[8] *Ibid.*, 108
[9] *Ibid.*

Another limitation is that many of King's papers have not been published, although they are being published:

> The King Library and Archives houses and preserves more than 2 million documents, including Dr. King's personal papers and materials related to the American Civil Rights Movement. The King Papers Project is a 14- volume scholarly collection of Dr. King's speeches, sermons, and writings. Two volumes have already been published and volume three[10] is scheduled to be published in the coming months.[11]

Additionally, many of these are available at the Martin Luther King collection and archives at Boston University as well as The King Center of Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta.[12] I had no problem finding the King documents I requested.[13] The sheer volume of writing that has been done on Martin Luther King, Jr. is limiting in and of itself. It is hard to know where to begin and what to eliminate. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the bibliographic writings and the writings which described the prophetic aspect of King have been the focus, in addition to his own writings.

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[10] Actually, Dr. Carson has already published the third volume, which the author was able to obtain, and on the day that the Archivist of The King Center, Cynthia Lewis, was interviewed, Carson and his team were there at The King Center photographing and copying documents for the next volume. Carson used to have an office at The King Center, but now works out of Stanford University.

[11] "The King Center," (Atlanta, Georgia, 1999 [cited 1 April 1999]); available at http://members.aol.com/pforpeace/KingCenter; INTERNET, 2.

[12] In the late 80's the King papers and writings were under litigation. A suit was filed by the King estate to bring all of the papers from Boston University to The King Center in Atlanta. The result of the litigation was a ruling in favor of Boston University which meant that they kept the papers and writings which were there already. In general, the earlier papers from King's life, like during his childhood, high school, and college years, are at Boston University. The papers and writings of King's career are housed in Atlanta in The King Center archives. This information was obtained from an interview of Cynthia Lewis, Archivist of The King Center in Atlanta.

[13] Most of the documents I needed had already been published in the first three volumes that were edited by Dr. Carson. All the documents are accessible in The King Center by appointment, and the documents are accessible at Boston University as well.

Most of Jordan's writings, papers, sermons, and correspondence are available in the Koinonia Farm archives, which were very disorganized when they were examined in 1994. Additionally, many of the writings and correspondence have been documented and reproduced in the back of the book on Jordan by Henlee Barnette, *Clarence Jordan: Turning of Dreams Into Deeds.*[14]

To develop a definition of "prophet" or "prophecy" is a huge and endless task. If you simply limit it to the ancient period, it still would be unmanageable. Consequently, this study limited the development of the prophetic type to biblical models, primarily in the eighth-century BCE. Still this a formidable task. This study limited the criteria and their application to the case study's attitudes, issues and behavior which can be measured with relative objectivity. By the very nature of the criteria, however, sometimes the objectivity of these applications is questionable.

"Prophecy" and "prophets" is a popular subject. There are many dissertations, monographs, and books written on this subject. One of the most respected books is done by Joseph Blenkinsopp and entitled *Sage, Priest, and Prophet.* This book is notable because it relies heavily on the Weberian ideal type in its analysis and Blenkinsopp's three essential charcteristics of the prophet are similar to three of the eight criteria identified in this work.. Prophecy is a popular topic of study, however many of the studies that have been done on biblical models have studied a particular prophet (such as Isaiah). One of the most

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[14] Henlee H. Barnette, *Clarence Jordan: Turning of Dreams Into Deeds* (Macon, Georgia: Smythe and Helwys Publishing, 1992).

applicable and closely related piece of previous research was done by Kelvin Tipton Calloway. Calloway's dissertation was entitled *Martin Luther King Jr., Modern Day Prophet: An Ethical Analysis of King's Preaching.*[15] Calloway tries to recapture a biblical understanding of prophecy and apply it to mainline Protestant America, particularly in the preaching of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Calloway also says that it is biblical prophecy that provides a paradigm for modern prophecy, and Calloway argues that King understood prophecy in its biblical sense and tried to apply it in a modern setting. Calloway, however, focuses his study on developing a model for ministry and argues that his study provided a universal model for ministry by seeing King, the prophet, as theologian. While some of his ideas overlap the subject matter of this study, it is not similar to the problem of this dissertation. The nature of this study has attempted to be objective from a sociological standpoint, especially by the use of Weberian methodology.

The primary methodology of this dissertation was critical library research. In addition to traditional library research methods, since I have begun my research, extensive Internet research is now available. I am somewhat traditional, however, and whenever possible, I still like to hold the source in my hand and smell the distinct smell of archives. Internet access of The King Center (Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change) in Atlanta is possible on a limited basis and was used. I also interviewed the archivist of The King Center, Cynthia Lewis. I also have interviewed representatives of

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[15] Kelvin Tipton Calloway, "*Martin Luther King, Jr., Modern Day Prophet: An Ethical Analysis of King's Preaching*" (Ph.D. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1988).

The Clarence Jordan Center at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky. This includes the founder of the Center (originally called *The Clarence Jordan Institute*[16]), Dr. Henlee Barnette[17], and the professor who is now the chairman of the Center, Ben Mitchell.

Additionally, I have done some other interviewing. I have interviewed Millard Fuller who is Founder and Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity and a close associate of Jordan's before his death. I had hoped to interview Jordan's brother, Frank, and King's widow, Coretta Scott King, but it could not be arranged. I have visited KOINONIA farm, seen their videotape, toured the facilities, interviewed the staff, and ate their communal lunch on 1 April 1994. I also listened to audio tapes of sermons preached by King and Jordan.

The scope of the dissertation will be seven chapters outlined in the following way: After this initial introduction of the material and basic statement and explanation of the hypothesis, this study proceeds with the text of the paper.

The first section of the paper discusses a background of the prophetic traditions in the west, including and focusing on Greece and the Fertile Crescent cultures, especially in Palestine. This background is necessary to understand not only the concepts of prophecy but also as a foundation for the rest of the work.

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[16] Henlee Barnette, Professor of Christian Ethics, retired, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, interview by author, 9 April 1999.

[17] As it turns out, Dr. Henlee Barnette was a close associate of Clarence Jordan and knew vast amounts of personal information about him which drastically supplemented the information gathered in library research. Coincidentally, he also aided this paper in regards to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reinhold Niebuhr.

The next section of the paper deals with the "Biblical Prophetic Type." The first chapter of this section discusses Weberian methodology and the definition of the "ideal type." The second chapter of this section uses the criteria for an ideal type based on Weberian methodology and developed an ideal type of a biblical prophet. The next section examines some biblical models of prophecy such as Moses, Isaiah, and Hosea and applies the criteria of an ideal type of biblical prophet to their lives and ministry.

The next chapters of the dissertation discusses three modern case studies. The first case study examines the life and ministry of Reinhold Niebuhr. The second case study examines Martin Luther King. The third case study discusses Clarence Jordan. Each of these three chapters have outlined the aspects of their life and ministry which are relevant to the criteria discussed in the previous section. The last chapter of the dissertation, has developed the argument of the hypothesis which is that in the lives and ministry of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan, there exists the presence of criteria to be called prophetic and makes the assertion that these three are models for contemporary prophetic ministry in various degrees. It is during the last chapter that this study has been able to clearly develop its hypothesis, which is that aspects of classical biblical prophecy were present in the life and work of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan. Prophetic traditions are not limited to the Western traditions of religion, however they are distinctive. It is argued that the lives, messages, and ministries of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan are examples to various degrees of the prophetic tradition that is distinctively Western.

CHAPTER 1

Prophecy Backgrounds

In almost every religion in which a form of a divine being or beings is worshipped by humans as more powerful and more knowledgeable, there are also humans who are regarded as more in contact with these divine being(s) than most ordinary people. Since it is usually perceived that this contact is in some form of supernatural format, these persons are given a kind of special spiritual status in most cultures. Traditions of prophets, prophetesses, shamans, seers, spiritualists, diviners, and holy men and women are quite common in most religions. Traditions of prophecy are quite common in most of the religions of the ancient world, including the ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, and Greek religions. Additionally, it seems that some of these traditions may have influenced each other as the cultures which held them came into contact. The distinctive elements of prophecy in the traditions of ancient Israel can easily be traced to the traditions of prophecy in other areas of the ancient world. This study will attempt to identify criteria of biblical traditions of prophecy, and therefore an understanding of the prophetic traditions which preceded and were in contemporaneous contact with Israelite culture is necessary, and is limited to those prophetic traditions which seemed to influence the ancient Israelite prophetic traditions.

I. "Non-Israelite" Prophetic Traditions

A. "Pre-Israelite" Traditions of Prophecy

One of the popular topics of inquiry in the secondary sources on the subject of Israelite prophecy is the origin of Israelite prophetic tradition(s). To a certain extent, the answer to this is parallel to the answer of how the Israelites developed as a nation. From most accounts and certainly the biblical accounts, the patriarchs came from Mesopotamia and migrated to Canaan [i.e. Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:31)]. There is solid evidence that these patriarchs would have been familiar with a prophetic tradition from this region:

> The evidence from Mesopotamia indicates that prophecy existed in Amorite areas, on the fringes of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Furthermore, the earliest Mesopotamian prophets are attested in the same area and in the same period usually associated with the Israelite patriarchs. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that prophecy may have existed in some Israelite groups during the patriarchal period.[1]

Additionally, Wilson points out that Mesopotamian prophetic traditions were based on divination, omens, dice throwing, extispicy and hepatoscopy. Additionally, there are references to oracular speakers in some of the Mari letters which have resulted in comparisons being made between these figures and biblical prophets:

> Many of these comparisons have been concerned primarily with determining whether or not prophecy of the Israelite variety actually existed in Mari and whether or not there were historical or cultural links between the Mari "prophets" and the later Israelite prophets.[2]

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[1] Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 300.
[2] *Ibid.*, 98-99.

In his comparison, Wilson discusses the APILU/APILTLU, the MUHHU/MUHHUTU, the ASSINNU, and those oracular speakers without a specific title, and he analyzes the social function of the oracular speakers at Mari:

> Oracular speakers at Mari seem to have been peripheral intermediaries within the social structure. Their utterances were intended to bring about changes in the social and religious establishments, particularly by improving the lot of the gods and cults which the intermediaries represented. Most of their messages were innovative and designed to bring about changes in existing conditions. However, some of the speakers from Mari itself were concerned with preserving the social order and maintaining the status quo. Still, it must be assumed that even this quietism was intended to alter existing political policies.[3]

His conclusions about their social function is quite interesting in that it shows quite a commonality between the function of the oracular speakers at Mari and the Israelite prophets, yet Wilson doesn't clearly argue any cultural or historical links to Israelite prophecy. Wilson also cites the Neo-Assyrian MAHHU, RAGGINU, SABRU, and SELUTU and the Akkadian SHULGI and their prophetic traditions in Mesopotamia. It seems probable that the patriarchs would be influenced by these prophetic traditions. Additionally, the biblical account of Abraham's reason for relocation closely parallels the "call" experience which most Israelite prophets experienced.[4] Schultz argues that "no true prophet assumed his ministry as a vocational choice or on his own initiative. A prophet who was not divinely called was a false prophet and consequently came under God's condemnation."[5] This concept of "divine call" seems quite close to what Abraham

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[3] *Ibid.*, 110.

[4] For example, see Isaiah 6:1-9 for the account of Isaiah's "call" experience.

[5] Samuel J. Schultz, *The Prophets Speak* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 23.

(then Abram) experienced which precipitated his leaving Mesopotamia and sojourning to Canaan:

> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
>
> So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
>
> And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.[6]

This kind of experience seems very related to the prophetic tradition which evidently existed in the background of the patriarchs. Wilson later states that it is not unreasonable to suggest that prophecy existed in the lives of the patriarchs. This seems quite understated. It seems very reasonable to argue that the patriarch's Mesopotamian prophetic backgrounds strongly contributed to the flavor of Israelite prophecy once it was established as an independent tradition.

B. Traditions Which Existed During the Formation of Israelite Tradition(s)

In the formative period of the Israelites as a nation, the patriarchs and their descendants came into contact with several different cultures, each of which had its own prophetic traditions. The extent to which these influenced the Israelite tradition(s) is unknown, but it seems reasonable that some influence occurred.

1. Northern Invaders (Sea Peoples)

There seems to be no question in the minds of historians and archeologists that in the Bronze Age a series of invasions occurred throughout most of the known world by a race of "backward, aggressive Dorians."[7] These invasions by the northern invaders (many times called Indo-Europeans) brought about a so-called "Dark Age" in Greece.

Similar invasions also occurred in Palestine by the "Sea Peoples," and the invasion of the Indo-Europeans was not a one-time event, but rather one which was "a series of migrations which took place in waves over a period of at least one thousand and possibly three thousand years."[8] It is generally agreed that these invasions began about 2400 BCE and therefore the dating of these invasions would put them before, during, and after the establishment of Israel as a nation and as a religious system. The nature of the Indo-Europeans is that they would conquer existing cultures and replace the old religious traditions with their own. As previously mentioned, the Indo-Europeans were warrior-like cultures which usually violently conquered Pre-Indo-European agricultural societies including those in Palestine. The pattern of conquest, including religious conquest, can easily be seen to parallel most of the ancient Near Eastern myths and legends which refer to a supreme male deity's violent conquest and the establishment of his cult in the conquered region. Remember what Stone points out:

> Historical, mythological and archeological evidence suggests that it was these northern people who brought with them concepts of a supreme male deity. The

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[6] Genesis 12:1-5 NASV (New American Standard Version).
[7] Hurwit, 33.
[8] Stone, 63.

> emergence of the male deity in their subsequent literature, which repeatedly described and explained his supremacy, and the extremely high position of their priestly caste may perhaps allow these invasions to be viewed as religious crusade wars as much as territorial conquests.[9]

All of this information is speculative at this point; however, it is interesting to note that the patriarchs came from a region where the pantheon involved a strong female goddess (Ishtar/Inanna) and they adopted (eventually) a "monotheism" based on a supreme male deity with a high position of religious leadership. The extent to which the northern invaders influenced the Israelite prophetic traditions is unknown, but it is significant that the Israelites became a nation by conquering an agricultural society and struggled to replace the old religion with their own traditions. The development of prophets engaging in warfare and the idea of Yahweh as the divine warrior also suggest some Indo-European influence into the development of the Israelite prophetic traditions.

2. Prophetic Traditions in Egypt

Between the period of the patriarchs and the conquest of Canaan by Israel, the Israelites spent many generations in Egyptian bondage. Moses (who is called the first prophet by some biblicists) in the traditional account was born and reared in Egypt. It is certainly conceivable that Egyptian prophetic traditions could have influenced Israelite traditions. However, Egyptian traditions of prophecy have little in common with Israelite traditions. Wilson discusses some evidence of a prophetic tradition in Egypt; however, most of the oracles are not presented as "direct messages from a deity"[10] and most seem to be

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[9] *Ibid.*, 66.
[10] Wilson, 128.

politically motivated pieces of propaganda. The only direct contact with a god in Egyptian prophetic tradition seems to be requesting the gods answer to a question. "The petitioner phrased his question so that it could be answered either yes or no, and then presented it orally before the god."[11] This is different than Israelite traditions where the prophet delivers the words of Yahweh to the people whether they wanted to hear it or not. Very few examples of yes or no petitions can be found in Israelite tradition, although Gideon put out a fleece to ask the Lord to verify his calling in a yes or no answer (Judges 6:37). Nevertheless, there seems to be very little Egyptian influence in the tradition(s) of prophecy in Israelite religion.

3. Traditions of Prophecy in Contemporaneous Contact With Israelite Traditions of Prophecy

During the period of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites and continually afterwards, the Israelites were in constant contact with prophetic traditions from neighboring nations. By this time, the tradition of Moses was well established. Yahweh had appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai and given them the Decalogue, the first of which was "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."[12] Additionally, during the conquest, Yahweh required that no spoils were taken from the conquered peoples: "You are to keep absolutely clear of the devoted things, lest you covet them, and take some of the devoted things, and so put the camp of Israel under the ban, and bring trouble to it."[13] Apparently,

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[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Exodus 20:3.

[13] Joshua 6:18 NASV.

Yahweh felt that contact with Canaanite spoils, probably especially the family graven images which were common, would contaminate the Israelite society and religion. "Yahweh, who was primarily the God of the patriarchs and of Israel's historical past, had separated Israel alone from all the nations unto himself to be their God, and his throne in Israel rested upon the faithfulness of his people who were his pride."[14] However, biblical evidence is clear that eventually the Israelites had much contact with native Canaanites and assimilated much of their culture and some of their religions traditions. The fertility cults of Ba'al were assimilated into the practices of Israelite Yahwism, and were influential until purged by King David.

> When the Israelites came into Canaan, they found everywhere, from north to south, the different and independent local cults of Ba'al-Hadad established on the high places of the land. There Ba'al was invoked in order that he might provide fertility and rainfall, which was his specific function. In their new surroundings the Israelites had to adjust themselves to an entirely new way of living; from being desert nomads they became sedentary agriculturists. From the native population of Canaan the Israelites learned the best methods of agriculture suited for that mountainous terrain. But, together with these new methods, they learned the rituals of the Ba'al cult as well, which were considered an integral part of making the soil fertile. To the Israelites, moreover, the specific fertility god Ba'al-Hadad rather than Yahweh, whom they had met in the desert, may have seemed better fit to give them success in farming like the Canaanites. Thus the fertility cults of Ba'al and his consorts penetrated everywhere in Israel in a peaceful way, in spite of the dire warnings of the laws of Yahweh who prohibited the rituals of the Canaanite fertility cult.
>
> When the Israelites turned their back on Yahweh, joining the cult feasts of the Canaanites, with whom they associated, they were in great danger of losing their national identity and becoming assimilated by the Canaanites. The latter used the opportunity to win back their lost possessions and to oppress the Israelites. In their distress the Israelites cried to Yahweh and their brethren for help and were often delivered by the servants of Yahweh, the judges, who defeated their enemies, abolished their cults, and brought the people back to loyalty toward Yahweh and his

[14] ULF Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 178.

> laws. But soon after they had been delivered, they succumbed to the temptation of following the pagan deities again. Thus there was a constant rivalry between Yahwism and the Canaanite deities until the strong rule of the Yahweh fearing King David.[15]

This constant contact with the religious traditions of Ba'al-Hadad must have had some impact on the traditions of Israelite prophecy which were developing; the problem is that the extent of the influence is hard to measure.

To add to this confusion is the contact that the Israelites had with the Phoenician Ba'al-Melqarth. This contact seemed to be extremely influential into the development of prophetic tradition(s) in Israel.

> In the ninth-century (BCE) Tyre became exceedingly strong, being the center of the vast Phoenician colonial empire. Consequently the cult of its national god Melqarth, i.e., Hadad, spread wherever the commercial influence of Tyre reached, and the acceptance of this cult became a sign of political alliance with Tyre.
>
> The northern kingdom of Israel, being so close geographically and economically to Tyre, could hardly remain unaffected. Thus an alliance between Israel and Tyre was sealed by a political marriage of the Phoenician princess Jezebel to Ahab, king of Israel, and thereby the strong united cult of the Phoenician Ba'al and Asherah with its numerous cult personnel was established in the capital Samaria as the state cult supported by the court. In spite of Jehu's violent revolt against the house of Ahab and Ba'alism, Ba'al and Asherah remained important gods in Israel, worshipped by its kings, until the exile.
>
> Phoenician Ba'alism was introduced into the southern kingdom of Judah through the political marriage of Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, who had grown up on the court of Ahab and Jezebel, to the Judean vassal king. Especially when Athaliah took the throne of David the Ba'al cult became prominent, and a temple to Ba'al was built in Jerusalem. In spite of the reaction under Jehoiada Ba'alism remained in Judah, and thus we learn that king Manasseh made altars for Ba'al even in the courts of the temple of Yahweh. Although king Josiah cleansed the Yahweh temple of the vessels of Ba'al and Asherah and destroyed the Ba'al cults in his kingdom, yet Ba'alism after his time became important again and remained so until the exile of Judah.[16]

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[15] *Ibid.*, 176-177.

[16] *Ibid.*, 177-178.

It is significant to point out that the conflict which occurred between Elijah and the Phoenician prophets of Ba'al and Asherah can be evidence of the extent to which existing traditions could have influenced the developing Israelite tradition. "There was probably little to distinguish the four hundred and fifty prophets of the Phoenician Baal on Mount Carmel, who performed their limping dance, slashed themselves with knives, and cried ecstatically to their god, from the 'sons of the prophets,' associated with Samuel Elijah, and Elisha."[17]

Other evidence of the influence of the Phoenician Baal is stated by Landersdorfer:

> Dabei ist selbstverstandlich der Gedanke, als ob der Prophet irgendwie den illegitimen Jahvekult gebilligt oder gar das Idol des phonikischen Baal in den Dienst der prophestischen Religion gestellt hatte, von vornherein ausgeschlossen.[18]

However, the fact that Landersdorfer even has to make this statement reflects the impact that the Phoenician Baal had on the Yahweh cult. These similarities of ecstatic prophecy could be a coincidence, but more likely, the older tradition had influenced the developing tradition(s) in Israel. "It is not strange that this fierce rivalry between Yahwism and Ba'alism had great effects upon Hebrew religion."[19]

Other evidence (extrabiblical) of this ecstatic tradition comes from the Egyptian text telling the story of a temple official named Wen-Amon:

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[17] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 55.

[18] P.S. Landersdorfer, *Der Baal Tetramorphos Und Die Kerube Des Ezechiel* (Paderborn: Druck and Verlag von Ferdinand Schoningh, 1918), 52. (My translation): "Thought: The prophet has approved the illegitimate cult of Yahweh or even put the idol of the Phoenician Baal in the service of the prophetic religion. Right from the beginning, this thought can be excluded.

[19] Oldenburg, 179.

> In the relevant portion of the text, Wen-Amon visits the port of Byblos and seeks to remain there until he can settle a matter having to do with some stolen silver. The ruler of Byblos is at first unwilling to allow Wen-Amon to stay, but while the ruler is sacrificing to his gods, the Egyptian god Amon seizes one of the ruler's pages and through him demands that Wen-Amon be permitted to remain in the city (1,38-40). The Egyptian term used to describe the page's behavior is elsewhere used to indicate possession by a spirit, and the determinative before the term depicts a human in violent motion. This suggests that possession behavior at Byblos involved stereotypical physiological manifestations, although their exact nature cannot be accurately deduced from the test.[20]

This story of Wen-Amon, and the youth who went into a type of trance to reveal to the city ruler that Wen-Amon had been sent by a god, is further evidence of this kind of prophetic tradition in Phoenicia; and due to the political climate, it most likely influenced Israel as well.

As was mentioned previously, a favorite topic of research for interested scholars is the origin of the prophetic tradition(s) in Israel.

> One commonly held opinion is that early Israelite prophecy represents a combination of two original separate strands: a nomadic element that the Israelites brought with them on their entry into Palestine, and a kind of prophecy that was widespread in the settled civilizations of the ancient Near East, which was mediated to Israel through the Canaanites. These two features gradually coalesced from around 1000 BC onwards, as evidenced by such 'transitional' figures as Elijah and Elisha, to evolve into 'genuine' Israelite prophecy, which in turn consisted of two groups, the cultic and court prophets on the one hand, and the great individual prophets on the other.[21]

This hypothesis and more or less variations of it are detailed by a number of prophetic traditions which logically could have influenced the Israelite prophetic tradition(s) as it developed. Some conservative scholars (mostly religiously motivated) would argue that

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[20] Wilson, 129.

[21] J.R. Porter, "The Origins of Prophecy in Israel," *Israel's Prophetic Tradition* (P.R. Ackroyd, 12-31), 13.

Israelite prophetic tradition(s) were unique to Israel and resulted from monotheistic devotion to Yahweh. However, this hypothesis seems naive at best and requires one to overlook or explain away a good bit of conflicting evidence.

After examining the evidence, and reading several different theories, it seems most probable that there is a grain of truth in each hypothesis. There is something unique about Israelite prophetic tradition(s). There also seems to be much in common with previous and contemporaneous traditions of prophecy. It seems most likely that the patriarchs brought with them some prophetic traditions from Mesopotamia. The Sea Peoples traditions probably were influential. Traditions of Moses at Sinai injected a uniqueness to Israelite prophecy. The Canaanite Baal traditions and the Phoenician Baal traditions of prophecy also most likely affected the Israelite traditions of prophecy. Despite the objections of the theory being hypothetical[22] the schema that Israelite traditions of prophecy were the result of evolutionary development seems quite convincing. During this evolutionary process, the traditions of prophecy were shaped by the experiences of the Israelites, both those which were unique to them and those which resulted in assimilation.

II. Israelite Prophetic Traditions

As difficult as it is to pinpoint the origin of the Israelite prophetic tradition, it is equally as difficult to describe what the Israelite prophetic tradition is exactly. In research, several terms were found which are used to describe the "prophets:" "*Is ha'*

[22] *Ibid.*, 12-14.

elohim (man of God); *ro'eh* (seer); *gosem* (fortune-teller, soothsayer); *hozeh* (also seer); and *nabi'* (prophet—in a narrow sense of the word). Each of these are to one extent or another related to a tradition of "ecstasy." Robinson says that the "ecstatic existed in Canaan long before the Hebrew conquest."[23] Dodds states the association of prophecy and madness (ecstatic prophecy) belongs to the Indo-European (Sea Peoples) stock of ideas[24] and Dodds argues that "the dividing line between common insanity and prophetic madness is in fact hard to draw."[25]

In focusing in on Israelite prophets, Matheney observes that a prophet's task and purpose is closely tied to and ecstatic experience of a perceived encounter with the divine:

> The prophets have had genuine visions, often closely connected with their "call" experience. The canonical prophets as well as their predecessors have had other experiences which might be called "ecstatic," or even "abnormal," precisely to the extent that they were apprehended by the "hand," "spirit," or "word" of Yahweh, and compelled to his task. Their pursuit of this task may involve obedience to divine commands for symbolic acts, the significance of which is better understood during and after the performance of the act. But the recognition of these factors does not negate the weight of evidence for the real, conscious, intentional, and effective performance of prophetic symbolic act. Rather, the interpretation majors upon the proclamation and initiation of the divine word, by the reception of which the whole life of the prophet has been commissioned to speech and action.[26]

In a discussion of the Israelite prophetic tradition in particular, it becomes very difficult to make general statements which are descriptive of a single tradition. Wilson's

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[23] T.H. Robinson, *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1967), 28.

[24] Dodds, 70.

argument of two Israelite traditions begins to resonate as an extremely good way to describe what is happening prophetically in Israel. Wilson's paradigm provides a framework into which one can place the details concerning the Israelite prophetic tradition(s).

A. The Ephraimite Tradition

Wilson's major thesis is that two contradistinctive prophetic traditions existed in ancient Israel. Wilson first details the Ephraimite (northern) prophetic tradition. Part of the difficulty in identifying characteristics of this tradition is trying to sort out the deuteronomic redaction. Nevertheless, Wilson identifies the three characteristics of the Ephraimite prophetic tradition as 1) stereotypic speech patterns (announcement of disaster); 2) the distinctive vocabulary of the nabi'; and 3) a Mosaic model for prophetic behavior (spirit possession as form of mediation).

Concerning the announcement of disaster, this speech pattern was typically in response to the prophet's belief that the cult of Yahweh had been compromised, most likely by Ba'alism. The second characteristic is the distinctive vocabulary of the Nabi'. "Nabi', which probably means literally 'entrusted with a message,' is already found in Syrian Ebla in the twenty third-century (BCE), but in Israel it turns up relatively late—

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[25] *Ibid.*, 68.

[26] Pierce Matheney, "Interpretation of Hebrew Prophetic Symbolic Act" *Encounter* (256-267), 267.

only at the beginning of the period of the monarchy."[27] "The Hebrew word for Ecstatic is *Nabi'*, plural *Nebi'im* (E.V. 'prophet'), and the verb used of ecstatic behavior is a reflexive form of the root from which the noun *Nabi'* comes."[28]

> (Ecstasy) consisted of a fit or attack which affected the whole body. Sometimes the limbs were stimulated to violent action, and wild leaping and contortions resulted. These might be more or less rhythmical, and the phenomenon would present the appearance of a wild and frantic dance. At other times there was more or less complete constriction of the muscles, and the condition became almost cataleptic. The vocal organs were sometimes involved, noises and sounds were poured out which might be unrecognizable as human speech. If definite words were uttered they were often unintelligible. Face and aspect were changed, and to all outward appearance the Ecstatic "became another man." An additional feature was insensibility to pain, and the extravagant activities of the Ecstatic frequently included violent slashing and cutting of his own body and limbs.[29]

Both the stereotypic speech patterns and the distinctive vocabulary are probably related to the Mosaic Model for prophetic behavior.

> For Jews and Christians alike, Moses counts as being the prototype of a prophet. Yet this very Moses, who belongs to the beginnings of Yahwistic religion is never described in the early narratives by any one of the terms we have named (except perhaps "man of god").[30]
>
> Pivotal to the entire consideration of the prophets and their message is the recognition of Moses as the first great prophet in Israel's historical background. Whether Moses actually was a prophet as the Bible projects him or was merely "called a prophet by later men of prophetic lineage" is basically significant. Did prophecy begin with Moses or did Hebrew prophecy come from Canaanite contact? Did Moses lead twelve tribes out of Egypt or is this only an impression created by the fusing of the various documents in the Pentateuch? Did God reveal himself to Moses or is the burning-bush experience merely a story ascribed to Moses in later

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[27] Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 16.
[28] Robinson, 30-31.
[29] *Ibid.*, 31.
[30] Koch, 16.

> tradition? Was the law actually given to Moses by God or does it merely exemplify the creative genius of Moses? Are the tabernacle, the offerings, and the feasts and seasons as outlined in the Pentateuch realistically associated with Moses or are they later inventions by the Priestly writers?
>
> If Moses is taken seriously as a prophet through whom the basic truths of Israel's religion were revealed as recorded in the Pentateuch then the ministry of the prophets is basically of a supplementary nature. Israel's responsibility and purpose were clearly delineated by Moses. Prophets came to remind successive generations of the truth expressed in the written law as it applied to the contemporary condition. Additional revelation which was given to the prophets was always in harmony with the law.[31]

Schultz's viewpoint seems quite narrow. However, he is not alone when he puts Moses in the position of being the first prophet, just as Wilson uses Moses as the model for prophetic behavior. Wilson argues that the early representatives of the Ephraimite tradition were central to their societies—Abraham, Moses, and Samuel. Wilson argues that after the monarchy began in Israel that the Ephraimite prophets evolved into a more peripheral role (i.e. Hosea). This central/peripheral distinction is an important part of Wilson's argument and it is this part of the argument which makes Wilson's paradigm so interesting.

B. The Judean Tradition

Wilson argues that the Judean prophetic tradition is more difficult to define in terms of characteristics. Two prophetic terms, *hozeh* (seer) and *massa* (oracle), appear prominently in this tradition of prophetic material. These prophets appear to be far less cohesive, even though there are more prophetic books in this tradition.

> For the most part, Judean prophets appear to have had fewer stereotypical behavioral characteristics than their northern counterparts, and this fact

[31] Samuel J Schultz, *The Prophets Speak* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 20-21.

> may indicate that the Judeans had no standard model for prophetic behavior. Although they used the distinctive term "visionary" to characterize their intermediaries and stressed the vision as the normal mode of revelation, the southerners did not associate any distinctive behavior with the visionary, whom they often equated with other types of intermediaries, such as the prophet and the diviner. Similarly, we found little evidence that Judean prophets used stereotypical speech as part of their possession behavior. The *massa*, seems to have been a peculiarly Judean type of utterance, but we were able to detect no standard structure for the oracle.[32]

In his discussion of central and peripheral roles of the Judean prophets, Wilson concludes:

> For the most part the Judeans seem to have operated within the central social structure in order to assure orderly change and the preservation of the old traditions. Some of these central prophets may have played a regular role in the temple rituals, but many did not. The location of their prophetic activity is unclear, but they may have been at home in the royal court. Throughout the history of Judean prophecy there seem to have been occasional peripheral prophets. Some of these figures, like Isaiah, may have oscillated between peripheral and central functions, while others may have begun and ended their prophetic careers on the edges of Judean society.[33]

Based on these conclusions it is plain to see that Wilson had difficulty in trying to characterize prophets of the Judean tradition. However, this category, while slippery, does seem to work in contradistinction to the category of the Ephraimite tradition. Wilson's paradigm provides an excellent framework upon which to hang new pieces of prophetic evidence of ancient Israel.

III. Biblical Prophetic Traditions Influenced by Other Prophetic Traditions

[32] Wilson, 294.
[33] *Ibid.*, 294-295.

As one examines the various traditions of prophecy which existed in the ancient Near East, even prior to the patriarchal period of Judaism, it is tempting to speculate that perhaps Judaism borrowed the traditions of prophecy from other cultures, perhaps Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, or Canaan. This tempting speculation is quickly overridden by the scholarship of Wilson:

> Given the proper social conditions and cultural attitudes, intermediaries can appear in any society. The existence of intermediation can be best explained on the basis of internal and social and religious conditions. Borrowing need not be involved, although outside influences may be present and in particular may help to shape the form that intermediation takes in a given society. Even though contemporary scholars have generally rejected the idea that Israelite prophecy was borrowed from on of the surrounding cultures, the use of ancient Near Eastern material to elucidate Israelite prophecy has continued.[34] (Wilson, pp. 89-90)

Intermediaries and prophets are common in almost every culture and society, so the question moves beyond whether Judaism borrowed the prophetic tradition to how their prophetic tradition was influenced by other cultures.

This new inquiry is quite challenging, and when an answer is pursued, there is an abundance of primary and secondary sources to use as evidence, but the task is to wade through the volumes of material to make sense of it. The Hebrew Bible itself gives evidence that there were several traditions of prophecy in ancient Israel and that traditions of prophecy were not confined only to Israel. I Kings 18 is an account of Elijah (a prophet of Yahweh) as he confronts and comes into conflict with "450 prophets of Baal

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[34] *Ibid.*, 89-90.

and 400 prophets of Asherah."[35] Additionally, Jeremiah 27:1-15 refers to "prophets and other religious specialists in neighboring lands of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Phoenician cities who, like their counterparts in Israel but unlike Jeremiah himself, were supporting plans for a rebellion against Nebuchadrezzer in 594 BCE"[36] These citations are but a few of the biblical evidences that there were a number of different prophetic traditions in existence both in Israel and in neighboring lands.

In looking at the primary and secondary sources to discover how Israelite prophetic traditions had been influenced by the prophetic traditions of neighboring lands, another factor was introduced, and any attempt to synthesize the data must take into account this factor: at least two quite distinctive prophetic traditions existed in ancient Israel, at least certainly after the beginning of the amphictyonic period. At the outset of this inquiry, it was tempting to assume that the "non-Israelite" prophetic traditions would be pluralistic and any comparison or contrast would be to a singular Israelite tradition. It now seems clear from the primary (biblical) and secondary sources that there is more than one prophetic tradition in ancient Judaism in Israel. Ultimately the paradigm suggested by Wilson will be followed, that there are two traditions of Israelite prophecy. One tradition is central to society, culture, and religion. The other tradition represents a minority opinion and is consequently on the periphery of society. To differentiate the traditions as central and peripheral is certainly not a judgment, especially in light of the fact that

[35] I Kings 18:19.
[36] Blenkinsopp, 54.

accounts of prophets of the peripheral tradition seem to be more common in the biblical material than the prophets of the central tradition.

When one discusses the prophetic traditions of ancient Israel, one is discussing a process of evolution. This process began before the patriarchs and ended when Israelite prophecy was superceded by Apocalyptic.[37] Israelite prophetic traditions evolved from many influences including Mesopotamian, Indo-European, Canaanite, Phoenician, and those elements which were unique to Israel. At some point, Israelite prophetic tradition began to develop and evolve into two distinct forms: the Ephraimite and the Judean traditions. Both of these traditions evolved from the early periods of the conquest, to the monarchy and eventually through the exile.

IV. "Western" Prophetic Traditions as Distinctive

The argument that prophetic traditions of previous cultures have influenced later traditions is crucial to the thesis of this study. Following the argument that prophetic traditions have evolved will move one out of the ancient period of history to formulate distinctives to give a framework to a "Western" prophetic tradition. A concept of "western" prophetic tradition cannot be divorced from the prophetic traditions of the past, nor understood and defined in the absence of this context. If it were somehow possible to

[37] Wilson, 295.

objectively dissect biblical prophetic traditions into its individual parts, none of the individual parts stand alone as distinctive or original. Each have historical context in traditions of prophecy were preceded or were contemporaneous in the cultures which intermingled in the Fertile Crescent to create the culture of ancient Judaism, and the prophetic traditions which were a part of it.

Consider the evidence of the historical traditions which probably influenced the biblical traditions of prophecy. The invasions of Indo-Europeans brought traditions of ecstatic prophecy (madness) and allegiance to a supreme male deity, in almost every area where they had an influence of conquest. The biblical patriarchs were exposed to and arguably influenced by Mesopotamian prophetic traditions such as divination, omens, extispicy, and hepatoscopy. Moses was at the beginning of a distinctive culture that could be called Israelite and his Sinai experiences almost certainly influenced the traditions of prophecy that developed in biblical traditions through the eighth-century BCE and beyond.

Each individual part is not original or distinctive, but the way they evolved and were packaged together in the eighth-century BCE biblical tradition is distinctive. While some common thread can be noticed, the biblical traditions observed as a whole are certainly distinctive as traditions, which to a world which valued the biblical writings as inspired and authoritative, became extremely influential.

The "western concept of prophecy" as distinctive takes further shape when put into the overlay of church history. The Protestant influence which emerged from the Reformation

and was a large part of the cultures of the United States, further caused modern manifestations of the prophetic traditions to become even more distinctive as "Western." When people develop in a culture which affirms the value of the biblical record, as early American culture did, and the evils of society are present, it is no wonder that charismatic leaders emerge who consciously or unconsciously model themselves after biblical prophetic characters. It is not surprising, as will be discussed later, that Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, Jr. were inspired with and aspired to be like the eighth-century BCE biblical prophet Amos. It is also no wonder that Clarence Jordan was focused on understanding, teaching, and living the principles that Jesus of Nazareth taught. If the traditions of prophecy that were part of the biblical record were becoming more westernized than near-eastern, then that process definitely evolved through church history, political history, geography, and culture. The result is that the traditions of prophecy which exist in the contemporary American religious culture, can be defined as "distinctive" and "western."

This distinctive western concept of prophecy can be objectively observed in contemporary religious leaders in America. For the purposes of this study, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clarence Jordan have been chosen to be analyzed as potential contemporary prophets which would exemplify this distinctive western tradition of prophecy.

CHAPTER 2

WEBERIAN METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITION OF IDEAL TYPE

I. Introduction to Weberian Influence

Max Weber's life and work are a significant contribution to the social sciences and his theories and methodologies have changed the way that twentieth-century scholars study religion and other human affairs. Weber's academic achievements stand on their own but there are several contributing factors which propelled them into international significance. Weber's career occurred at the intersection of a historically significant era and an area of geographical significance to the international scene. These factors coupled with the powerful attraction and insight of Weber's mind created a lasting theory of studying human affairs which has become a litmus test and required study for sociologists, religionists, and social scientists.

> Max Weber's work is recognized by the majority of sociologists as the most important attempt yet to elaborate the foundations for the science of society. Weber's definition of the nature and scope of sociological inquiry has dominated all subsequent discussion of the matter. His formulations are . . . accorded a respect far exceeding that given any other classical theorist, including his native countryman, Simmel, and the acknowledged master, Durkheim.[1]

[1] Thomas W. Segady, *Values, Neo-Kantianism and the Development of Weberian Methodology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 1.

Weber's career (1864-1920) as a scholar and academician occurred in an extremely significant intellectual era and, in Weber's field, in the wake of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Weber has been called "the son of Kant"[2] and a "link to the neo-Kantians."[3] However he is labelled, it seems well accepted that Weber's work enhanced and relied upon the works of Kant and the neo-Kantians. "The neo-Kantian revival - - characterized by the shibboleth, 'Back to Kant' - - began as a positive response to the questions posed during this period of German intellectual history, and, ultimately formed much of the basis for Weber's own methodological thought."[4] The neo-Kantians attempted to establish the objectivity of the social sciences and also focused on the concept of "value," which carried, they argued, both an ontological and an axiological status. "It was along these general lines that Weber formed his methodological perspective."[5]

> However, (Weber) also shares the neo-Kantian critique of Kant - - that an abstract value scheme does not suffice to comprehend reality. Rather, reality must be understood in terms of concrete historical value schemes. It can and should be approached not only as nature but also as history of culture. Further, a Kantian theory of concepts must not claim a scientific monopoly.[6]

In addition to the focus on the notion of "value," Weber follows Kant's critique of dogmatic rationalism, "for which concepts are in the last analysis copies of 'objective' reality."[7] Further details of Weber's methodologies and theories of social science will be

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[2] Stephen J. Tonsor, "Sharpening the Antithesis," *National Review*, (August 15, 1975): 894.
[3] Segady, 18.
[4] *Ibid.*, 42.
[5] *Ibid.*, 43.
[6] Wolfgang Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*, trans. Guenther Roth (Berkeley: California UP, 1981), 14-15.
[7] *Ibid.*, 13.

discussed later, but it is important to point out that Weber's academic achievements occurred in the midst of an extremely momentous intellectual era, and that Weber was greatly influenced by the two predominant neo-Kantian schools in Germany at that time, the Marburg School and the Baden (Southwestern) group.

Besides the importance of the intellectual era, the geographical location of Weber was also significant. By reading his works, one can get one perspective "of Germany at that decisive moment in her history when the achievements of 1890 were drifting toward the tragedy of World War I and its aftermath."[8] There is good evidence in his writings (i.e. *Politics as Vocation* and *Call*) that Weber struggled with the desire to be a politician against the successes of his career as a scholar. "At heart . . . Weber was a politician, a glowing patriot seeing his country on the wrong road, passionately wishing to take the lead; but existing conditions prevented him from achieving his wish."[9] Weber was very critical of the German emperor and Kaiser, William II. As a young scholar and early in the reign of the emperor, Weber once wrote in a letter to a friend concerning his worries over the lack of consistency in the new emperor's behavior, "It is like sitting in a railroad car travelling at a great velocity without being certain that the next switch has been put into the position."[10] This kind of pessimism was characteristic and quite pervasive in the attitudes of Weber, not only towards Germany, but for all of modern society as well. The phenomenon of Weber's geographic location was significant as well because many of Weber's writings focused on

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[8] Tonsor, 894.
[9] Erich Hula, "Max Weber: Scholar and Politician," *The Contemporary Review* (October, 1928), 478.
[10] Gordon A. Craig, "The Kaiser and the Kritik," *The New York Review* (February 18, 1988), 18.

studies where his subject was some sort of human affairs in Germany (i.e. bureaucracy, agricultural crisis, etc.).

The significance of the intellectual era, coupled with the unique power of Weber's mind, thrust Weber's work to the forefront of the fields of the social sciences. Tonsor compared Weber to King Oedipus and contrasted Weber with one of the Thomas Mann's heroes because Weber "valued truth above all other things" and his life was "characterized by a moral and intellectual grandeur which (gave) it a universal and redemptive dimension."[11] These words of high praise were echoed by Hula who said that Weber's "genius embraces every aspect of social life from the remotest past to the present time. (Weber's) craving for knowledge was, however, but one element in Weber's nature; for he was not only contemplative but active, not only receptive but endowed with a creative attitude towards the life of the community."[12]

Weber has his critics, but Weber's significance is easily seen by his influence in the social sciences. "In the period just before and just after World War II, Weber came to dominate western sociology."[13] This dominance dwindled as competent scholarship developed, for example Blenkinsopp, yet even still Weber was influential as testified to in *Sage, Priest, and Prophet*: ". . . it may be useful to refer to Max Weber's concept of the *ideal type* as a way of assessing how the three roles in question actually functioned in

[11] Tonsor, 894.
[12] Hula, 478.
[13] Tonsor, 894.

Israelite society."[14] Blenkinsopp often refers to Weber as an authority. Weber's significance and influence are testified to by the vast number of articles and books which have been written either to laud him or to criticize him.

II. Weberian Methodology and Theory

What is Weber's "methodology" and "theory" of social science and the study of religion and human affairs? As a Weberian student, one would begin looking in Weber's writings to find where he has systematically outlined and illustrated a prescribed methodology and corresponding theory of research. However, the more you read Weber's writings, the more you realize what you don't know. This pursuit of Weber's methodology led Gilbert to remark that, "Weber's methodological writings are so dense that only those possessed, in good Weberian form, by some Calvinist demon are willing to wade through them."[15] Bendix comments that Weber's work "does not offer an overall theory."[16] Midgley comments further that "commentators on Weber are generally agreed that no such substantive general outline—either a philosophy of man or a philosophy of history—is extant in Weber's writings."[17] Furthermore, "Weber's works are still being corrected and rearranged (because) he neither completed his intended writings on methodology nor set out

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[14] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1995.

[15] Segady, 3.

[16] Ronald M Glassman and Vatro Murvar, eds., *Max Weber's Political Sociology: A Pessimistic Vision of a Rationlized World* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 13.

[17] E.B.F. Midgley, *The Ideology of Max Weber* (Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Company, 1983), 134.

his views on it in any systematic way."[18] Additionally, there exists a plethora of books and articles which summarize and critique Weber's most accessible methodological works, yet "there have been few attempts to develop a systematic Weberian methodology based on the entirety of Weber's methodological corpus (which is what Runciman attempted)."[19] A treatise on systematic Weberian methodology was quickly abandoned for many reasons, not the least of which is that "a prolonged, careful scrutiny of Weber's (prolific) writings reveals numerous fundamental confusions and contradictions (although, as Nietzsche reminds us, this in itself is no fatal flaw)."[20]

> Thus, to assert that one is in possession of the "truth" regarding Weber's meaning is somewhat like the parable of the blind man grasping a part of the elephant—we have grasped something, perhaps, but not the whole truth.[21]

It is with this concept of "truth" in mind that the Weberian methodology and theory will be examined. Weber's basic concepts regarding "value" relevance will be examined, along with the Weberian formulation of "ideal types" as mechanisms used to describe and understand "reality."

A. "Value" Relevance

A logical place to begin to understand Weber is to attempt to understand how he "divorced the realm of value and freedom from the world of causal necessity and

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[18] W.G. Runciman, *A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), 1.
[19] Segady, 3.
[20] *Ibid.*, 1.
[21] *Ibid.*

rationality."[22] In theory, Weber felt that social science should carefully separate objective analysis from ethical judgement. When compared to other sociologists, like Marx and Spencer, Weber argued that any models of society should be freed from any accompanying ethical directives. "The social scientist could, Weber argued, partially explain social reality, but, as a scientist, the sociologist could offer no political program or moral directives."[23] In another related critique of Marxist sociology, "Weber insisted on the primacy of values and particularly the great world religions as the determinants of human behavior, rather than the mode of production alone as Marx insisted."[24] According to Weber, modern science is seeking to free itself from value judgements and science's function is to implement a rational culture. Consequently, "social science cannot determine ends."[25] Social science, according to Weber, cannot tell us what ends we should choose, because by nature, science should be free from "value judgement."

To Weber, "science deals only with what is. Its job, therefore, is to explain what is, and it generally does so by looking for the causes."[26] This explanation of reality is done by an examination of "facts."

> Of course, there is a persistent puzzlement about how facts might be arranged to form a moral principle or social-policy directive. By themselves, they cannot. Facts must be interpreted, and the interpretations reflect moral and political judgements. . . . We hardly know what to do with them. The fact is, facts do not speak for themselves.[27]

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[22] Tonsor, 895.

[23] James R. Kelly, "Everyman as Sociologist," *America* (June 7, 1975), 443.

[24] Tonsor, 894.

[25] Fred H. Blum, "Max Weber's Postulate of 'Freedom' From Value Judgements," *American Journal of Sociology* (July, 1944), 47.

[26] Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 48.

[27] Kelly, 441.

Weber realized that facts can be interpreted on several levels and he says there are basically three. First, there is what Weber called "Philological Interpretation," which consists of understanding the literal meaning of documents when doing critical studies of texts (which is preparatory work required in every human science). Second, there is what Weber called evaluative or ethical interpretation, which means making a judgement on a subject and assigning a favorable or unfavorable value to it. Weber says these interpretations are flavored by our emotions, our empathy, our personal experiences, our esthetic appreciations, and our moral judgements. Third, there is what Weber called rational interpretation, "whose aim is to grasp, through causality, or through comprehension, the meaningful relationships between different phenomena or different elements of the same phenomenon."[28]

> To the extent that the first type of interpretation effects a selection among documents and sources, it bears some relation to value-orientation. The second type, which makes a direct value judgement of an object, is not a scientific method, although the scientist must sometimes take it into account in his work, for he cannot disregard the fact that one activity is generally deemed good and important, while another is censured. He must not, however, allow himself to be influenced by such evaluations, but must study, for example, the phenomenon of prostitution with the same strict objectivity as the phenomenon of a religious belief. Nevertheless, only rational interpretation is a determining factor in the formulation of a scientific proposition . . . Consequently, we are here talking about analysis, the purpose of which is to determine the values toward which a given activity is oriented, and not to evaluate that activity as good or bad in the light of subjective ethical convictions. . . . It is of particular importance in sociology, when the meaning of an activity is analyzed.[29]

[28] Freund, 57.
[29] *Ibid.*, 57-58.

In this passage, the phrase "value-orientation" is introduced, a phrase which Weber borrowed from Rickert. "Value-orientation" of a subject analyzed has nothing to do with a value judgement or an ethical evaluation of it. Additionally, value-orientation is not related to an objective or universal system of values. Religious or ethical values depend on our feelings, our emotions, and our faith, all of which "escape the jurisdiction of science. Consequently, they cannot serve as a basis for theoretical knowledge."[30] Weber suggests that "value-orientation" can fulfil the role as a basis for which to analyze a phenomenon of human affairs. Weber's "value-orientation" performs the following roles:

(a) it determines the selection of the subject of study, i.e., it enables us to detach a definite object from reality, which itself is diffuse;
(b) once the topic has been chosen, it guides us in sifting the essential from the secondary, i.e., it defines the historical individuality or uniqueness of the problem in effecting a choice from an infinitude of details, elements, and documents;
(c) in this operation, it supplies the reason for establishing a relationship between various elements and the meanings we assign to them;
(d) it also indicates what causal relationships are to be established and how far causal regression should go;
(e) lastly, because it is not a value judgement and requires clear and articulated thinking for the verification of our propositions, it eliminates mere personal experience and vague emotionality.[31]

It is with this process of "value-orientation" that Weber theorizes that social sciences should analyze phenomenon of human affairs. Value-orientation is not mere relativism, because this method has "absolute" values inherent in it: "the belief in the value of science itself, (and) the belief in the ethically autonomous, responsibly choosing, free human being."[32] By following the methodology of Weber's value-orientation, the analyst theoretically can be

[30] *Ibid.*, 52.
[31] *Ibid.*, 55-56.

value-neutral when analyzing a subject and consequently can move past the value-judgement of the phenomenon to how the phenomenon is expressed and impacts human affairs.

This process of "value-orientation"is quite demonstrable in Weber's analysis of the prophets and prophecy in *Ancient Judaism.* For example, in his chapter on "warfare and war prophecy," Weber makes the following statement:

> The *casus foederis* of a confederate war, its army leader, and the object of the war were always charismatically and prophetically determined through inspirations and oracles sent by Yahwe as the warlord. Yahwe himself was held to be the true leader in a war of the confederacy. The violators of the covenant had denied aid to him personally and not simply to the sworn confederates. Therefore, like Jabeth, they are eradicated. A confederate war was, thus, a holy war or it could become one and certainly in emergencies always was declared to be one.[33]

All five roles of value-orientation can be demonstrated by this passage: (a) The subject of the study is "holy war;" (b) The essential elements are the primacy of Yahweh, the perceived violations of the covenant, and the paramount importance of the prophet's religious experience and Weber uses whatever documents are available for his study; (c) The reason for establishing the relationship is that the war is caused by a perceived violation of covenant and/or an oracle or inspiration from Yahweh to the prophet; (d) The causal relationships begin with the phenomenon of holy war and regress backward through the prophet's experience, the perception of violation of covenant, and in terms of causal relationships, can regress no further than Yahweh as the warlord; (e) The most interesting aspect of Weber's analysis is not what is there, but what isn't contained in his analysis. It is

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[32] Blum, 49.

quite notable that there is little, if any, value judgement made on the phenomenon of holy war. This was a purely objective description of the phenomenon of the concept of holy war of Israelites in ancient times. Weber never questioned the validity of a "god" as a warlord; he didn't judge the value of a perceived covenant. He didn't question the authenticity of a prophetic inspiration or oracle; he didn't make an ethical judgement about the eradication of "enemies" simply because there was a perceived violation of "covenant" even if Yahwe wasn't their enemy's "god." He didn't question why sometimes it took an emergency to designate a "holy war" or question that this designation is strangely after the fact and late in being specified as "holy war." Weber would probably have an opinion on each of these issues, and in summary, he would probably argue that "holy war" and "oracles" are irrational and emotional manifestations of an irrational devotion or faith in a covenant with an irrational god, Yahwe. As will be discussed later, Weber's concept of rationalization "de-divinized" or "disenchanted" the world in modern times. "The process of rationalization has, according to Weber, reached a stage in modern times where the old possibilities of explanation fail. Science itself cannot create such possibilities. And thus mankind experiences the conflict of gods, who have lost their power over the world."[33] Weber has a definite agenda pertaining to several of the issues he commented upon in this passage in *Ancient Judaism.* The genius of his method of value-orientation is that he is able to carefully separate objective analysis from ethical judgement and/or rational evaluation. He objectively describes the phenomenon of holy war, and manifestations of Yahweh to

[33] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 90-91.

prophets, and dreams, and ecstasies, and many other forms of "irrational" perception or behavior in *Ancient Judaism*, and he is able to do so, for the most part, without making an evaluative or ethical interpretation of the facts. To Weber, such an interpretation would be unscientific and would make the analysis no longer a valid "social study" but rather some sort of ethical, theological, or moral commentary on *Ancient Judaism*. Weber simply accepted the concept of Yahwe as meaningful, the concept of covenant as valid, the phenomenon of inspirations or oracles of prophets as authentic, and the issues of violation and holy war as important. In doing so, Weber was able to look beyond these issues and describe to us how these subjects were causal or determinant in the manifestation of human affairs in the lives of ancient Israelites.

B. ideal type

In order to aid his "value-orientation" methodology, and in order to invigorate the concepts utilized in his method, Weber evolved the notion of an intellectual tool which he termed the ideal type. It seems that when Weber is describing ideal type he spends more time telling what it is not than what it is. Weber says it is not a "'theory' or an 'hypotheses,' nor is it a 'description of reality,' and 'ethical imperative,' or an 'average man.'"[35]

> The concept of the ideal type, then, constitutes a ". . . conceptual construct (Gedankenbild) which is neither historical reality nor even the 'true' reality . . . (but is) formed by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and

[34] Midgley, 135.
[35] Segady, 112.

> occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct."[36]

Blenkinsopp summarizes the concept of the Weberian ideal type:

> It will be recalled that, for Weber, an ideal type is a construct based on abstraction and conceptualization that has the purpose of guiding inquiry back to the mass a available data. Weber's ideal types were not intended to be normative. They served as a means of provisional classification, allowing for some preliminary understanding of the phenomenon, creating and testing hypotheses, distinguishing between constants and variables, and identifying deviations.[37]

"The ideal type is thus the sum total of concepts which the specialist in the human sciences constructs purely for the purposes of research."[38] The main functions of the ideal type are to provide the means to the researcher to assess objective characteristics of the subject of study, "both in relation to other constructed ideal types, and the comparison of ideal types with empirical reality."[39]

Weber used the concept of ideal type in many of his writings; for example, he developed ideal types of Protestantism and Capitalism. Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* has often been cited as the clearest example of developing an ideal type in relation to other constructed ideal types. Additionally, another interesting note is that in Marianne Weber's biography of Weber, she related that Weber's ideal-typical capitalist was not a composite representation, but almost entirely a depiction of Weber's entrepreneurial uncle. Nevertheless, Weber's notion of ideal type is a usable research tool for Weber details how

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[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Blenkinsopp, 116.
[38] Freund, 60.
[39] Segady, 112-113.

the ideal type can be modified or "reconstructed" when in conflict with empirical data and therefore maintains its utility as a research tool. In this study, the ideal type is the concept borrowed from Weber which is used to study prophets and prophecy in the Western tradition.

CHAPTER 3

CRITERIA FOR AN IDEAL TYPE OF BIBLICAL PROPHET

I. Prophetic Type of Western Religious Tradition

Ideal type needs to be clearly contrasted and to not be confused with a technique of biblical hermeneutics and research called "typology."[1] "Typology" when used in hermeneutics of biblical prophecy often times focuses on the prophet as an eschatological predictor. It is important at this point to interject a reminder that in this study, prophets are not studied as "foretellers" of the future, rather as "forthtellers" of truth as they see it.

In *Ancient Judaism*, Weber doesn't develop an ideal type of an Israelite prophet. Weber seems to make scattered references of prophet typology but nothing is systematized

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[1] "Typology" often is used to interpret prophetic eschatology, emphasizing the historical concrete nature of the promised future. This theory is explained and advanced by Hans K. LaRondelle in his *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews UP, 1983):

> "The prophet, looking in faith to the future, was a "typologist," says Lampe, because he based his faith on the past acts of God (e.g., the exodus deliverance). (54)

In this quotation, LaRondelle references Lampe, G.W.H. and Woollcombe, K.J. *Essays on Typology*. Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 22. (Napierville, Ill.: A.R. Allenson, 1957), and B.W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), chapter 12. For other examples of "typology" as an instrument of hermeneutics see Fritsch, C.T. "Biblical Typology: Typological Interpretation in the New Testament."

extensively, but they are not limited to Israel in that they are common in most of the ancient Middle Eastern religions. It is an interesting exercise to use Weber's analysis of prophets in *Ancient Judaism* to develop an ideal type of an ancient Israelite prophet; this exercise is extensive and the results are shared in the following paragraphs.

Weber didn't develop an ideal type of an Israelite prophet and apparently realized that the tradition of prophecy in the ancient Near East was so diverse and had such a long history that it became relatively difficult to develop such a concept. Weber says:

> All the hopeless unclarity in which figures such as Balaam, Samuel, Nathan, also Elijah, today appear to us, derives not only from the fact that here, as usual, the transition of the types was fluid, but from the tendentious expurgation and obfuscation of the old contrasts.[2]

Weber noticed that historically, the forms of prophecy were changing. "Roeh-ecstasy" was private business in earlier times. I Samuel 9:6, 7 recounts how "prophets" were asked private questions, which they received answers to through visions, and were compensated with gifts.

> To be sure, the later tradition considers the man of God and seer particularly as one who announces the will of the god of the covenant to the respective authorities: the elders or the king or to a hero whom he wishes to awaken as a charismatic war-lord. This is already represented by Samuel and Nathan.[3]

Weber notices that even in this public tradition of prophecy, there are several prophetic types. Some heard the "word of God," others saw visions or dreamt dreams.

Bibliotheca Sacra 104 (1946): 87-100, and Gundry, S.N. "Typology as a Means of Interpretation: Past and Present." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969): 233-240.

[2] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 105-106.

[3] *Ibid.*, 106.

> Of Hosea, the first prophet (of the settled peasant tribes of the North), it is merely said that the "word of Yahwe" (debar Yahwe) came to him. Amos tells of all sorts of images which Yahwe then interprets for him (1:1, 7:1, 4:7, 9:1). Similar accounts occasionally are still to be found with Jeremiah and, in a somewhat different manner, with Ezekiel. Isaiah by contrast does not see images to be interpreted, but he sees and hears what he shall proclaim; or he sees the splendor of God and then receives his commandments. In any case, audition (from God) becomes all important.[4]

The means by which the message was received by the prophet, while important in distinguishing "types," is secondary to the "fact" that the message came from God. Weber noticed another way that prophecy began to change which is related to the message. Prophets of "old" usually delivered messages which were good news or positive. "The 'man of God' henceforth became above all one who communicates the will of the god of the covenant to the holders of political power, . . . regardless of whether the oracle would please the holders of political power or not. In fact, it was given precisely when it was unpleasant."[5]

> However so important did the pattern become that it led to the creation of a special mosaic paradigm of this (Num. 11:26) in Eldad and Medad. In the legendary figure of Elijah, this type reached its climax and at the same time inclined toward the new type of the later scriptural "prophet." Elijah differed from the old "man of God" in that he addressed his oracles, at least in part, to the politically interested "public" and not alone to the authorities: kings or elders. Elijah is the first specifically "clerical" figure of Israelite history.[6]

According to Weber's analysis, this new "type" of prophet delivered his message, which was usually unpleasant to a figure in power and/or to the public, but in any case, prophecy was not "private" any longer. From an analysis and summary of Weber's work, a proposed

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[4] *Ibid.*, 444.
[5] *Ibid.*, 108.
[6] *Ibid.*

ideal type of an Israelite prophet might consist of criteria advanced from the following analysis of quotes in *Ancient Judaism*:

(1) "In the accounts of their ecstasy of calling, this first ecstasy, giving the prophet his 'call,' is never presented as the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits. On the contrary, it was always in agreement with the endogenous nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[7]

(2) "Every prophet is bound by the law and its commandments and whoever seeks to estrange men from them is a false prophet. Hence only one who converts men from their sins can be truly god-sent."[8]

(3) The prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." "By virtue of their calling the prophets laid claim to special qualities; . . . the expression 'spiritual man' (ish haruach) is employed by a scriptural prophet."[9] "Such prophecy was authoritarian in character and averse to all orderly procedure."[10]

(4) Additionally, the prophet is "self evidently false if he teaches false gods or whose prophecy remains unfulfilled."[11]

(5) "The pre-exilic prophets from Amos to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, viewed through the eyes of the contemporary outsider, appeared to be, above all, political demagogues and, on occasion, pamphleteers. . . .This characterization of the prophets (as demagogues and pamphleteers) can indeed be misleading, but properly understood it permits indispensable insight. It means that the prophets were primarily *speakers*. Prophets as writers appear only after the Babylonian Exile. The early prophets addressed their audiences in public. . . .to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[12]

(6) "The total attitude of the prophets has often been described as 'culture hostility.'"[13]

Weber did not mean that the prophets had a personal lack of culture, as a matter of

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[7] *Ibid.*, 294.
[8] *Ibid.*, 395.
[9] *Ibid.*, 297.
[10] *Ibid.*, 271.
[11] *Ibid.*, 395.
[12] *Ibid.*, 267,268, 269.
[13] *Ibid.*, 285.

fact it was usually quite the opposite in that most prophets were literate and well informed about their own culture and the cultures of neighboring societies. Weber explains what he means by "culture hostility."

> Not only all aesthetic and all values of genteel living in general, but also, all worldly wisdom was viewed by them with quite alien eyes. These attitudes were sustained by the anti-chrematistic tradition of the puritanically pious in their environment who were suspicious of the court, the officials, the *gibborim* and the priests."[14]

(7) "Psychologically viewed most pre-Exile prophets were ecstatic men. At least, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel professed to be and undoubtedly were. Without gross carelessness, one may safely assume that all were ecstatics, though of various kinds and in different degree. . . . The prophets ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts. There can be no doubt that these very states, originally, were considered important legitimations of prophetic charisma and, hence, were to be expected in milder forms even when not reported."[15]

(8) "The decisive characteristic is that one must have personal intercourse with Yahwe. One must have stood 'in the counsel' of God and have personally heard the voice of the Lord if the oracle is to be valid."[16]

These passages have been extracted from Weber's writings describing among other things, the prophetic tradition in ancient Judaism. To group them together and to proclaim that an ideal type has been created is on the one hand overwhelming in presumption and arrogance, and most likely self-evidently incomplete. The caveats include the understanding that any criteria presented is general and stereotypical, as well as viewed through the filters of the modern perspective. On the other hand, careful

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[14] *Ibid.*, 285-286.
[15] *Ibid.*, 286.

scholarship combined with a desire to create an instrument for careful study in the future. in the spirit of Weber's methodology, an ideal type of pre-exilic prophet can be proposed and developed. Weber's notion of the ideal type is an important intellectual tool for studying social sciences. It is a concept which is not in contradiction of Weber's "value-orientation" methodology and seems quite useful in studying both the human affairs of the past and of the present.

With these caveats in mind, the following criteria developed from the above passages are presented as an ideal type of pre-exilic prophet in ancient Israel:

1. A prophet experiences an ecstatic sense of "calling" from God.
2. A prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to writings and codes perceived to be sacred.
3. A prophet is recognized by others as possessing a quality known as "charisma."
4. A prophet speaks words which are later perceived to be credible and true.
5. A prophet delivers his message primarily by speaking in public.
6. A prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture.
7. A prophet had an ecstatic psychological profile.
8. A prophet claims and is perceived to have genuine piety in relationship to God.

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[16] *Ibid.*, 107.

This ideal type gives us a tool to study not only ancient personalities, but these same criteria can be applied to modern personalities to determine if the pre-exilic prophetic tradition still exists.

The compilation of observations made by Weber into an ideal type of prophet is affirmed in the writings of other scholars who studied prophets and prophecy. Notice the parallels of observations made by Dr. Henlee H. Barnette, who personally knew each of the three contemporary men later examined in this study:[17]

> Biblical prophets are more *forth-tellers* than *fore-tellers* because they speak to current religious idolatry and social injustice. Prophets are grasped by a sense of divine vocation or calling: yet they are human, persons of finitude. Often, they suffer because they attack dehumanizing ideas and institutions both religious and secular that have become sacrosanct. Their lives may be threatened because they challenge powerful evil forces in high places. As Abraham Heschel observed, the prophets may be charged with "moral madness" because they do not fit in with the status quo of society.[18]

Notice in Barnette's observations the affirmation of the definition of prophecy as "forth-telling," and the similar observations in regards to "calling" and "message in conflict." Every time a scholar makes a similar observation and assembles the data in a similar way, it strengthens the thesis of the previous scholar. Barnette was not alone in his affirming observations.

With regards to the criterion involving charisma, Blenkinsopp includes it as a distinguishing characteristic in his concept of prophet. Blenkinsopp admittedly relies heavily on Weber's analysis when he relates the following:

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[17] Henlee H. Barnette, telephone interview by author, 9 April 1999.

> The elements considered essential, the constants, are therefore the possession of charisma, a distinctive mission, and a specifically religious message. Weber borrowed the term *charisma* from early Christian literature as a way of encapsulating the irreducibly personal and nonascriptive element (i.e., an element not assigned by society) in social interaction, especially in the exercise of leadership roles. It is defined as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.' The possession of this elusive quality and its acknowledgement by the prophet's public- an essential concomitant- serve to legitimate the status, claims, and mission of the prophet. It will generally be manifested in miraculous or at least remarkable demonstrations of power that, again, must be interpreted in a positive sense by the society, or a segment of the society, in which the prophet functions.[19]

Gerth and Mills echo and add to the understanding of the Weberian concept of charisma:

> Weber borrowed this concept from Rudolf Sohm, the Strassburg church historian and jurist. Charisma, meaning literally 'gift of grace,' is used by weber to characterize self-appointed leaders who are followed by those who are in distress and who need to follow the leader because they believe him to be extraordinarily qualified. The founders of world religions and the prophets as well as military and political heroes are the archetypes of the charismatic leader. Miracles and revelations, heroic feats of valor and baffling success are characteristic marks of their stature. Failure is their ruin.[20]

Gerhard von Rad and Abraham Joshua Heschel are respected scholars who have also studied and observed the ancient canonical prophets. The observations made by von Rad and Heschel regarding the prophets closely parallel Weber's observations which this study systematizes into the criteria that are compiled into the ideal type. Von Rad's *The*

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[18] Henlee H. Barnette, *Clarence Jordan: Turning Dreams Into Deeds* (Macon, Georgia: Smythe and Helwys Publishing, 1992), 1.

[19] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 116.

[20] Gerth, H.H. and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 52.

Message of the Prophets contains an entire chapter entitled "The Prophet's Call and Reception of Revelation." In this chapter, von Rad makes the following observation regarding the "call" experience of the prophets:

> As far as we can see, the prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries received their call through God's direct and quite personal address to them, and this created a totally new situation for the man concerned. The work on which he was sent was not just limited to a fixed period. The office to which he was commissioned, though perhaps not in every instance regarded as lifelong, at all events removed such a man from all his previous mode of life for at least a considerable time. Being a prophet was a condition which made deep inroads into a man's outward as well as his inner life- we shall later have to remember the consequences involved in the fact that from the very beginning not only the prophets' lips but also their whole lives were conscripted for special service. . . . At all events, the prophets themselves felt they had been compelled by a stronger will than theirs.[21]

This observation dovetails nicely with the observations made by Weber regarding the ecstatic, sudden nature of the call in a prophet's life. Von Rad ties this observation into the issues of the ecstatic psychological profile, one of Weber's observations:

> The call to be a prophet in which, as we have said, and individual was personally addressed by God, was as a rule associated with another factor which made the future ambassador of God acquainted with the will and purpose of Yahweh in an extremely vivid way. This was a vision. Of course, in the fairly large number of visions which occur in the Old Testament there is no instance of where a vision is not immediately followed by an audition and where it does not culminate in God's addressing the prophet. Nonetheless, the fact that Yahweh claimed not only the prophet's lips but also his eyes for the service of his new task is of prime importance. . . . On one point, however, there is universal agreement, that visions and auditions came to the prophets from outside themselves, and that they came suddenly and completely without premeditation.[22]

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[21] Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 36-37.
[22] von Rad, 38-39.

In Heschel's chapter entitled "An Examination of the Theory of Ecstasy," he points out that it "is true that the prophet is overwhelmed by the divine word that comes to him, but it is the consciousness of being overwhelmed, the consciousness of receptivity, and the ability to respond to the word that are outstanding features of his experience."[23] These observations affirm the first and the seventh criteria of the ideal type used to make a comparison to both ancient and modern personalities for analysis.

Heschel was quite interested in the behavioral patterns and the psychological health of the mind and emotions of the ancient canonical prophets. In a discussion on whether prophets exhibited symptoms of neurosis, Heschel says: "Neurosis will not make a person a prophet, just as malaria will not make him a millionaire."[24] However, in regard to how a prophet dealt with the issues of their time, Heschel says:

> The prophets were among the wisest of all men. Their message being ages ahead of human thinking, it would be hard to believe in the normalcy of our own minds if we questioned theirs. Indeed, if such is insanity, then we ought to feel ashamed of being sane.[25]

Heschel goes on to urge objectivity, not allowing our contemporary attitudes and experiences to color our interpretation of the attitudes and experiences of the prophets. Heschel explains,

> To us it is inconceivable to go on living and not be aware of the outside world; to the prophets it is inconceivable to go on living and not be aware of the Creator of the world. What we think is due to mental disorder may have been due to a higher spiritual order. Whatever departs from the normal is not necessarily pathological.

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[23] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets: Part II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 132.
[24] *Ibid.*, 184.
[25] *Ibid.*

> From the fact that the prophet exhibits features which differentiate him from the average we must not deduce any conclusions about his total personality. One should be surprised not to come upon 'eccentricities' in the behavior of the prophet. One would expect a human being of flesh and blood to remain robust, smug, and calm when overwhelmed by the presence of God?[26]

Clearly, these comments explain in greater detail and affirm Weber's observations that the prophet usually had an ecstatic psychological profile. Evidently, there was something in the profile of a prophet's psychology which allowed him to, real or perceived, hear the voice of God, and act upon it in word and deed. This analysis adds credibility to the seventh criterion of the ideal type, and von Rad's observations supplements it. Von Rad perceived that in order to understand the prophet, it was important to understand how the prophet perceived the "word of God." In explaining that the prophets perceived that they were physically sustained by the "word of God," von Rad observes,

> This looks very much as if the prophets regarded Israel's whole life as in some special way dependent upon the word of Yahweh, and thought of her as directed toward it right down to the most elemental levels of her life. . . . Yet, while this idea of man's total dependence upon the word of God originates with the prophets, it apparently only came to the surface, at least in so emphatic a form, in the seventh century; and the prophets themselves were certainly the first people to realize that their own lives were totally dependent on Yahweh.[27]

Heschel also comments on this mindset of the prophets:

> To a person endowed with prophetic sight, everyone else appears blind; to a person whose ear perceives God's voice, everyone else appears deaf. No one is just; no knowing is strong enough, no trust complete enough. The prophet hates the approximate, he shuns the middle of the road. Man must live on the summit to avoid the abyss. There is nothing to hold except God. . . . Where an idea is the father of

[26] *Ibid.*, 185.
[27] von Rad, 71.

> faith. faith must conform to the ideas of the given system. In the Bible the realness of God came first, and the task was how to live in a way compatible with His presence. Man's coexistence with God determines the course of history.[28]

In continuing the observations of the scholars on the issue of how the word of God was to faith in the everyday setting, von Rad says: "(The prophets) concern was not the faith, not even the 'message': it was to deliver a specific message from Yahweh to particular men and women who, without themselves being aware of it, stood in a special situation before God."[29] This observation dovetails into another observation that von Rad made,

> (The prophets) work away, using the most extraordinary means, to convince their hearers of the binding force and undiminished validity of ordinances from which the latter had long broken away, and of which they were perhaps indeed no longer aware. In this appeal to the old uncorrupted Yahwistic traditions, the prophets' work had a thoroughgoing element of reformation.[30]

These observations affirm Weber's analysis that the prophet had a message which tried to convert his audience to adherence to the sacred writings or the reported "word of Yahweh." These observations also affirm the statements that the message was in conflict with society and especially the established religious community, as well as affirm that the prophets perceived to hear God through ecstatic means.

In affirmation of the Weber's observation that the prophets were primarily "speakers," von Rad says,

> The prophetic word - far more than any of the other forms of speech used by Yahwism - has its origin in an impassioned dialogue; yet the dialogue never tries to

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[28] Heschel, *The Prophet*, 16.
[29] von Rad, 100.
[30] *Ibid.*, 11.

> climb into the realm of general religious truth, but instead uses even the most suspect means to tie the listening partner down to his particular time and place in order to make him understand his own situation before God.[31]

Von Rad observes that as a part of the speaking dialogue which the prophet has with his audience, the prophet employed common formulaic phrases, "Thus says the LORD (Yahweh)" and/or "Thus hath Yahweh spoken." "Prophecy ultimately employed the 'messenger formula' as the most direct means of expressing its function."[32] In speaking their messages, or even writing them, "(the prophets) saw themselves as ambassadors, as messengers of Yahweh."[33] In a summary of Heschel's observations of this aspect of prophets, Calloway says,

> Heschel also sees the prophet as a messenger or spokesperson of God. The prophet's duty, he asserts is to speak to the people, whether they hear or not. . . . The prophet is commonly characterized as a messenger of God, yet the prophet is more than that. He is a person who: stands in the presence of God (Jer. 15:19); who stands 'in the council of the Lord' (Jer. 23:18); is a participant, as it were, in the council of God - - not a bearer of dispatches whose function is limited to being sent on errands. He is a counselor as well as a messenger.[34]

These observations parallel and affirm Weber's observations that the prophets were primarily speakers and affirms this criterion as part of the ideal type of prophet.

In regards to Weber's observation that prophets claimed and were perceived to have a close relationship with God as an explanation for how and why they felt qualified to speak on behalf of God, Calloway summarizes Heschel's observations:

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[31] *Ibid.*, 100.
[32] *Ibid.*, 18.
[33] *Ibid.*, 19.

> Lastly, for Heschel, the prophet is an associate of God. He is not just a mouthpiece but a person; he is not just an instrument but a partner, and associate of God. The task of the prophet is to convey the word of God, yet the word is aglow with pathos.[35] Prophetic utterances show that the fundamental experience of the prophet is: a fellowship with the feelings of God; a sympathy with the divine pathos;[36] and a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos.[37]

Evidently the observations regarding ancient canonical prophets and prophecy by Weber are affirmed by the observations of other scholars who studied them as well. Therefore, it seems that the validity is affirmed of the observations which have been developed into an ideal type of biblical prophet. Using ancient prophets, especially Isaiah, to test the validity of the ideal type would now seem appropriate.

II. Criteria Applied to Biblical Case Studies

A. General Biblical Application

In his study on capitalism and the ideal type of capitalist, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber correctly identified the concept of "calling" as a clear concept in Protestant theology. Weberian analysis noted that the concept of calling clearly evolved in the religious doctrine as a new idea and the product of the Reformation. Weber defines the Protestant concept of "calling" as "the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the

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[34] Calloway, 19-20.
[35] Heschel, 25-26.
[36] *Ibid.*, 26.
[37] Calloway, 21.

individual could assume."[38] Weber points out that it is this concept of calling "which inevitably gave every-day worldly activity a religious significance."[39] While this is a concept put forth by Protestants, it certainly has a heritage in the biblical record.

> Now it is unmistakable that even in the German word *Beruf*, and perhaps still more clearly in the English *calling*, a religious conception, that of a task set by God, is at least suggested. The more emphasis is put upon the word in a concrete case, the more evident is the connotation. And if we trace the history of the word through civilized languages, it appears that neither the predominantly Catholic peoples nor those of classical antiquity have possessed any expression of similar connotation for what we know as a calling (in the sense of a life-task, a definite field in which to work), while one has existed for all predominantly Protestant peoples.[40]

The development of the concept of calling in Weber's analysis is new to Protestants in the sense that it applied a concept of "calling" to all people, religious and secular, and in essence erased the boundary between those categories. Nevertheless, in describing the development, Weber acknowledges the presence of this concept in the lives of the prophets of the Old Testament in the religious context.

> The authority of the Bible, from which Luther though he had derived his idea of the calling, on the whole favoured a traditionalistic interpretation. The old Testament, in particular, though in the genuine prophets it showed no sign of a tendency to excel worldly morality, and elsewhere only in quite isolated rudiments and suggestions, contained a similar religious idea entirely in this traditionalistic sense. Everyone should abide by his living and let the godless run after gain."[41]

Weber concluded that Luther's concept of calling in the Reformation was adapted from a traditionalistic view, which put forth that a person's "calling is something which man has to accept as a divine ordinance, to which he must adapt himself. This aspect outweighed

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[38] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930), 80.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*, 79.

the other idea which was also present, that work in the calling was a, or rather *the*, task set by God."[42] This traditionalistic view is clearly present in the biblical record of pre-exilic prophets and is important in understanding the criteria for "prophecy." The application of criteria to the lives of pre-exilic biblical prophets must be seen in the context of this biblical context of the concept of calling.

The biblical concept of calling can arguably be traced to perceived epiphanies to Noah in Genesis 6:13-22 and Abram in Genesis 12:1-4, both of which were told a task specific command by Yahweh, building a boat and leaving Ur to start a new nation, respectively. Nevertheless, the concept of calling can clearly be seen in the account of Moses, who is traditionally called the first of the biblical prophets, a distinction which Weber would concede, describing Moses the "archetype of prophet." Moses' call experience is recorded in Exodus 3 and contains some of the following passages:

> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."[43]

The account of the call experience goes on to recount that Yahweh was revealing to Moses his role as deliverer of the Israelites from the bonds of slavery in Egypt. Initially Moses protests repeatedly and eventually accepted the role and the corresponding task.

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[41] *Ibid., 83.*
[42] *Ibid.*, 85
[43] Exodus 3:2-4, NASV.

> The call of Moses is indeed significant in the light of his background and training (Ex. 3-4). In the court of Pharaoh he realized that he would have to contend with authority. Not without reason was he reluctant to ask for Israel's release. God assured Moses of divine aid and provided three miracles to accredit him before the Israelites- the rod which became a serpent, the leprous hand, and the water turning to blood. This furnished a reasonable basis for the Israelites to believe that Moses had been commissioned by the God of the patriarchs. Having been assured that Aaron would be his spokesman, Moses complied with God's call and returned to Egypt.[44]

The biblical record clearly identifies a call experience with the role of a prophet. Jeremiah's account record's "Then the LORD stretched out his hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.'"[45] Ezekiel reports a similar experience that included elaborate visions from God. When applying the criteria of the ideal type of prophet to Moses, he measures up quite favorably. There is clearly a call experience, and his attempts to convert were not to convert to a faith in Yahweh but to a faith that Yahweh would do what he said he would, deliver the people from Egyptian slavery. While Moses' charisma is unchallenged, his credibility often was, yet in the end Moses is well known today because he spoke words which were regarded to be true. One of Moses' protests regarded his lack of skill and confidence as a public speaker, thus the arrangement for Aaron as spokesman. However, it seems clear that over his lifetime he proved to be a communicator. Nevertheless, the biblical background is clear that public speaking is clearly indicated as a criteria for the distinction of "prophet."

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[44] Samuel J. Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1960), 50-51.
[45] Jeremiah 1:9, NASV.

> The prophetic word- far more than any of the other forms of speech used by Yahwism- has its origin in an impassioned dialogue; ...the prophets use every possible rhetorical device - they are not afraid to use extremely radical forms of expression or even caricature.[46]

Von Rad's analysis points out clearly the ecstatic nature of biblical prophecy and the prophetic elements of Moses' life certainly includes an ecstatic deliverance of a message to the public. Moses certainly had a message to be delivered, not only to the Israelites but also to the Egyptians.

> We do not gain understanding of the prophet's "message" either by reducing the sum total of his sayings to general basic religious concepts, or by coordinating the separate sayings to make a synthetic whole. As was stated above, each saying was, for those to whom it was addressed, the word of Yahweh. There is therefore, strictly speaking, no such thing as a "message" to which each single word was subordinate and from which each single announcement was derived; al that we have are the various individual words in which, on each specific occasion, the word of Yahweh was proclaimed in a different guise.[47]

Moses was also reputed to have a piety in relationship with Yahweh that was more personal than the ordinary person. The Bible records dialogue between Moses and Yahweh and clearly the standard of a special relationship with God is evidenced.

There is much similarity between the traditions of the eighth-century BCE prophets and the traditions of prophecy which preceded them in the ancient world. A simple comparison of the traditions clearly shows some overlap in practice, suggesting that more ancient traditions influenced the traditions of the eighth-century BCE. Von Rad adds evidence which clarifies:

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[46] Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 100.
[47] *Ibid.*, 101.

> Scholars have since shown that the prophets' involvement in ancient Eastern ideas, in cult and myth, indeed even in primitive 'magic' ideas (as they were then called) was much greater than had been supposed. Furthermore, this involvement in the traditions and general religious ideas of their environment was by no means just a peripheral one: it extended to the centre (sic) of their message.[48]

The criteria that Weber pointed out as "prophetic" in the traditions of prophets in ancient Judaism were echoed by the scholarship of Von Rad, who wrote extensively on issues regarding the prophets' call, their ecstasy, and the unique characteristics of the prophets' message. The observations of Weber, systematized using Weberian methodology, and crafted into an ideal type of biblical prophet, is strongly supported with the biblical record of the traditions of prophecy, beginning with the prophetic tendencies of the earliest biblical characters and extending through the prophets of the eighth-century BCE.

Some of the criteria of the ideal type can be examined in the life and ministry of the ancient canonical prophet Hosea. All that is known about the historical prophet Hosea is discovered in the autobiographical sections of the biblical book of Hosea. Like his contemporary, Amos, he prophesied to the Northern Kingdom,[49] while Isaiah and Micah were ministering to the Southern Kingdom.[50] The area of the Fertile Crescent in the eighth-century BCE was filled with warfare, invasions, and the shifting of power and property.

> More often than fighting off the rest of the world, however, Israelites have fought among themselves. The greatest split in the country came after the death of Solomon, when Southern Judea stayed with the true Temple worship and the son of Solomon, but northern Israel rebelled against God and the weak king and went

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[48] *Ibid.*, 13.

[49] The Northern Kingdom was called Israel, and sometimes was called Ephraim, after the largest tribe.

[50] Also called Judah.

> her separate way. The old religion of Canaan was revived in the north, although some semblance of the rites of Moses and Aaron was practiced by a few faithful.[51]

Material prosperity and spiritual decline characterized the historical and cultural context of the time under Jeroboam II (782-753), when Hosea began his ministry. Assassination of leaders and poor trade were the norm before the reign of Jeroboam II who was not only long-lived but also brought a stable increasing wealth to the capital, Samaria.

> The bear of Assyria to the north was placated with tribute money, and relations with Judea were carefully friendly. When Menahem took the throne in 752 BCE, . . . he reaffirmed Israel's allegiance to Assyria and her king Tiglath-Pileser and led his people even deeper into the dark and pleasurable worship of the old ones of Canaan. Into this situation came a man sent from God, a prophet, sent to lead his people back to the true worship of the God of Moses.[52]

Hosea's prophecy was characterized by pointing out the perceived spiritual bankruptcy and the specific "sins" of the people that he believed were committed against Yahweh.

The first criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet is: A prophet experiences an ecstatic sense of "calling" from God. There is no detailed description (like that of Isaiah) of the "call" experience of Hosea. However, the very first verse of the book of Hosea implies a specific time that Yahweh was perceived to have "called" Hosea:

> The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. When the LORD first spoke through Hosea. . .[53]

The dates of these kings are as follows: Uzziah (also called Azariah), 791-740 BCE; Jotham, 750-732 BCE; Ahaz, 746-716 BCE; Hezekiah, 716-687 BCE; Jeroboam II, 793-

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[51] Marion Wyse, *Hosea and Gomer* (Wheaton: Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985), 9.
[52] *Ibid., 10.*

753 BCE The passage suggests that Yahweh communicated to Hosea during a historical period commonly identified to the reigns of certain leadership. This in itself doesn't imply a specific call at a particular time, however, the first part of Hosea 1:2 suggests that at some point, the "LORD first spoke" to and through Hosea. "Visions and auditions are naturally not strictly separated but related in various ways. Of Hosea, the first prophet, it is merely said that the 'word of Yahwe' (*debar Yahwe*) came to him."[54] While we have no detailed account of that first experience of "hearing" Yahweh's "call," it is implied that Hosea did sense a "calling" from God to be a prophetic spokesman. This call experience, while not detailed, fulfills the characteristics of this criterion. It was a call experienced through an ecstatic event, in the sense that the prophet perceived that he heard a voice that was beyond himself.

The second criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet is: A prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes. In the book of Hosea, Chapters 1-3 detail the prophet's domestic life, which will be discussed later in the section dealing with ecstatic profile. The remainder of the book records excerpts of Hosea's messages delivered during his 50 year career as a prophet. In the prophetic section three themes are dominant: the "sins" of the people, the certainty of the "judgment" of Yahweh, and the assurance of Yahweh's loyal love to the people. Von Rad notices a strong emphasis of the prophet to convert his listeners to a faithful

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[53] Hosea 1:1-2a, NASV.
[54] Weber, 444 n. 12.

commitment to Yahweh. Von Rad points out that the message of Hosea is rooted in the historical evidence that Yahweh was faithful to his people, the Israelites:

> Hosea's whole preaching is rooted in the saving history. It might almost be said that he only feels safe when he can base his arguments in history. Yahweh is Israel's God 'from the land of Egypt' (Hos. 12:10 [9]; 13:4); by the prophet Moses. Yahweh brought Israel up from Egypt (Hos. 12:14 [13]). This early history of Israel was the time when Yahweh was able to give her his entire love (Hos. 11:4). What an appalling contrast the present shows! Israel has forsaken Yahweh like a faithless wife who runs after her lovers. Hosea depicted this completely subverted relationship of Israel to Yahweh under the image of his own marriage, and used the symbolic names of children born of it to announce the message of Yahweh's wrath and his turning away from his people.[55]

The criteria of the ideal type of biblical prophet generally apply to biblical models, however to more objectively use the tool to apply to modern subjects, it needs to be tested with a control subject known to be a prophet. In this next section, the ideal type is applied to the life of Isaiah to not only test the ideal type, but also to gain a greater understanding of the criteria.

B. Isaiah

1. Isaiah As Prophet

The biblical book of Isaiah is generally divided into three sections that are disputed among scholars debating authorship. This exercise generally is a search for the historical pre-exilic prophet to which the book is attributed. Most competent scholars do not doubt the historicity of the prophet or the partial authorship of the book attributed to him. There

are several sections in the first part of the book which are generally accepted as being written by the pre-exilic prophet. This discussion will be limited to these chapters in the book of Isaiah: 1-11, 13-23, and 28-32. The writings in the other chapters of Isaiah are attributed to at least two other possible authors, commonly known as Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah. Although the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating to the second-century BCE, attribute and consider the entire book as a single unit with a common author, other evidence not part of this study causes doubt to be cast on the other chapters, so this study will be limited to the chapters commonly accepted as authored by the eighth-century prophet named Isaiah.

Little is known about Isaiah's lineage, birth, youth, or education except that he was the son of Amoz and apparently his hometown was Jerusalem. His call experience is definitely dated in the year that King Uzziah died, or 740 BCE and therefore Isaiah's birth is reasonably dated 765-760 BCE. When Isaiah was born Judah was prosperous and growing in military and economic strength. Tiglath-pileser III, also known as Pul, assumed the Assyrian throne in 745 BCE and subsequently conquered Babylon and began advancing their campaign westward towards Palestine.[56]

> Under the pending threat of Assyrian aggression rapid changes occurred in Israel and these undoubtedly had their repercussions in Judah. When Menahem died he was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who was murdered by Pekah after a two-year rule. The latter seized the throne in Samaria in 740-39 and began an aggressive anti-Assyrian policy. The death of Uzziah, the outstanding king of Judah since the days of David and Solomon, occurred the same year.[57]

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[55] Von Rad, 111-112.
[56] Schultz, 299-300.
[57] *Ibid.*, 300.

It is at this time that Isaiah received his calling. Isaiah warned continuously and vigorously against foreign alliances and instead urged Judah to trust Yahweh (7:4; 30:1-17), and although he was usually scoffed at, he warned of the inevitability of the Babylonian captivity. He also addressed social ills because he saw them as symptoms of a spiritual decline and delivered these messages in a prophetic style.

2. The Analysis of Isaiah As A "Biblical Prophet"

a. Isaiah's Calling

The first criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet is: A prophet experiences an ecstatic sense of "calling" from God. This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> "In the accounts of their ecstasy of calling, this first ecstasy, giving the prophet his 'call,' is never presented as the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits. On the contrary, it was always in agreement with the endogenous nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[58]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "calling" or the first criterion.

The call experience of Isaiah is a classic account of the ecstatic perception of the prophet hearing and having a vision of Yahweh. It is recorded in chapter 6 of the biblical book of Isaiah:

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I (Isaiah) said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken form the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
And He said, "Go, and tell this people:
'Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.'
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull, and their eyes dim,
Lest they see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And return and be healed."
Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered,
"Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,
Houses are without people,
And the land is utterly desolate,
The LORD has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,
And it will be subject to burning,
Like a terebinth or oak,
Whose stump remains when it is felled,
The holy seed is its stump."[59]

This call experience of the prophet Isaiah is one of the more well-known in the scripture, on the same level as Moses' burning bush and Paul's road to Damascus

[58] Weber, 294.

experience. The account of the experience is important evidence for the purposes of this study, and is important for several reasons. First, it validates the criterion of the ideal type that states that part of the prophetic tradition is an ecstatic calling. Whether you agree with the authenticity of the possibility of this being genuine, even the greatest skeptics would acknowledge that this account reports that the prophetic subject believed that he was being asked by the divine being to be a messenger of truth to a particular society, in this case Judah. Second, it is good evidence of the presence of an ecstatic tradition within the prophetic tradition of the ancient canonical prophets. It is evident from the Isaiah 6, as well as many other Isaiah passages, that the prophet perceived that visions from Yahweh came upon him as sudden occurrences. Third, this passage gives evidence that the visions are perceived otherworldly conversations with Yahweh and even other beings in his divine court.[60] Consequently, these perceived conversations would justify in the prophets mind his responsibility to speak this "truth" to his assigned audience; it is the essence of the call experience, an assignment to be a messenger of truth, and the bestowal of the charisma to accomplish the task. This passage is clear evidence that Isaiah meets this criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

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[59] Isaiah 6:1-13, NASV.

[60] Notice the message to Isaiah reported in Isaiah 6:7 from one of the "seraphim." Seraphim are believed to be angel-like heavenly creatures, some scholars believe there is a sense of "burning ones" and others translate it "exalted" or "noble ones." C.H. Irwin, *The International Bible Commentary,* (Chicago: John C. Winston, 1928), 236.

b. Isaiah's Attempt To Convert

The second criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes.[61] This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> "Every prophet is bound by the law and its commandments and whoever seeks to estrange men from them is a false prophet. Hence only one who converts men from their sins can be truly god-sent."[62]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "attempt to convert" or the second criterion.

Isaiah could be called "the evangelical prophet" because his message emphasizes much about the redemptive work of the Messiah (i.e. 9:6-7). Isaiah also attacked the social ills of his society (1:3-9), not because he felt a calling to be a social reformer, but because he believed that if the nation did not change, that the spiritual decline would cause the political and economic destruction of Judah. He believed that Yahweh would not protect them as long as they were not repentant in the face of the advancing Assyrian army under the leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III. An example of this prophetic message is found in the first chapter of the book of Isaiah:

> 'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD,[63]

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[61] At the time of the ancient prophets, obviously none of the sacred writings were established as canonical.

[62] Weber, 395.

[63] When "LORD" appears in all capital letters, it means the name "Yahweh" has been translated. "Yahweh" was considered too sacred to be spoken, so ancient scribes substituted "LORD." Sometimes you see the German transliteration "Jehovah." (The Hebrew language used no vowels so Yahweh was actually

'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.
If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land;
But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.'
Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.[64]

Isaiah desired to convert Judah from apostatic practices to a renewed commitment to Yahweh. Weber comments on the intention of the prophets to intention to point out God and his attributes and plan for their audience.

> Presumably the demand for faith within Israel was first raised and emphatically stressed by the prophets, and, indeed, by Isaiah (7:9). This agreed with the nature of the prophetic inspiration and its interpretation. They heard the voice of God which required in the first place nothing from them and the people other than faith. The prophet had to demand faith of himself and this faith had to be devoted to the missionary messages which his god laid on him. Hence, the faith which the Jewish prophets demanded, was not that internal behavior which Luther and the Reformers intended. In truth, it signified only the unconditional trust in Yahwe's omnipotence and the sincerity of his word and conviction in its fulfillment despite all external probabilities to the contrary. The greatest prophets, especially Isaiah and Ezekiel, indeed, based their stand on this conviction. Obedience and particularly humility were the ensuing virtues and both were especially appreciated by Yahwe, especially humility, the strict avoidance not only of *hybris* in the Hellenic sense, but in the last analysis of all trust in one's own abilities and all self-reknown. This representation was of great consequence for the development of later Jewish piety.[65]

Heschel acknowledges the intention of Isaiah to deliver a message with a purpose of converting, or some semblance thereof, his audience.

> The mandate (the call in Isaiah 6) Isaiah receives is fraught with an appalling contradiction. He is told to be a prophet in order to thwart and to defeat the essential purpose of being a prophet. He is told to face his people while standing on his head.

[in English] YHWH. Adding vowels and substituting the German "J" for "Y" and "V" for "W," leaves you with the German/English transliteration "JeHoVaH.")

[64] Isaiah 1:18-20, NASV.

[65] Weber, 318.

> Did he not question his own faculties of seeing, hearing, and understanding when perceiving such a message? What gave him the certainty that it was God's voice speaking to him? It is generally assumed that the mission of a prophet is to open the people's hearts, to enhance their understanding, and to bring about rather than to prevent their turning to God. Was not Isaiah's entire ministry devoted to persuading, to exhorting, and to influencing his people?[66]

The second criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet is that the prophet seeks to convert his audience. Isaiah meets this criterion of the ideal type.

c. Isaiah's Charisma

The third criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet is recognized by others as possessing a quality known as "charisma." This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> The prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." "By virtue of their calling the prophets laid claim to special qualities; . . . the expression 'spiritual man' (*ish haruach*) is employed by a scriptural prophet."[67] "Such prophecy was authoritarian in character and averse to all orderly procedure."[68]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "charisma" or the third criterion.

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[66] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 89-90.
[67] Weber, 297.
[68] Weber, 271.

When Weber originally describes charisma he means, "it is conceived to be a magical quality of an extraordinary person, leader, ruler who claims authority and leadership on its basis."[69] Weber articulates that this charisma was bestowed upon an individual by God: "At times, the prophet resisted, like Jeremiah, with anxiety, this charisma which was laid upon him as a duty; at times he offered himself joyfully to the God in quest of a prophet, like Isaiah."[70] Weber saw "prophetic charisma" as a duty and as something bestowed. The editors of *Ancient Judaism* write, "Where leadership and group-cohesion is based on the belief of the followers in the alleged, presumed, or actual extraordinariness and irreplaceability of the leader, Weber speaks of charismatic leadership, charismatic authority, etc."[71]

Weber articulates the magical power that prophetic charisma includes,

> However, if the prophetic charisma first means the ability rationally to understand Yahwe, it nevertheless contains quite different irrational potentialities. The first of these is magical power. Isaiah is the only scriptural prophet mentioned as medical consultant during a sickness of King Hezekiah.[72]

It was precisely Isaiah's charisma that led to his invitation. Whether the charisma was bestowed upon him by God, or whether it was the combination of a gregarious leader personality who was emotionally stable, it is evident that Isaiah possessed the prophetic charisma that is a criterion of the ideal type.

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[69] Weber, 465.
[70] Weber, 294.
[71] Weber, 465.
[72] Weber, 297-298.

d. Isaiah's Credibility

The fourth criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet speaks words which are later perceived to be credible and true. This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> Additionally, the prophet is "self evidently false if he teaches false gods or whose prophecy remains unfulfilled."[73]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "credibility" or the fourth criterion.

In most respects, the credibility of Isaiah has been validated in a time context much longer than many prophets' credibility is judged. To many modern day evangelicals, Isaiah's credibility is understood not only in the sense of his political warnings coming true, like the warnings about the Assyrians, but also in the context of his prophetic words regarding the messiah being perceived to be true, especially when the events of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth are superimposed on the writings of Isaiah hundreds if not thousands of years later. The definition of prophecy as put forth by this study is that it is not foretelling the future, but rather forth-telling the truth. This does not mean to say that prophecy has no predictive element at all, but that prophecy should not be defined or understood as only, or even mostly, in the predictive sense. It does mean that prophecy can be understood in the sense that warnings or proclamations about events in the future can be

viewed as forth-telling the truth that unless people, policies, and practices change, then the future events were realistic. However, there are some events that Isaiah predicted which are hard to rationally explain and are attributed to the prophet's special relationship with Yahweh that allowed him to know information that in retrospect is judged to be accurate in the predictive sense. There are several passages which would qualify, like Isaiah's warnings that Assyria would defeat Judah, and that eventually a remnant would return to reestablish Yahwism in Jerusalem, but a good example is found in Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.

In 701, Sennacherib launched a military expedition against Palestine. Most rulers surrendered and paid tribute or were easily overrun by the superior Assyrian army:

> A large Egyptian and Ethiopian army dispatched to relieve the beleaguered town of Ekron was defeated. Important as it might have been to invite Egypt, Sennacherib's army instead turned against Judah, the chief enemy in this entire campaign. There was nothing to hinder their entrance into Judah. Soon her valleys were filled with Assyrian chariots and horsemen (22:7), the country ravaged, forty-six fortified cities turned over to the pro-Assyrian kings of the Philistine cities, and their populations deported. Sennacherib set up headquarters in Lachish, Judah's strong frontier fortress, where he awaited Hezekiah's surrender.[74]

Through messengers, Sennacherib demanded a huge tribute and the surrender of Jerusalem. Hezekiah was unwilling to accept that and was encouraged by Isaiah that Jerusalem would not be captured by Sennacherib and his army even though the city was beseiged.

> The plight of Jerusalem seemed desperate. All neighboring kingdoms either had surrendered or were crushed. The country was overrun by the enemy, Egyptian aid proved worthless. Jerusalem was alone. In that hour of distress and disgrace, Isaiah

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[73] Weber, 395.
[74] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 75.

> proclaimed the word that the Lord had spoken concerning Assyria. (Isaiah's words are found in Isaiah 37:22-29) Isaiah's prediction was vindicated by a miraculous event. A disastrous pestilence spread in the Assyrian camp, decimating the army. Sennacherib returned to Ninevah and was eventually murdered by his sons (II Kings 19:36-37).[75]

Weber's observations of this event were described as "Isaiah's oracle of good fortune for Jerusalem, during the siege of Sennacherib."[76] The credibility of Isaiah grew immensely as the result of his oracle that Jerusalem would not fall to the army of Sennacherib, when indeed it did not. It is difficult to rationally explain, and thus this is why Heschel calls the result a "miraculous event." Whatever the explanation, it is evident that Isaiah was seen as credible during his ministry and in the eyes of many and up until now, his perceived credibility has increased. Isaiah meets this criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

e. Isaiah As A Public Speaker

The fifth criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet delivers his message primarily by speaking in public. This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> "The pre-exilic prophets from Amos to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, viewed through the eyes of the contemporary outsider, appeared to be, above all, political demagogues and, on occasion, pamphleteers. . . .This characterization of the prophets (as demagogues and pamphleteers) can indeed be misleading, but properly understood it permits indispensable insight. It means that the prophets were primarily *speakers*. Prophets as writers appear only after the Babylonian Exile. The early prophets addressed their

[75] *Ibid.*, 76-77.
[76] Weber, 308.

> audiences in public. . . .to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[77]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "public speaking" or the fifth criterion.

Isaiah primarily delivered his message by speaking in public. Of course we now have his prophetic oracles and messages in written form, but it is evidenced that his primary mode of communication was speaking.

> Even Isaiah identified pasture and wasteland (5:17; 17:2), in the manner of an outright Jerusalemite. Apparently Isaiah preferred the public courtyard of the Temple as a scene for his appearance. . . . As a rule, however, the prophet personally confronted also the king and his family in the street, spoke in public, or - though this was unusual - dictated his word to a disciple and had it circularized. This last is illustrated by Isaiah who had his disciples seal one of his oracles (8:16).[78]

A written dictation which was circularized was unusual. The primary delivery of the message of Isaiah was the spoken word, mostly using the messenger formula that the prophet was speaking for and on behalf of Yahweh. Evidence shows that Isaiah meets this criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

f. Isaiah's Message In Tension

The sixth criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture. As a reminder, this is based on the following observation of Weber:

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[77] Weber, 267,268, 269.

"The total attitude of the prophets has often been described as 'culture hostility.'"[79] Weber did not mean that the prophets had a personal lack of culture, as a matter of fact it was usually quite the opposite in that most prophets were literate and well informed about their own culture and the cultures of neighboring societies. Weber explains what he means by "culture hostility."

> Not only all aesthetic and all values of genteel living in general, but also, all worldly wisdom was viewed by them with quite alien eyes. These attitudes were sustained by the anti-chrematistic tradition of the puritanically pious in their environment who were suspicious of the court, the officials, the *gibborim* and the priests."[80]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "message in tension" or the sixth criterion.

Isaiah's message was definitely in tension with the culture, including the religious culture. Some of the tension manifested itself as apathy, as reflected at the end of the call experience passage in Isaiah 6: "Then I (Isaiah) said, 'Lord, how long?' And He answered, 'Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people, and the land is utterly desolate. . .'"[81] The apathy seems to be a symptom of a perceived cause for the tension resulting from Isaiah's message: it is perceived that Yahweh "hardened Israel's heart" to the truth of Isaiah's message.

> Yet God erected a terrible barrier against Isaiah and his preaching: he hardened Israel's heart. . . .there are striking similarities between Isa. 6 and I Kings 22:21, and

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[78] Weber, 269.
[79] Weber, 285.
[80] Weber, 285-286.
[81] Isaiah 6:11, NASV.

> both have been described as typical stories of a prophet's commissioning. If then is so, then it was the prophetic tradition which furnished Isaiah with this very motif of hardening of the heart. However this may be, the motif holds so prominent a position in Isaiah that we must take the trouble to assign to it its proper place within the wider context of Yahwism. Many commentators have found no great difficulty in this. They appealed to the undisputed fact that when the word of God is continually rejected, the capacity to hear and understand it dies away.[82]

The form that the tension and hostility towards Isaiah's message took is mainly in the form of apathy and indifference. It grieved Isaiah that he saw the problems of his culture but the average person went on with life as if everything was great. Isaiah's message to the common man seemed unnecessary gloom and doom, and his apathy caused him to scoff at Isaiah.

> Callousness is sovereign and smug; it clings to the soul and will not give in. The crack of doom is in the air, but the people, unperturbed, are carried away by a rage to be merry. *Carpe diem* - after all, death signifies merely the end of the opportunity to be merry.
>
> *In that day the Lord God of hosts*
> *Called for weeping and lamentation,*
> *And balding and girding with sackcloth;*
> *And behold, joy and gladness,*
> *Slaying oxen and killing sheep,*
> *Eating flesh and drinking wine.*
> *Let us eat and drink*
> *For tomorrow we die!*
> *The Lord of hosts has revealed in my ears:*
> *Verily, this iniquity shall not be pardoned till you die,*
> *Says the Lord God of hosts.*
>
> *Isaiah 22:12-14*
>
> The threat of scourge and doom does not frighten the scoffers, nor does the prophet's condemnation of their cherished beliefs as lies of falsehood shake their self-assurance.[83]

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[82] von Rad, 122.
[83] Heschel, *The Prophet*, 90-91.

The tension was only a symptom of the pride and complacency of the culture, which to Isaiah is exactly the reason the prophetic words and oracles were needed. The complacency and pride were what the people needed to become aware of and of which they needed to be repentant.

> A factual description of the state of religion in the time of Isaiah, based upon the data cited in his accusation, would speak of disregard and deviation and evasion. Yet Isaiah speaks of rebellion, rejection, and disdain.
>
> *Ah, sinful nation,*
> *A people laden with iniquity,*
> *Offspring of evildoers,*
> *Sons who deal corruptly!*
> *They have forsaken the Lord,*
> *They have despised the Holy One of Israel,*
> *They are utterly estranged. . .*
> *They have despised the Torah of the Lord of hosts,*
> *They have contemned the word of the Holy One of Israel.*
> *Isaiah 1:4; 5:24*
>
> There is no contrition, no compunction, no regret. Instead there is pride, conceit, and complacency (32:9 ff.).[84]

The tension and hostility toward Isaiah's message probably took many forms, but none greater than scoffing and apathy. The ideal type of prophet has a message that is in tension with the culture. Isaiah's culture was generally not receptive to the bulk of what Isaiah said that God wanted them to hear. Isaiah meets this criterion for the ideal type of biblical prophet.

g. Isaiah As An Ecstatic

The seventh criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet had an ecstatic psychological profile. This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> "Psychologically viewed most pre-Exile prophets were ecstatic men. At least, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel professed to be and undoubtedly were. Without gross carelessness, one may safely assume that all were ecstatics, though of various kinds and in different degree. . . . The prophets ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological[85] states and acts. There can be no doubt that these very states, originally, were considered important legitimations of prophetic charisma and, hence, were to be expected in milder forms even when not reported."[86]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "ecstatic" or the seventh criterion.

Weber's observation on which this criterion is based on included Isaiah as an example of the ecstatic. Heschel's evaluation is similar to Weber's. Quoting R. Kittel's *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Heschel says, "Isaiah's and Jeremiah's consecration-visions are pathological phenomena, akin to the ecstatic visions of the seers and diviners."[87]

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[84] *Ibid.*, 92-93.

[85] The word "pathological" in any context but especially a psychological context could be easily misconstrued or misunderstood by a modern reader. Weber's use of the word in 1952 would not be loaded necessarily with the extreme negative connotations that might be associated with it in 1999. Weber uses the word "pathological" in the sense of the essential nature or the characteristic function of the prophet, especially in the context of the emotional. "Of interest, in the first place, is the emotional character of prophetic ecstasy *per se*, which differentiates it from all forms of Indian apathetic ecstasy." (Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 288) In true Weberian form, he probably does attribute the observed behavior as abnormal human behavior, but states it as objectively as possible without judgment of value. Nevertheless, the use of the word "pathological" seems to be a rhetorical problem in the historical context. Abraham Heschel seems to use the same word in the same context.

[86] Weber, 286.

[87] Heschel, *The Prophets, Volume II*, 175. The quote was taken from R. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, II (2nd ed.; Gotha, 1903), sec.46, 449.

Heschel argues that the ecstasy of Isaiah is a symptom of his pathological behavior. He says,

"What is the evidence to justify such a diagnosis?"[88] Heschel then acknowledges Weber's comments from above that the prophets (including Isaiah) "professed to be and undoubtedly were" ecstatics and that their ecstasy "was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts."[89] Heschel then asks a question and answers it with important evidence of Isaiah's ecstatic psychological profile:

> What were these (pathological) states and acts? . . .
> . . .2. Isaiah, upon the Lord's 'command (?) had intercourse with a prophetess whose child he then named as previously ordained (Isa. 8:3).[90] Strange, symbolic names of children of prophets generally were found.'
> 3. 'When the spirit overcame them, the prophets experienced facial contortions, their breath failed them, and occasionally they fell to the ground unconscious, for a time deprived of vision and speech, writhing in cramps (cf. Isa. 21).'[91]
> 4. Isaiah 'walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles . . . naked and barefoot (cf. Isa. 20:3-4).'[92]

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[88] *Ibid.*, 178.

[89] Weber, 286; Heschel, II, 178.

[90] This was quoted from Weber, 286. Isaiah 8:3 (NASV) says, "So (Isaiah) approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me (Isaiah), 'Name him Maher-shalal-has-baz.'" The child therefore became the symbol of the impending chastisement of Syria and the Ten Tribes of Israel in the north. In Isaiah 7:3, it relates that Isaiah had named one of his sons "Shear-jashub," which means "a remnant shall return." This was a prophetic word that even if Jerusalem was defeated, God would bring back a remnant of people to continue.

[91] Heschel was quoting directly from Weber, 286. The passage referred to is Isaiah 21:3,4 which says, "For this reason my loins are full of anguish; Pains have seized me like the pains of a woman in labor. I am so bewildered I cannot hear, so terrified I cannot see. My mind reels, horror overwhelms me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling (NASV)."

[92] Heschel, *The Prophets, II,* 178-179.

This criterion is very easy to find evidence, both primary and secondary, which supports that Isaiah had an ecstatic psychological profile. The ideal type is easily verified in this characteristic of prophecy in the life and ministry of Isaiah.

h. Isaiah's Piety

The eighth criterion of the ideal type of prophet is: A prophet claims and is perceived to have genuine piety in relationship to God. This is based on the following observation of Weber:

> "The decisive characteristic is that one must have personal intercourse with Yahwe. One must have stood 'in the counsel' of God and have personally heard the voice of the Lord if the oracle is to be valid."[93]

From this point forward in the paper, all of this description will not be repeated each time it is addressed. This criterion will be referred to as "relationship with God" or the eighth criterion.

Isaiah claimed to have and was perceived to have a close relationship and special communication with God. Abraham Joshua Heschel says, "Isaiah is animated by a sense of dread and the awareness of the transcendent mystery and exclusiveness of God, and only secondarily by a sense of intimacy, sympathy, and involvement in the divine situation."[94] Heschel goes on to say in regards to the relationship that Isaiah had with Yahweh:

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[93] Weber, 107.
[94] Heschel, *The Prophet*, 83.

> In this song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7), the prophet speaks first in his own name (vss. 1-2), then as the voice of God (vss. 3-6), and again in his own name (vs. 7). What personal attitude is reflected in the prophet's words?
>
> It is the prophet's love of God, Who is called 'my Friend' and for Whom he sings 'a love song concerning His vineyard.' He neither rebukes the people's ingratitude nor bewails their prospect of ruin and disgrace. The prophet's sympathy is for God Whose care for the vineyard had been of no avail. God's sorrow rather than the people's tragedy is the theme of this song.[95]

Isaiah's ministry is characterized by his concern and pity for the people who made up his audience. This is intensified as he becomes the spokesman for Yahweh:

> Indeed, two sympathies dwell in a prophet's soul: sympathy for God and sympathy for the people. Speaking to the people, he is emotionally at one with God; in the presence of God, beholding a vision, he is emotionally at one with the people When told of the doom which threatens 'this people,' Isaiah exclaims with a voice of shock and protest, 'How long, O Lord?' (6:11; cf. Jer. 4:14; Ps. 74:10).[96]

A person must perceive themselves to be very close to a divine being to perceive themselves in conversation with it, and then when told the plan for the people, to have the perceived right to challenge or question the proclamation he was assigned to deliver. Isaiah not only had a relationship with his audience but he believed he was close to Yahweh. Isaiah meets the criteria of the ideal type of claiming and being perceived to have genuine piety in relationship to God.

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[95] *Ibid.*, 85.
[96] *Ibid.*, 87.

III. Conclusions

In modern natural scientific methodology, tools such as induction, deduction, and systematic verification through planned experiments are used. The scientific method uses such concepts as objectivity to do scientific study. Weber applied these ideas to the much less objective field of the social sciences. Weber "therefore called his perspective 'interpretive' or 'understanding' sociology. It is characteristic of his rational and positivist position that he transformed the concept of understanding."[97] According to the methodology prescribed by Weber, in order to understand a subject of study, a social scientist should use a process of "value-orientation" to analyze human affairs. When "value-orientation" principles are combined with the Weberian tool, the ideal type, a method to study subjects with relative objectivity has been developed. This study uses this methodology to study prophets, a tradition of religious expression which has been around since pre-historic times.

This chapter develops criteria for the ideal type of biblical prophet and then attempts to test the "scientific" tool by a planned experiment of applying a control to the process. By applying the criteria of the ideal type to subjects which are known to be biblical prophets, the tool of the ideal type is tested, and found to be an accurate measure of prophetic characteristics, especially in the life and ministry of Isaiah. By using the "value-orientation" articulated by Weber, studies by comparison can now be made to

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[97] H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. and eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 56.

other subjects using this tool, the ideal type of biblical prophet, to measure with relative objectivity, whether the subject compares favorably to the ideal type. This work has applied the ideal type in the study of three modern religious leaders with the goal of answering the following questions: Is the ancient tradition of biblical prophecy a working tradition in the modern period in the west? Additionally, are the lives and ministries of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan prophetic? These questions could not be answered without the context of the historical traditions of prophecy discussed in Chapter 1 and the Weberian methodology, especially the ideal type, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. With this foundation laid, the examination of the life and ministry of the case studies, Niebuhr, King, and Jordan is possible.

CHAPTER 4

MODERN CASE STUDIES: REINHOLD NIEBUHR

I. Introduction to "Modern Prophecy"

Following the criteria of the ideal type of prophet from the previous chapter, the argument can be made that not only is prophecy an ancient religious expression but a viable religious reality in the modern period. These same criteria would apply to the "modern prophet," and this exercise in Weberian methodology provided the framework from which to examine the development of modern subjects into the ideal type of modern prophet.

In order to be quite clear of what is being communicated by calling a modern personality a "prophet," the use of this word needs to be defined. The popular meaning of the word would be quite limiting and mostly an inaccurate description of the ministry and message of Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Clarence Jordan and others. Consequently, a broader and more original meaning of the word must be employed.

Since the focus is personalities of the modern period and what is meant by calling someone a "prophet," it seems appropriate to refocus on Israelite prophetic traditions.

is *nabi*, derived from a verb signifying "to bubble forth" like a fountain; therefore the term means one "who announces" or "pours forth" the declarations of God. The English word comes from the Greek prophetes (προφητης) which means in Classical Greek "one who speaks for another," or "for a god," and therefore its essential meaning is "an interpreter."[1] The modern use of the word which connotes predictions or telling the future is post-classical, and is derived from the LXX. From this medieval use of the word, "prophecy" passed into the English language in the sense of "predictions" or "foretelling" and this seems to be its popular meaning and use, however, this common usage is misunderstood and incomplete at best, and probably inaccurate. If the more ancient understanding of the word is used, the prophets were to be "forth-tellers" of the truth of God. If "prophecy" is defined in this way, then this makes the term quite applicable and a good description of Niebuhr, King, Jordan and others.

II. Niebuhrian "Prophecy"

"Prophet" can be used to describe someone favorably in our twentieth-century culture. However, for the title to have integrity, it cannot be used loosely, and spoken in the full and deep understanding of the significance of the role. Joseph Blenkinsopp defers to Weber's definition of prophet:

> One of the best-known definitions of prophecy is that of Max Weber. . . In spite of his brilliance, Weber had the same problem as any other student of prophecy, namely, where to start. To explain his strategy, we must return to the concept of the *ideal*

[1] Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 895.

> *type*. . . On this basis, then, Weber defined the prophet as 'a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.' The elements considered essential, the constants, are therefore the possession of charisma, a distinctive mission, and a specifically religious message.[2]

Interestingly enough, Blenkinsopp's summary of the ideal type into three characteristics parallels the eight criteria that this paper puts forth as the ideal type of prophet.

Reinhold Niebuhr's preaching, lectures, and writings have often been called "prophetic." "Many sober-minded observers, not just among his friends, insisted on calling him a prophet—a label that always embarrassed him."[3] Niebuhr's admirers and opponents alike called him a prophet, and even though it may have embarrassed him, "he knew it was on target. He grappled endlessly with the paradox of cultivating a prophetic identity while avoiding a pretentious pose. It was Amos he wished to follow."[4]

To speak about Reinhold Niebuhr, one must almost ask "which Niebuhr?" Are we speaking of the Rauschenbusch-like pacifist of his twenties, or perhaps the Niebuhr who during the Cold War argued that it was America's responsibility to maintain the peace by a balance of terror and consequently save the rest of the world from communism? To a careful reader it is obvious that Reinhold Niebuhr evolved as a thinker. If you define prophecy the way it is defined in this paper, he was always the prophet, however his prophetic instincts seemed to be the sharpest earlier in his life when as a pastor he was grassroots connected with how theology and politics affected the lives of "the common

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[2] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1995), 115-116.

[3] Richard W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), vii.

man." The qualifier is that ancient prophets spoke to the "people of God" and Niebuhr's audience extended much beyond the church, and his mission was to try to present the Christian faith and truth to sophisticated intellectuals, including scholars, politicians, and those outside the field of religion. In this regard, Niebuhr may have been more in the role of "sage" as discussed by Blenkinsopp. Blenkinsopp tries to distinguish the role of sage as separate from the role of prophet.

> As a descriptive label, the term *sage* is not much in use in contemporary English, and its usage, when not facetious, is generally restricted to putatively wise individuals or groups in the past. . . Our inquiry into sagedom in Israel therefore has to include a wide range of phenomena in accounts where other designations (e.g., scribe, counselor) are used or, in some cases, where none is used at all. . . *Philosopher* is hardly appropriate, except perhaps with reference to the authors of Job and Ecclesiastes. If only because it is broader in connotation, *intellectual* might do, especially if it could be shown that a distinctly lay intellectual tradition existed in Israel during the biblical period. The more problematic term *dissident intellectual*, applied to certain prophets . . ."[5]

The term *sage* probable applies to Niebuhr. Since his audience was generally sophisticated intellectuals, including scholars, politicians, and those outside the field of religion, it gives even more credibility to the suggestion that Niebuhr was a sage or at least a sage-like prophet. This would put Niebuhr in the role of "court prophet" as oppsed to the prophet which preaches "outside the gate." It seems that this would resonate as well with Niebuhr as Fox reports Niebuhr's comments in his biography:

> "If Karl Barth is the Tertullian of our day," Niebuhr had written in a collection on Tillich in 1952, "abjuring ontological speculations for feat that they may obscure or blunt the kerygma of the Gospel, Tillich is the Origen of our period." He hesitated to

[4] *Ibid.*, viii.
[5] Blenkinsopp, 1.

> place himself in print among the Big Three, but he divulged his preferred historic place to Scarlett several years later: "About Barth and Tillich and myself. I wouldn't want to be Tertullian. He was too obscurantist. I would rather emulate Augustine."[6]

Niebuhr was involved in the political discourse and the realities of political life, therefore his prophetic voice might best be understood in terms of "court prophet" or "sage." Niebuhr stated the faith in modern terms, and communicated that a biblical perspective and the classical faith are relevant to modern times. For over half a century, Niebuhr's "prophecy" interpreted American theology, politics, philosophies, and religious faith. Consequently, it is neither pretentious or degrading, but quite accurate to label Niebuhr a "modern court prophet" or "sage."

III. The Analysis of Niebuhr As A Modern Prophet

A. Niebuhr's Calling

In regards to the prophetic calling of the ancient Israelite prophets, Weber refers to the "ecstasy of calling" as the "first ecstasy."[7] A distinguishing criterion for the ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet perceives an ecstatic sense of "calling" from God. However, Weber's observations make it clear that it is not just that a person feel "called" but that the calling is not just a long thought out decision, "the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits."[8] Rather, Weber perceives that the call experience of the ancient canonical prophets was more

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[6] Fox, 257.

[7] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 294.

spontaneous, truly an ecstatic experience: "it was always in agreement with the endogenous nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[9]

The seeds of Reinhold's personal experience with God sprouted in the soil of his own heritage. He was born June 21, 1892, the son of Gustav Niebuhr, who was an immigrant from Germany. Coming from farming background, his father eventually pursued seminary training and married a pastor's daughter, who was herself a second-generation German-American. Like most people, Reinhold's character and values were shaped by his ancestral heritage and the culture in which he lived and grew.

> The origins of Reinhold Niebuhr's wisdom lie in the combination of German-Lutheran ancestry and the values of the American heartland. His intellectual saga, to be sure, encompasses the vast range of the Western world's intellectual history and in many ways owes more to the Anglo-Saxon world than to the German. His faith, however, was carefully nurtured in the cradle of German-Lutheran piety. His early attitudes toward politics were set by his father's reaction against German authoritarianism and his appropriation of midwestern egalitarianism and patriotism.[10]

It seems, however, that the most significant characteristic which Niebuhr inherited from his father was the inspiration of a "deep admiration and the conviction that the vocation of the pastorate was the most interesting position in town."[11]

> Reinhold's father read from the Bible every morning in both Hebrew and Greek and conducted a learned ministry which inclined his denominational seminary to offer him a post as a professor. His father held together his religious and social interests in a harmony which Reinhold always remembered fondly . . . If a father/pastor exhibits "real grace" in the religious life of the family the son is very likely to enter the ministry. Reinhold's relationship with his father was warm and trusting.[12]

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[8] Weber, 294.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Ronald H. Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet to Politicians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 17.
[11] *Ibid.*, 18.
[12] *Ibid.*

Because of his healthy home environment, the aptitude for deep religious convictions was nurtured. It also nurtured a high esteem of the values of the academic life.

Another formative characteristic which Reinhold inherited from Gustav was his father's tendency towards liberalism. Gustav dismissed the fundamentalists, yet "he was also enraged by liberal modernists who discounted the New Testament miracles."[13]

> Gustav's liberalism had combined both a flexible attitude towards dogma and strong interest in social and political questions, with an orthodox commitment to the divinity of Christ and the supernatural character of saving grace.[14]

Reinhold inherited his father's tendency towards liberalism and carried it further. In a sermon at Lincoln First Methodist Church on August 17, 1913 Niebuhr portrayed God as a principle of judgement. In saying this he "had taken the first standard liberal Protestant step . . . Reinhold, in the summer of 1913, had begun to secularize, naturalize his father's message."[15]

From the exercise in Weberian methodology, the first characteristic in the ideal type of a prophet is that they must have perceived an ecstatic "calling" from God. Theologians by nature tend to move out of the realm of personal religious experiences with God. However, from Stone and Fox's bibliographic descriptions, it seems quite clear that Niebuhr's personal intercourses with God grew from seeds planted in his childhood religious experiences. It is interesting to note that even as late as Spring, 1914, he was writing his thesis for his B.D. at Yale, it was originally entitled "The Validity of

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[13] Fox, 7.
[14] *Ibid.*, 23.

Religious Experience and the Certainty of Religious Knowledge." However, when he handed in the paper in its final form, the title had been shortened to "The Validity and Certainty of Religious Knowledge" (notice the omission of "Religious Experience")[16] Niebuhr's "calling" to public ministry doesn't seem to be based on an ecstatic calling, a sudden occurrence like an "Isaiah 6" experience. There doesn't seem to be moment of perceiving God's call (like Moses' burning bush). Rather, Niebuhr's prophetic career was flavored by positive religious experiences especially in the early part of his life. In this regard, and noting that Weber describes the call as "ecstatic" and "a sudden unmotivated occurrence,"[17] Niebuhr's experience is marginal in this criterion and therefore does not meet this criterion as an ideal type of modern prophet.

B. Niebuhr's Attempt To Convert

Another criterion of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that a prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes. In his chapter, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" Heschel points out that prophets see the world differently than those without the gift of prophecy. What may seem trivial to the common man is quite important to a prophet because he is more sensitive to evil and issues which effect the welfare of the people.

> Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is

[15] *Ibid.*, 23.
[16] *Ibid.*, 29.
[17] Weber, 294.

> injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.[18]

It seems clear that Niebuhr was never afraid to speak a message which made people more sensitive to God. It also is probably another characteristic which he inherited from his father.

> Gustav did not hesitate to speak out on controversial public issues, at a time when many liberal ministers preferred to stick to platitudes about social progress. He was especially outraged by the local saloons, which in his view undermined family life. Perhaps it was his six years in San Francisco, one of the "wettest" American cities, that filled him with animus on the subject of public drinking. His was not a popular stance in a German community that often viewed the temperance movement as an Anglo-Saxon plot against German culture. But it probably did endear him, by contrast, to the town's Protestant leaders, who were appalled not only by German drinking, but by the drinking of the several hundred Irish and Polish Catholic miners who worked the three local coal mines and periodically let loose in Lincoln.[19]

From the beginning of his ministry until the end of his academic career, Niebuhr's prophetic message was unique. He stated the faith in modern terms, to show to modern man that biblical perspective and classical faith are relevant. For example, in a sermon at Union theological Seminary on February 3, 1952, Niebuhr's prophetic message was clear.

> The problem with Christians, he observed, was their self-satisfaction. "When we say that we believe in God, we are inclined to mean that we have found a way to the ultimate source and end of life, and this gives us, against all the chances and changes of life, some special security and some special favor."[20]

Niebuhr spoke with the prophet's intensity and single mindedness. Describing a conversation he had with "Reinie," Dr. Henlee Barnette, Professor Emeritus of Ethics at Southern Seminary, recalled,

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[18] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 4.
[19] Fox, 7.

> Reinhold despised being called 'neo-orthodox,' he instead wanted to be called a 'Christian realist.' Reinhold said that Karl Barth had 'airplane ethics,' that is, he flew right over the issues. Reinhold felt you needed to be on the ground wrestling with the issues, and saw himself involved in that process.[21]

If the ideal type of prophet is one whose message brings people back to allegiance to God, then Niebuhr meets this criterion of the ideal type of modern prophet.

C. Niebuhr's Charisma

The third characteristic of the Weberian ideal type of prophet is that the prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." When Weber speaks of "prophetic charisma" it is originally conceived "to be a magical quality of an extraordinary person, leader, ruler who claims authority and leadership on its basis."[22] This is the easiest category to prove in Niebuhr's credentials in that he was reknown for his flair and unusual delivery of messages.

This characteristic of Niebuhr was evident from early childhood. One church member wrote about "Reinie,"

> "I remember him as a bright eager boy with a zest for life," she wrote in a 1959 letter. "His face was usually wreathed in smiles, he was a battery of energy, he was very popular with young and old alike in the church, and he never left any doubt in anybody's mind that he would be a preacher. We all took it for granted."[23]

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[20] *Ibid.*, vii.
[21] Henlee Barnette, telephone interview by author, 9 April 1999.
[22] Weber, 465.
[23] Fox, 10.

He was also an entertainer, actor, and impersonator. He acted in family skits and always had the lead. His wit and flair was pointed from the beginning. One church member recalled:

> Reinie was imitating peculiarities of some member of the church. I laughed heartily, although I was old enough to know better. His mother frowned on this kind of thing but I noticed his father smiling slyly behind the book he was reading. Another time a crowd of young people went out to the Chautauqua on the closing day for a picnic. The session had just closed and the last speaker had been very pompous and over-developed in the stomach. Reinie, skinny fellow of about 13, got up on the platform, with all the pompousness of the speaker, walked back and forth with his stomach sticking out, used all the same pompous phrases until the rest of us were in stitches. He was always the life of the party wherever he was, but we all still knew he was going to be a preacher.[24]

This "charisma" blossomed as Reinhold began his academic training. While he was at Eden he was chosen to represent the school in a debate against rival school Concordia Lutheran College. His opponent recalled,

> "I knew we were going to be licked. He was too good for us. He was better informed, had excellent command of the language, and clinched every point in a way that convinced the audience he was right. His rebuttal was devastating."[25]

Eden won the debate and Reinhold's stature grew in his classmates eyes.

> A half-century later, when asked to offer their recollections of Reinhold at Eden, his classmates invariably mentioned the "great debate," when this nineteen-year-old David slew Goliath with a dazzling display of logic, facts, and rhetorical barbs. His fellow students had not always admired him before the debate. Some resented his dominance, his natural assumption of authority. His practice sermons struck some of his peers as condescendingly erudite and self-important. But after the debate all that changed. He was thereafter almost worshipped.[26]

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[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*, 16.
[26] *Ibid.*, 17.

His charisma carried him through some low moments of his life. When he began attending Yale without an accredited degree he once wrote in a letter, "I feel all the time like a Mongrel among thoroughbreds and that's what I am."[27] However, his tireless energy that was a part of his charisma prevailed. Even as a young boy he was known as a tireless worker and in the height of his career he was tireless. "Forty or more weekends a year, for more than a quarter-century, he bolted from one state to another, preaching at colleges, addressing student conferences, conferring at political meetings. His hastily packed suitcase sometimes sat poised beside the lectern at his Friday class."[28]

Niebuhr had a quality, a charismatic quality, which attracted people to him. Notice the evidence cited in June Bingham's biography of Niebuhr, *Courage to Change*.[29]

> When strangers used to visit Union Theological Seminary's Professor of Christian Ethics, the receptionist would tell them, if it was near the lunch hour, to go down the hall to the Social Room.
>
> "But how will I know which one is Niebuhr?"
>
> "That's easy. Just look for a crowd of students. He'll be the man in the middle of it."
>
> His ideas, his personality, his power to evoke new thinking still bring the students crowding around. The bench—a hard and slippery one—outside his fourth floor office is usually filled with students, not only from Union and Columbia but from universities all over the country, and from Europe and Asia as well. Some of the people have appointments; others have only patience. If they do not see Niebuhr one day, they will see him the next. For his door is always open.[30]

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[27] *Ibid.*, 28.

[28] Fox, viii.

[29] The name of the book was taken from Niebuhr's prayer written in 1934. The prayer reads, "O God, give us serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change what should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other." It has since become the motto of Alcoholics Anonymous and the U.S.O. distributed millions of copies to servicemen in World War II. June Bingham, *Courage to Change* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961).

[30] Bingham, 23.

Niebuhr was very well known for his pulpit charisma. Those who commented about his preaching inevitably recalled his presentation.[31] Fox's biography of Niebuhr begins with the recollection of a sermon.

> Niebuhr swept in, draped in his flowing gown. The Gothic sweep of the nave accentuated his height. He was tired, recovering from the flu, but when he rose for the sermon his eyes began to dance. He focused on one face and then another. The coughing in the congregation died down and many bent forward in concentration . . . . Then he preached for thirty minutes on the impartiality of God's providence. Sometimes his voice receded into an intense whisper, sometimes it erupted in a gravely bark. He used no notes and kept his hands free for vast circling motions, pointed jabs, for tugging at his gown, rubbing his bald crown: constant motion and an unremitting flow of words . . . . His charisma was no pulpit act; his gift was far less manageable than that. He was strikingly unselfconscious in public, unconcerned with social form. He was totally without ostentation, constitutionally unable to condescend.[32]

Niebuhr's charisma also had it's effect on his audiences. Notice Bingham's description of a speech Niebuhr gave in a Chicago hotel in Spring of 1949:

> By the end of one sentence, he had every person's full attention; by the end of one hour, he had several hundred people on their feet, clapping, stamping, shouting their approval. . . . Listeners sat bolt upright, their fists clenched, as the speaker bombarded them with startling new ideas, startling interpretations of old ideas, dramatic challenges to their long-accepted presuppositions, and sudden explosive humor.[33]

Niebuhr's charisma was a part of him and exemplified itself in all arenas of his life. It was not just limited to the pulpit or the classroom. It was part of the way Niebuhr is described and identified.

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[31] Dr. Leo Sandon recalled the pulpit charisma in Niebuhr's presentation.
[32] Fox, vii-viii.
[33] Bingham, 3.

> He already had the prophet's intensity and single-mindedness. He spoke as one possessed, driven—not just in church, but with friends, in meetings, in the classroom. . . . He was a pure democrat in personal relations, at home above all with the seminary students who flocked around him and called him Reinie. He answered all the letters he received, often writing thoughtful replies to pencilled inquiries from unknown correspondents in the heartland. His many friends in the political and intellectual worlds marvelled at his energetic presence and quick wit.[34]

Like the prophets of old who sometimes preached in sackcloth and ashes, sometimes named their children with names of prophetic meaning, Niebuhr was a man of charisma. His charisma was unavoidable and Niebuhr definitely meets this criterion of the ideal type of prophet.

D. Niebuhr's Credibility

A fourth criterion to be described as an ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet "forth-tells" words which are later perceived to be credible and true. A true prophet (as opposed to a false prophet) is one whose message is perceived over time to reflect truth.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, history allows a unique perspective on the credibility of Niebuhr who died in 1971. He was extremely influential, and although his theology and ideas evolved, over time they have proven to be quite credible. Bingham summed up some of the ways that Niebuhr has been influential in a chapter entitled *The Concepts of the Prophet*:

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[34] Fox, viii.

> Einstein says it is impossible for man to take ultimate measurements of speed because he himself is in motion; Niebuhr says it is impossible for man to make ultimate judgments in history because man himself is moving within time and history;
>
> Heisenberg says an object is changed by the process of being viewed; Niebuhr says that the acting self is changed by the process of being viewed by the self-transcendent self;
>
> Bohr denies either-or in regard to light; Niebuhr denies either-or in regard to religion;
>
> Gödel shows that man's reason operates within a sphere which logic cannot make wholly logical; Niebuhr points to the limits of logic in the sphere of the self and its existential encounters.[35]

Niebuhr's message was and still is quite credible. He lived in an age of tremendous change in the modern world. Niebuhr meets this criteria of the ideal type of modern prophet.

E. Niebuhr As A Public Speaker

Weber says that ancient prophets were primarily *speakers*, and addressed their audiences in public, "to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[36] This criterion is very obvious in Niebuhr's life. Niebuhr was an author and professed and delivered his message in the written word, however, during his lifetime, his message was delivered mainly through speaking. Many of his written works were developed from speeches he gave, very similar to the ancient canonical prophets.

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[35] Bingham, 265.
[36] Weber, 269.

As discussed in the section dealing with Niebuhr's charisma, Niebuhr was a powerful speaker. In her chapter entitled "The Speaker," Bingham describes one of his speeches in 1949:

> The speaker straightened his tie, ran a big-knuckled hand over his shiny pate, pulled his long nose further downward, and spoke out rapidly in a deep voice. . . .
>
> Few speeches can have rivaled this one for profundity, for range, for electromagnetism. . . . One minute the deep voice would boom out; the next it would drop to a whisper—and then boom again. The blue eyes would fly open as he presented a nugget of thought; then squint in diabolic conspiracy as he demolished it. Yet wait—a long index finger would rise—there may be a phoenix stirring in those ashes. With both arms in motion, like an orchestra conductor, he swept his listeners into the soaring of that phoenix, and the "unpredictable," "incongruous," and "ironic" results, which in turn could lead to . . .
>
> The suspense he built by these verbal, facial, and gestural dynamics became close to unbearable. And the depth of his own caring was so profound that the listener's racing intellect was finally accompanied by a racing pulse: the whole of the self was involved as well as the mind.
>
> As the applause thundered, and finally slackened, the young wife turned to her husband. "Who is this man?"
>
> "Famous," he answered, "but I'm not sure what for."
>
> "What do you suppose his job is?"
>
> "Minister."
>
> "A minister?"
>
> The completeness of her incredulity made him smile. "Why not?" he said. "They've got to have some good ones."[37]

Niebuhr was notorious for his speaking schedule. He left after classes and travelled, even quite frequently to Europe, to share his message. "Like a giant bumblebee, Niebuhr flew back and forth across the Atlantic, cross-pollinating American and European ideas, churchly and secular ideas, theological and political ideas."[38]

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[37] Bingham, 3-4.
[38] Bingham, 276.

Niebuhr was primarily a speaker, generally to large audiences. In a day when people gathered to hear interesting rhetoric, hearing Niebuhr was in demand. Niebuhr meets this criterion of the ideal type of prophet.

F. Niebuhr's Message In Tension

The sixth criterion of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture. Niebuhr's message seemed on the surface to be in tension, yet it struck a nerve that resonated with his audience and gave them some structure to articulate their thoughts, and would account for why his audiences were large and his speaking was in demand.

In 1915, Niebuhr left Yale and became the pastor of the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit. A pastorate in Detroit proved to be fertile ground for a blooming prophet. The issues and changes of society proved to be quite formative. "Reinhold Niebuhr's years in Detroit (1915-1928) were full of the social activism and wrestling with issues of theology which were to characterize his later life."[39] It is in the pastorate where Niebuhr's prophetic voice began to mature and to a certain extent where his prophetic instincts were the sharpest because of his grassroots connections with the laity. It was in Detroit where he spoke on issues which were at best controversial. He spoke against the social evils of Henry Ford and on the issue of race relations in Detroit, neither of which could be

[39] Stone, 24.

arguably popular. However, his church grew from 65 to 656 and likewise the benevolence budget.[40]

It is not clear when or where Niebuhr was first called a prophet, yet it is clear that he knew that he was being called that, and it was a label that was embarrassing to him though he knew it was probably an accurate description.

> He grappled endlessly with the paradox of cultivating a prophetic identity while avoiding a pretentious pose. It was Amos he wished to follow. The Hebrew prophet had warned that the day of the Lord would be darkness and not light, that Yahweh had no use for solemn assemblies or burnt offerings. God would be impressed when justice rolled down like waters and righteousness like an everlasting stream. He scorned those who were at ease in Zion, who lay upon beds of ivory and ignored the urgency of the hour. Niebuhr shared Amos' sense of crisis. He also shared Amos' awareness of the risk of pride. Amos denied any special competence: "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees." Niebuhr yearned to speak with Amos' authority and to appropriate his humility. He already had the prophet's intensity and single-mindedness. He spoke as one possessed, driven--not just in church, but with friends, in meetings, in the classroom.[41]

It is perhaps Niebuhr's struggle with his role as a prophet which prompted him to write "Marx, Barth, and Israel's Prophets" in which he compares Israelite prophecy against the messages of Marx and Barth. He concludes the article with the following:

> It is idle to hope that, even at best, a prophetic religion could completely stem the tides of dualistic other worldliness on the one hand, and of naturalistic utopianism on the other. But it is still possible to create and, above all, to reclaim a prophetic religion which will influence the destiny of our era and fall into neither defeatism nor into the illusions which ultimately beget despair.[42]

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[40] *Ibid.*, 26.

[41] Fox, x.

[42] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Marx, Barth, and Israel's Prophets," *Christian Century* (52: 138-140, January 30, 1935), 140.

Niebuhr believed that a biblical perspective could influence the destiny of his era and it is this prophetic drive which motivated him to keep up his tireless schedule. Additionally, it is this message of balance between defeatism and illusion which leads him to argue a non-Utopian viewpoint in *The Nature and Destiny of Man.* He says:

> We cannot, therefore, escape the ultimate paradox that the final exercise of freedom in the transcendent human spirit is its recognition of the false use of that freedom in action. Man is most free in the discovery that he is not free. This paradox has been obscured by most Pelagians and by many Augustinians. The Pelagians have been too intent to assert the integrity of man" freedom to realize that the discovery of this freedom also involves the discovery of man's guilt. The Augustinians on the other hand have been so concerned to prove that the freedom of man is corrupted by sin that they have not fully understood that the discovery of this sinful taint is an achievement of freedom.[43]

It is this same non-utopian viewpoint which develops into his theology of "irony." *In The Irony of American History*, Niebuhr espouses irony over tragedy, absurdity, pathos, and idealism. Irony is the balanced viewpoint which serves one from the extremes. It is in these discourses of theology where Niebuhr relates the theory to practice. It motivates him to speak on the social ills of communism and their threat to the world with the same fervor that he spoke against the social policies of Henry Ford and their threat to his congregation some 30 years prior. His prophetic tendencies never left him; only his arena became larger, from Detroit to the globe.

This brings to our attention the most interesting part of Niebuhr's career; his prophetic voice against Henry Ford, during his pastorate in Detroit. As Heschel pointed

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[43] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volumes I and II* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 260.

out, what is very trivial to the average man is dangerous and sinful to a prophet. In 1925, Niebuhr's prophetic voice erupted against the American culture of consumption:

> Was it possible, he wondered in a Methodist magazine, even to preach the Gospel in America, where "happiness is gauged in terms of automobiles and radios," where "the love of possession controls our home life," where in Emerson's words "'things are in the saddle and ride mankind'?" In a culture of such deep complacency "idealistic motives perish . . . . It is not possible to attain the kingdom of God if you think you are already in the kingdom." The pious bourgeoisie of the Protestant churches made "short shrift of any teacher of religion who trie[d] to teach them the way of God.": There could be no security for such a teacher, "It seems that now, as in ancient times, the only safety for a prophet lies in itineracy . . . . Undoubtedly the Christian religion will not seriously challenge the conscience of America until it is presented to the nation by men with such conviction and passion that a few martyrdoms will become inevitable." For the prophet there would be not merely "tension" with culture, but a fight to the death. "For us, as for the time of Amos, the day of the Lord must be darkness, and not light, and things must become worse before they can be better."[44]

From this quote, one can immediately recognize Niebuhr's identification of himself as a prophet with a prophet's reward.

In 1925-25, Niebuhr was chairman of the Interracial Committee, a committee formed to address the growing racial tension in Detroit. In 1925 and 1926, the Ford's humanitarian image began to be challenged. Articles appeared in criticism of Ford in *New Republic, Nation* and *Christian Century*. This inspired Niebuhr to write articles which substantially attacked Ford. The articles were bolstered by Niebuhr's "privileged access to the unpublished findings of his race committee on wage rates in Ford plants. Niebuhr said of Ford:

> He was probably "at least as naive as he is shrewd." In his "combination of sentimentality and shrewdness" Ford struck Niebuhr as an apt symbol of America

[44] Fox, 88.

> itself, a nation which "applies the social intelligence of a country village to the most complex industrial life the world has ever known." Henry Ford was not malevolent but a deluded innocent with flashes of exploitative genius. He truly believed that unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and disability compensation were superfluous when men were taught thrift and paid a generous wage-which he convinced both himself and an adoring public he was still paying. "Henry Ford," exuberantly backward-looking in matters of social responsibility. "What a civilization this is!" he told his diary in 1927.[45]

"What a civilization this is!" These are unquestionably words which can be uttered only by a prophetic voice. Niebuhr made a career of speaking, writing, and charismatically conveying his prophetic voice. It was a voice that was heard by those in the church, but also got the attention of secular society as well. His prophetic voice grew out of his childhood experiences and was shaped by his pastorate and climaxed in his academic career. Just like Amos, Niebuhr issued a cry for justice.

Niebuhr's opinions and theology evolved during his lifetime, often responding to his analysis of historical events. "the importance of World War I to Reinhold Niebuhr's thought can hardly be overestimated. It is the first and most important example of Niebuhr's thought being adjusted so that it could more adequately interpret current events in international politics."[46] Part of the most interesting chapters of the evolution of this message was his temporary espousal of socialism. Niebuhr was a politically active socialist during the 1920's and 1930's. This affected all other aspects of his theology. "The primary response of Reinhold Niebuhr to socialism occupied the 1930's and served

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[45] *Ibid.*, 95.
[46] Stone, 40.

as a transition stage in his move from liberalism to realism."[47] By the end of the 30's, Niebuhr recognized that the benefits of socialism would never be realized in America through the Socialist Party:

> The failure of the Socialist Party in the United States to win mass support and the failure of its leaders to understand the international situation forced Niebuhr to regard it as irrelevant to the American political scene. By 1940 he regarded it as discredited: "Nothing is more obvious than that socialism must come in America through some other instrument than the socialist party.[48]

Another part of Niebuhr's message which was in tension with some elements of the culture, especially the religious culture was his emphasis on social reform, especially racial prejudice. It is no surprise that Niebuhr was influential in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life, as will be discussed later. Bingham points out one such incident in Niebuhr's life:

> The need for establishing a minimal form of "justice in social relations" was laid, like a foundling, on Niebuhr's doorstep in Detroit:
>
> > We had a large Negro population which grew tremendously with the automobile industry . . . I subsequently became the chairman of the mayor's committee on racial relations. We had a rather long struggle to provide what one might call elemental justice to a growing Negro group, emphasizing equality in jobs, housing, and so forth.
>
> As a result of Niebuhr's efforts on the racial front, four Negro families came regularly to his church. They were professional people, and most members of the Bethel congregation were pleased to have them. But the Negroes maintained positions of responsibility in their own churches, and both they and their churches rejected the idea of their officially joining Bethel. Niebuhr took up with his official board the question of such membership. The board was willing, but the Negroes never came to be.[49]

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[47] Stone, 54.
[48] Stone, 69.
[49] Bingham, 111.

One of the criterion of the ideal type is that the subject has a message which is in tension with the culture, especially the religious culture. Whether it is the criticism of liberalism, pacifism, politics, or any other subject which he spoke, or whether it was the controversy in theology caused when he wrote *Moral Man and Immoral Society*,[50] Niebuhr's message was always in tension. His charisma allowed him to be very influential in American religious and political thought in the twentieth century. Niebuhr meets this criterion in the ideal type of prophet.

G. Niebuhr As An Ecstatic

According to Weber's analysis of the ancient prophets, a seventh criterion can be proposed as the ideal type of a modern prophet; a prophet has an ecstatic psychological profile. There is little evidence which supports that Niebuhr was ecstatic in profile. Regarding prophetic ecstasy, Weber observes: "The prophets ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts."[51] There is no evidence to support "pathological states and acts" in Niebuhr's life. He was much too rational to be considered an ecstatic. Notice Bingham's description of Niebuhr's application of rationality:

> The book in which Niebuhr first seriously grappled with the problem of where the law of love was applicable, and where it was not, was *The Contribution of Religion to*

[50] Niebuhr published the book in 1932, and it was the work which put Niebuhr on the intellectual map. Niebuhr later stated "in order to be accurate, he said jokingly, (the book) should have been *Immoral Man and Even More Immoral Society*. For its thesis is that sinful as is the individual, society is even more so." June Bingham, Courage to Change (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 161.

[51] Weber, 286.

Social Work, the Forbes Lectures of 1930 published in 1932. In it Niebuhr insisted that there were areas of life where rational discrimination was more valuable than the purest religious idealism:

> The virtues of a rational morality are . . . sobermindedness and balance. Religion, on the other hand, is an affair of the emotions . . . it always involves a potential danger to a balanced view of a moral problem. If it is a sublime emotion . . . the religious devotee . . . may achieve a nobility which the rationalist can never encompass. . . . But emotion may disturb the cool judgment which is . . . necessary to high morality. It may lead to extravagances which emphasize one value . . . as against all other values. . . . Where a moral duty is simple but difficult, religious impulse is required to furnish the necessary dynamic for its fulfillment. But whenever a moral problem involves a complex situation with many conflicting and competing values, religion is usually not a helpful ally.[52]

This attitude is further evidenced in Niebuhr's analysis of Vietnam.

> His understanding that the United States' national interest advocated the balancing of Communist power did not imply that the United States should assume total responsibility for stopping all Communist expansionism. His response to the war in Vietnam is consistent with his political philosophy, but his changing response also reflects his concern for a flexible policy which can be altered to meet new evidence. His response to Vietnam indicates the degree to which his approach to international politics is the classical method, drawing evidence from any source: History, empirical evidence, personal experience, and common sense, and examining it by criteria of consistency, coherence, and utility.[53]

The evidence shows that Niebuhr consistently examined evidence by the criteria of consistency, coherence, and utility. While it is reasonable to say that that process is a good approach, especially for an academic, it doesn't meet a description of an ecstatic psychological profile. Niebuhr does not meet this criterion of the ideal type of prophet,

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[52] Bingham, 160.
[53] Stone, 191.

which overlaps to the reason that he is marginal in the criterion of calling. His calling was a rational decision, not a sudden pathological occurrence.

H. Niebuhr's Piety

The final criterion examined in this study is that the ideal type of modern prophet would claim to have heard the "voice" of God and to be perceived by their peers to have genuine piety in relationship to God. This criterion is difficult to document one way or the other in Niebuhr's life. Part of the reason it is difficult is because Niebuhr has a variety of thoughts about God in his works:

> Niebuhr uses the term God often in his writing, but beyond asserting that God is the creator, redeemer, and judge who is known most clearly through Jesus Christ, he does not often present precisely what he means by the term. His concerns were with the nature of man and his political and ethical life, but even so the infrequency of the rigorous discussions of God in his hundreds of articles and over a score of books is striking. Similarly, though there are hundreds of essays, several books, and more than a score of dissertations on his thought, there is no adequate discussion of his thought on God. The editors of the more important critical volume on his thought did not even include an essay on his doctrine of God among the twenty subjects they chose to discuss.[54]

In his *Nature and Destiny of Man, volume I*, Niebuhr writes about man's experience of God. Niebuhr says:

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[54] Stone, 225-226.

St. Paul speaks of this experience of God when he declares that even without a further revelation men are "without excuse" if they do not glorify God as God but become vain in their imagination and make themselves God (Romans 1:20). The experience of God is not so much a separate experience, as an overtone implied in all experience. The soul which reaches the outermost rims of its own consciousness, must also come in contact with God, for He impinges upon that consciousness.

Schleiermacher describes this experience of God as the experience of "unqualified dependence." This is one of its aspects but not its totality. It is one of its aspects because there is, in all human consciousness, at least a dim recognition of the insufficient and dependent character of all finite life, a recognition which implies the consciousness of the reality upon which dependent existence depends. An equally important characteristic of the experience of God is the sense of being seen, commanded, judged and known from beyond ourselves. This experience is described by the Psalmist in the words: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, . . . and art acquainted with all my ways" (Ps. 139). . . .

The experience so described is in some sense identical or associated with what is usually called "conscience." The actual nature of conscience is, of course, variously defined in various philosophies. It may be regarded as the social obligations and judgments which all men must face. Or it may be defined as the obligation and judgment under which the rational or intelligible self places the empirical, the sensible or the partial self. The significance of the biblical interpretation of conscience lies precisely in this, that a universal human experience, the sense of being commanded, place under obligation and judged is interpreted as a relation between God and man in which it is God who makes demands and judgments upon man. [55]

When Niebuhr speaks of God, he often uses it as a loose symbol. Stone points this out in his biography on Niebuhr, subtitled *Prophet to Politicians*.

> Niebuhr uses the word God in many different ways in his preaching and teaching. His tendency was not to define the word rigorously, but to use it as a symbol rather loosely. Like both the Old and New Testaments, he did not ordinarily analyze language about God but related his faith in God to perplexing issues of human justice, meaning in history, and the suffering of men. The three motifs of God's action which were most meaningful to Niebuhr were creation, judgment, and redemption.[56]

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[55] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volume I* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 127-129

[56] Stone, 228.

While it seems controversial to suggest that Niebuhr didn't have a close relationship with God, the intent of the criterion seems to focus on a relationship which allows the prophet to genuine piety with the divine. While Niebuhr certainly possessed much knowledge about God, and put forth some extraordinary insights regarding God, the evidence is there to suggest that he practiced genuine piety, but didn't claim a relationship with God where he later revealed that he had heard God's voice and had been given an assignment to deliver the message. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a paper entitled "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism" where he argued that Niebuhr didn't grasp the concept of divine *agape*. King's conclusions include the following:

> The strength of Dr. Niebuhr's position lies in its critique of the easy conscience and complacency of some forms of perfectionism. He is right, it seems to me, in insisting that we must be realistic regarding the relativity of every moral and ethical choice. His analysis of the complexity of the social situation is profound indeed, and with it I would find very little to disagree. But there is one weakness in Niebuhr's ethical position which runs the whole gamut of his writings. This weakness lies in (the) inability of his system to deal adequately with the relative perfection which is the fact of the Christian life. How one can develop spiritually; by what powers Christian values are conceived in personality; and how the immanence of *Agape* is to be concretely conceived in human nature and history—all these problems are left unsolved by Niebuhr. He fails to see that the availability of the divine *Agape* is an essential affirmation of the Christian religion.[57]

The evidence is marginal for the purposes of the prophetic characteristics, but seems to suggest that Niebuhr does meet this criterion of genuine piety of the ideal type of prophet.

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[57] Clayborne Carson, ed. "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism" *The Paper's of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 150.

IV. Conclusions

Reinhold Niebuhr is viewed by many as a "modern prophet." There is little question that Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the most influential figures in American religious and political thought in the twentieth century. He was a major figure in the "Neo-Orthodox" movement in Protestant theology. This movement from the 1920's forward reoriented the entire thrust of theological and biblical studies.

For the purposes of this study it was interesting to notice how prophetic subjects of the twentieth century influenced one another. Niebuhr strongly influenced King and Jordan. One example of how King influenced Niebuhr is contained in the following example:

> One application of thoroughly modified pacifism to political life was that of Gandhi in India. Gandhi's passive resistance against the British overlords was as much resistance as it was passive. And as Niebuhr pointed out, it worked as well as it did because the British had reachable consciences. It would presumably not have worked against the proconsuls of a fanatic like Lenin or a criminal like Hitler.
>
> Domestically, pacifism found its optimum application to political life, Niebuhr felt, in the Alabama bus-boycott of 1955-56. In *Christianity and Society*, Spring, 1956, Niebuhr wrote the lead editorial in praise of its organizer, the local leader of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Martin Luther King:
>
> > [King] scrupulously avoids violence and calls his strategy the "way of love." It is the most effective way of justice. Those of us who are nonpacifists will be quick to admit that whenever pacifism . . . is not preoccupied with moral scruples about guiltlessness . . . whenever it does not occupy itself with the problem of contracting out of responsibilities of justice in the name of perfection . . . it becomes impressive.
> >
> > In the case of the Montgomery boycott the most obviously effective way of bringing pressure for the sake of justice has been adopted. Violence in any local situation is not only wrong but self-defeating. In the case of a Negro minority in a white society it would be suicidal. The boycott and the strike are recognized forms of pressure in a free society, but the boycott is unfortunately not as widely recognized legally as the strike. Hence the court proceedings against the Negro

> boycott leaders. But it is very obvious that even in a just and free society there must be forms of pressure short of violence, but more potent than the vote, to establish justice in social relations.[58]

Taylor Branch observed the connection between Niebuhr and King:

> Although the Niebuhr influence went to the heart of the public and private King and affected him more deeply than did any modern figure, including Gandhi, the connection between King and Niebuhr would be obscured by complicated twists of time, race, and popular imagery.[59]

The prophetic tradition of these and others evidently influenced and cross-pollinated the thinking of each other, as did in the ancient canonical prophets.

Using the ideal type developed from Weber's methodology and observations as a comparative tool, measuring the criteria observed in the evidence shows that Niebuhr is prophetic by a preponderance of the evidence. Niebuhr was not an ecstatic personality, and therefore was marginal in the criteria of his calling. Niebuhr is observed to meet six of the criteria of the ideal type of prophet, and is marginal in two of the other criteria. By the evidence compared with the ideal type, Niebuhr was a modern prophet, but probable most like the role of the court prophet or sage.

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[58] Bingham, 110-111.
[59] Branch, 81.

CHAPTER 5

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

I. King As Prophet

It is an important part of this undertaking to show that the term "prophet" can be used to describe someone favorably in our twentieth-century culture. However, for the title to have integrity, it cannot be used loosely, and spoken in the full and deep understanding of the significance of the role. To identify Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a prophet is not an original idea. In the editorial introductory comments of James Melvin Washington in his work entitled *A Testament of Hope,* King is called the "prophet of the people."[1] Calloway astutely recognized the significance of Washington's comments about King, restating his words:

> According to Washington, it was the black preachers who managed to create and sustain the only consistent tradition of prophetic ministry in America. King, says Washington, was a product of this company of prophets, and he accepted his "call" to be a part of this ministry even before he finished college.[2]

More will be discussed on the context of the black church traditions in America and the sense of "calling" that influenced King, but it is interesting that the clear observation is made that King was prophetic.

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[1] James Melville Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), xvi.

King's prophetic qualities were also noticed and commented upon by Abraham Joshua Heschel, and he compared King to the prophets of Israel. The following comments were made while introducing King to the Sixty-Eighth Annual Convention of the Rabbinical Society on March 25, 1968:

> Where in America today do we hear a voice like the prophets of Israel? Martin Luther King is a sign that God has not forsaken the United States of America. God has sent him to us. His presence is the hope of America. His mission is sacred. his leadership of supreme importance to every one of us.[3]

An important factor in seeing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a modern prophet is to understand the development of the black church in America. African Americans were first exposed to the Western form of Christianity in many ways: the slave traders, the masters, and the missionaries who did missionary work. The inculturation of African blacks began from the time of their capture. Almost immediately their captors began stripping them of their former lifestyle and religion. Although Frazier in the 1960's had concluded that the religious remnants from Africa in the lives of the early slaves had lost meaning, "[t]here is an emerging consensus among contemporary scholars that significant Africanisms survived capture, the middle passage, and plantation life."[4] Sandon goes on to say:

> Today it is recognized that the slaves' proverbs, folk tales, sexual attitudes, material culture, and religious practices came directly from Africa. . . . From the beginning of the slave trade in Colonial America, Africans received Christian baptism. There was anxiety about this practice until the courts established that baptism did not make a black slave free.[5]

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[3] "Conversation with Martin Luther King," *Conservative Judaism* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1968): 1.

[4] George C. Bedell, Leo Sandon, Jr., and Charles T. Wellborn, *Religion in America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), 389.

[5] *Ibid.*

Sometimes new slaves were baptized, before they were even put aboard ship to be transported to the Americas. They were bombarded from the very beginning with waves of new ideas and cultural values.

One of the first things that had to be settled was whether or not it was important for attention to be given to the spiritual needs of the slaves, since they were generally viewed as little more than beasts of burden from Africa.[6] After an initial reluctance, many white churches, ministers, and masters felt a responsibility towards the protection of the souls of the slaves, because of the theological conviction that it was their responsibility to "spread the Gospel."[7] Sandon points out in *Religion in America*, that the concern for the spiritual condition of the slaves began in the seventeenth century.

> Throughout the seventeenth century there was concern expressed for the salvation of African slaves. The venerable Richard Baxter (1615-1691), English Puritan leader, published in 1673 his *Christian Directory* for the saints in America. Included in this volume was a chapter title "Directions to those Masters in Foreign Plantations who have Negroes and other slaves; being a solution of several cases about them." In this chapter Baxter called upon masters to "understand well how far your power over your slaves extendeth and what limits God hath set thereto." Baxter reminded the maters that slaves had immortal souls and that owners were trustees whose power over the slaves carried grave responsibility. Finally, Baxter admonished the slaveholders to "make it your chief end in buying and using slaves to win them to Christ and save their souls." The *Directions* apparently had an extensive circulation throughout the colonies.[8]

It is important to note the efforts of the slave owners to inculturate the Christian belief into the lives of the slaves.

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[6] Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Glory* (New York: Friendship Press, 1947), 3.
[7] W.D. Weatherford, *The Negro From Africa to America* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924), 320.
[8] Sandon, 389-390.

> Whatever the legal status of the Negro with reference to religion, it is certain that great numbers of slave owners were intensely earnest to see that the Negro had a chance to know the Bible and to enter into religious life.[9]

This is not to say that this was a universal trait of American slave owners, for there were, most assuredly, "many masters who were not interested in religion at all, for themselves or for their slaves."[10] In general, however, most slave owners desired their slaves to become Christians and worked toward this end by either teaching them themselves or, more commonly, allowing them time off so that ministers, white or black, could teach them.

Missionary work with the slaves was an important factor in the development of the black church in America. "Although slaves were baptized and taken into the Anglican church during the seventeenth century that a systematic mission to the Afro-American was attempted."[11] The first missionary sent to the slaves was the Reverend Samuel Thomas, who went to South Carolina in 1702 as a result of the formation a year earlier of the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.*[12] Several missionaries began to come, and they were succeeded by many more. Denominational missionaries, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Baptists, were soon very active in the effort to "spread the Gospel."[13] However, the adoption and adaptation of Christianity actually occurred much before the denominational work.[14]

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[9] Weatherford, 301.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Sandon, 390.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Weatherford, 320.
[14] LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 32.

> Christianity was adopted by Negroes before the great attempts by missionaries and evangelists in the early part of the nineteenth century to convert them. The reasons for this grasping of the white man's religion by the North American Negro are fairly simple. First, his own religion was prohibited in this country. In some parts of the South, 'conjuring' or use of 'hoodoo' or 'devil talk' was punishable by death or, at the very least, whipping. Also, the African has always had a traditional respect for his conqueror's gods. Not that they are always worshiped, but they are at least recognized as powerful and placed in the hierarchy of the conquered tribe's gods.[15]

In addition, the growing social awareness of the slave is another reason why Africans began to embrace the white man's god. "social awareness in the sense that the African, or at least his progeny, soon realized that he was living in a white man's world."[16] The slave soon understood that everything about the religion that was brought from Africa was seen as primitive nonsense by the white man.

> For the American slave, Christianity was attractive simply because it was something the white man did that the black man could do also, and in the time of the missionaries, was encouraged to do. . . . Because the African came from an intensely religious culture, a society where religion was a daily, minute-to-minute concern, and not something relegated to a specious once-a-week reaffirmation, he had to find other methods of worshiping gods when his white captors declared that he could no longer worship in the old ways.[17]

Southern planters had mixed feelings about the efforts of the missionaries, who were typically from the North. The missionaries spoke of forming independent black churches, which the planters saw as a threat to the institution of slavery, because it allowed for a certain amount of freedom to be experienced by the slaves that the masters

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[15] *Ibid.*, 32-33.
[16] *Ibid.*, 33.
[17] *Ibid.*

did not want them to taste. Nevertheless, much missionary work was done among the slaves.

In order to control the proceedings and at the same time expose the slaves to Christianity, the masters also got involved. In 1837 in Liberty County, Georgia, the "Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes," was formed and the prime movers in this work were slave owners.[18]

The most successful denominations in the conversion of slaves were the Methodists and the Baptists. In general, the reasons for their success were because the doctrine, language, and practices of the Methodist and Baptist worship could more easily be adapted to the African beliefs that had been brought over. While there was a significant phenomenon in religious black history in the development of the institutional church of free Negroes in the North,[19] this study will focus on the development of the black church in the South, which is the context for Martin Luther King, Jr., although there obviously some overlap of contexts. Even from the beginning, the black church formed and developed as an attempt to take strides towards freedom, and the Methodists as the African Methodists Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) was the first denomination to give African-Americans the independence to organize.

> The first separate denominations to be formed by African Americans in the United States were Methodist. The early black Methodist churches, conferences, and denominations were organized by free black people in the North in response to stultifying and demeaning conditions attending membership in the white-controlled Methodist Episcopal churches. This independent church movement of black Christians was the first effective stride toward freedom by African Americans.

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[18] Weatherford, 314.
[19] Sandon, 397.

> Unlike most sectarian movements, the initial impetus for black spiritual and ecclesiastical independence was not grounded in religious doctrine or polity, but in the offensiveness of racial segregation in the churches and the alarming inconsistencies between the teachings and the expressions of faith. It was readily apparent that the white church had become a principal instrument of the political and social policies undergirding slavery and the attendant degradation of the human spirit. Against this the black Christians quietly rebelled, and the Black Church emerged as the symbol and substance of their rebellion. In 1863 a group of African Americans in Nashville asked to be admitted to the A.M.E. Church. . .[20]

In the period surrounding the Civil War, there were many black defections from white churches. "The challenge to join an 'African Church' was interpreted as a challenge to assume the full responsibility of freedom, both physical and spiritual, and African affiliation became a concrete symbol of the will and capacity to be independent."[21]

After the emergence of the A.M.E. Church, which became the first black denomination, the Baptists also began organizing black congregations.

> The first independent black Baptist congregations were organized in the last half of the eighteenth century, at a time when the American colonies and black Methodists alike were issuing their respective declarations of independence. The black Baptists were pursuing no overt political revolts but rather were struggling to carve out a religious space in the midst of the southern plantations that defined their lives as slaves. During the antebellum period, however, fugitive slaves and free blacks in the North did form abolitionist missionary associations and societies, the leaders of which then organized the first regional black Baptist conventions.[22]

Baptist missionaries began work in the South among slaves in the late seventeenth century.

> The cultural origins of the black Baptists are to be found in the South rather than the North as was the case with the founding of the mother congregations of the African Methodist Church and the African Methodist Zion Churches in the mid-1790s. This

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[20] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 47-48.

[21] Lincoln and Mamiya, 48.

[22] *Ibid.*, 20.

> basic difference still holds true for the black Baptists - even though they now dominate the urban scene. Regardless of this preponderance, these churches are still characterized by a distinct Southern religious milieu which stresses enthusiastic and demonstrative worship.[23]

It was not until the Baptist revival between 1788 and 1792 that the work was rewarded.[24] During those years, many Negroes were converted and brought into the denomination. This growth of the Baptist church among blacks in the South continued after this revival.

> Reports indicate there were eighteen or nineteen thousand Negro Baptists in 1795. In 1841 it was said: 'There are more Negro communicants, and more churches regularly constituted, exclusively for Negroes, with their own regular houses of public worship, and with ordained Negro preachers, attached to the [Baptists] than to any other denomination in the United States.' It should be noted that the Baptists early began putting Negro preachers in charge of Negro churches, which may account for their rapid growth and disproportionate numbers.[25]

While other denominations were active as well, the Baptist church provided a structure for the black church in the South. The adoption of the Baptist church provided an excellent structure into which the African belief systems could be adapted.

> This has to do with the popularity among Negroes of the Baptist Church, which has been stressed by all students of the Negro religion. Explanations of this fact, it will be remembered, are couched in terms of the greater democracy of the Baptist Church organization, the greater emotionalism permitted in the services of this church, and that the services of this denomination are closer to the requirements of humbler folks than those of other churches. That the first two of these reasons is congenial to African religious patterns has been already pointed out. Yet neither this fact nor an explanation in terms of the socio-economic situation of the Negroes under slavery and in post-slavery days is of much aid in helping the student understand why the Baptist Church, rather than autonomous 'cults,' should have had such a great

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[23] James M. Washington, *The Origins and Emergence of Black Baptist Separatism, 1863-1897* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1983), 257.

[24] Weatherford, 317.

[25] *Ibid.*, 318.

> appeal to Negroes, or why denominations other than the Baptists did not attract comparable numbers of followers.[26]

One of the aspects of the Baptist denomination that attracted the slaves was the fact that Baptists allowed for the formation of churches whose congregations were almost, if not entirely African American. In addition, the Baptist allowed for the ordination and service of black preachers in the leadership of these churches. This caused considerable growth in the black church in the Baptist denomination.[27] The Baptist denomination was the most popular denomination during the development of the black church in America. To the slaves, the congregation fulfilled the role of the African clan or tribe, and the black preacher assumed the functions of the earlier priest or witch doctor.[28] It is into the context of the black church in America that Martin Luther King, Jr. was born and reared. Eric Lincoln acknowledges the fertile ground of this context:

> From the beginnings in the "invisible institution" of slave religion, African Americans have invested far more authority in the charismatic personality of the preacher than in any organizational forms of bureaucratic hierarchy.[29]

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s father was the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. Gilbert H. Caldwell recognized not only the prophetic tradition of King's ministry but also the significance of the context of the black Baptist church in King's life. In the *Christian Century*, Caldwell writes:

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[26] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 232.

[27] Jones, 28.

[28] Leon McBeth, "Images of the Black Church in America," *Black History and Heritage*, 16 (July, 1981): 20.

[29] Lincoln and Mamiya, 14.

II. The Analysis of King As A "Modern Prophet"

A. King's "Calling"

In regards to the prophetic calling of the ancient Israelite prophets, Weber refers to the "ecstasy of calling" as the "first ecstasy."[33] A distinguishing criterion for the ideal type of a modern prophet that is being developed in this study is that the prophet experiences a sense of "calling" from God. Remember however, Weber's observations make it clear that it is not just that a person feel "called" but that the calling is not just a long thought out decision, "the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits."[34] Rather, Weber perceives that the call experience of the ancient canonical prophets was more spontaneous, truly an ecstatic experience: "it was always in agreement with the endogenous nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[35] The evidence is abundant and clear that Martin Luther King, Jr. definitely perceived a call and responded to it. However, it is harder to show evidence that the call experience could be defined as ecstatic. It seems that King made a series of smaller, well thought out decisions where he carefully stepped into a role he was groomed to fulfill. Even though King's call experience does not meet the "letter" of every part of Weber's observations, generally King's experience tips the scale in favor of meeting this criterion of the "ideal type."

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[33] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 294.
[34] Weber, 294.
[35] *Ibid.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s spiritual pilgrimage began on a spring Sunday in 1934 in a revival service in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. King was only five years old and because his father was the pastor of the church, he had spent much of his life in that environment. There was an evangelist from Virginia preaching that day and offered an "invitation,"[36] to which the young King responded.

> When (the evangelist) invited people to join the church, M.L.'s sister took off for the pulpit - the first person that morning to offer a pledge. At once M.L. ran after her, determined that Christine was not going to "get ahead of me." And so he joined God's House, not because of any dynamic conviction" (as he later claimed), but because of "a childhood desire to keep up with my sister." Even at his baptism, he was "unaware of what was taking place." Hence conversion for him was never an abrupt religious experience, never "a crisis moment." It was simply a gradual assimilation of religious ideals from his church and family environment.[37]

King had a very stable family life, and in 1944 at the age of fifteen he matriculated at Morehouse College. While he had a distinct social conscience at this point, his initial inclination was not to pursue the ministry as a vocation.

> When Martin first went to Morehouse he intended to become a doctor or lawyer. His interest in intellectual matters and his strong social consciousness, together with his normal youthful rebellion against tradition, had decided him against the ministry. He was strongly motivated toward religion but was opposed to the emotionalism of the church he knew, and he believed in a relevant social gospel which few ministers preached at that time. Even at that young age, Martin intended to dedicate his life to improving the condition of the black masses, but he thought he could do this more effectively in a profession outside the ministry.[38]

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[36] An "invitation" was, and still is, a common element in many evangelical services. It usually follows the sermon and is an opportunity for people to respond to the message, usually by "walking the aisle," that is, leaving your pew and going down to the front of the church to speak to the minister, and/or pray. It is the common practice in this church culture to get "saved" in this fashion.

[37] Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 1-2.

[38] Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1993), 81.

In 1945, several classmates went to work in the tobacco fields of Connecticut as a summer job. "In Connecticut his friends asked Martin to lead their devotions. I think it was from experience that he began to feel an insistent call to the ministry."[39] While at Morehouse, the president of the college, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, became his mentor. Coretta Scott King recalls the influence that Mays had on her husband with regard to his calling and vocation:

> At Morehouse, listening to Dr. Mays preach, and also hearing another brilliant minister, Dr. George D. Kelsay, head of the theology department, Martin came to see that the ministry could be intellectually respectable as well as emotionally satisfying. When he accepted this fact, it opened the way for him to go into the church. The balance between mind and soul, intellect and emotion, was what he would strive to achieve.[40]

King attended Morehouse for three years and had decided what he believed God was "calling" him to do with his life. King's father, Martin Luther King, Sr. recalls this moment in King's life, as reported in his autobiography:

> M.L. was clearly impressed by those first three years (at Morehouse), and told his mother one evening that he would enter the ministry. After sharing the news with me, M.L. agreed to a trial sermon at Ebenezer, where he found a crowd waiting to bear witness, a crowd that grew so rapidly on a Sunday afternoon that we had to move him into the main sanctuary so he could finish. M.L. had found himself. I could only thank God, pretty regularly, for letting me stay around long enough to be there.[41]

Coretta Scott King relates the same day in her writings:

> Martin was seventeen and finishing his junior year at college when he went to his father and told him that he felt the call to the ministry. Concealing his delight behind an air of doubt, Daddy King proposed that Martin should preach a trial sermon before

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[39] *Ibid.*, 82-83.
[40] *Ibid.*, 83.
[41] Martin Luther King, Sr., *Daddy King* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980), 141.

> a small congregation in one of the smaller auditoriums of Ebenezer. But when word got around that young M.L. was going to preach, so many people came that they had to move into the main sanctuary. The sermon was a great success. Martin had inherited his father's ability to preach, though he adopted a far more subdued style.[42]

"Shortly after his nineteenth birthday, King applied for admission to Crozer Theological Seminary."[43] The application, filled out in February of 1948, references most of the spiritual milestones in the young King's life to that point. "His application indicates the date of his joining the church (1 May 1936), the date of his early decision to enter the ministry (summer of 1944), and his various student activities at Morehouse College."[44] On the application, in answer to the request: "Give your personal reasons for the decision to study for the gospel ministry," King responded with the handwritten answer, misspellings included:

> My call to the ministry was quite different from most explinations Ive heard (sic). This dicision (sic) came about the summer of 1944 when I felt an inescapable urge to serve society. In short, I felt a sense of responsibility which I could not escape.[45]

While still a teenager, King was aware of the direction that his life was going. Before he turned twenty, he was articulating a call to ministry and had already began practicing his prophetic vocational ministry.

> As an alternative to the open celebration of his own importance, which would have been distasteful to his natural humility, King spoke of his role in the early

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[42] Coretta Scott King, 83.

[43] Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 142.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Martin Luther King, Jr., *"Application for Admission to Crozer Theological Seminary."* [2/1948]. [Atlanta, Ga.] (Afms) 5 pp. CRO_NRCR. 480200-000.

> Movement as one that had been fated by history or God, and presented himself as a person who had been called to a special task.[46]

It seems that King sensed in 1944 that he was "called" yet it wasn't until three years later that he acknowledged that publicly, and to his father, and church. It seems the call experience was a process, although this certainly can be attributed to his young age. King clearly articulates a sense of "calling," while admittedly it was less emotional and less dramatic than, for example, the call experience of Isaiah or perhaps Moses. Nevertheless, it generally tips the scale in favor of meeting the criterion included in the "ideal type," the tool this study is using to measure a subject's life to determine if it is prophetic.

B. King's Attempt To Convert

Another criteria of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that a prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes. In his chapter, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" Heschel points out that prophets see the world differently than those without the gift of prophecy. What may seem trivial to the common man is quite important to a prophet because he is more sensitive to evil and issues which effect the welfare of the people.

> Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is

[46] Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166.

> injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.[47]

King saw in the American culture the evil injustice of prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. Even as a boy it affected him:

> . . . it made him angry. He could not understand why two white boys across the street would not play with him. He gated the Jim Crow laws that separated white people from black people in theaters, trains, buses, and other public places and conveyances. These humiliations remained in the back of his mind, and he hoped that when he was older he would be able to fight against them.[48]

This prophetic sensitivity to the injustice of society towards the African American became an emphasis in his message. Like a traditional preacher, King aspired to convert "unbelievers" to a relationship with God. However, the more overarching message to which he sought to convert his listeners was an understanding that the racial problem in America was a spiritual and a moral problem. In an interview for *Playboy* magazine, King revealed how he came to be aware of the issue that his prophetic voice spoke so clearly to point out.

PLAYBOY: As one who grew up in the economically comfortable, socially insulated environment of a middle-income home in Atlanta, can you recall when it was that you yourself first became painfully and personally aware of racial prejudice?

KING: Very clearly. When I was fourteen, I had traveled from Atlanta to Dublin, Georgia, with a dear teacher of mine, Mrs. Bradley; she's dead now. I had participated there in an oratorical contest sponsored by the Negro Elks. It turned out to be a memorable day, for I had succeeded in winning the contest. My subject, I recall, ironically enough, was "The Negro and the Constitution." Anyway, that night, Mrs. Bradley

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[47] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 4.
[48] Jeanne A. Rowe, *An Album of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1970), 8.

> and I were on a bus returning to Atlanta, and at a small town along the way, some white passengers boarded the bus, and the white driver ordered us to get up and give the whites our seats. We didn't move quickly enough to suit him, so he began cursing us, calling us "black sons of bitches." I intended to stay right in that seat, but Mrs. Bradley finally urged me up, saying we had to obey the law. And so we stood up in the aisle for the ninety miles to Atlanta. That night will never leave my memory. It was the angriest I have ever been in my life.[49]

King's message was spotlighted into prominence in 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in a bus to a white person and was arrested.

> Martin Luther King, Jr., was not yet twenty-seven years old when an event occurred in Montgomery, Alabama, that was to change his life and raise him to world prominence. On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a black seamstress, boarded a Montgomery public bus and took a seat. She had been shopping all day and was very tired. Soon all the seats in the bus were filled. As the bus began to pick up more people along the way, the driver told Negro passengers to give their seats to white passengers. The driver told Mrs. Parks to get up and give her seat to a white man who had just entered. When Mrs. Parks refused to leave her seat, she was arrested. Negro leaders in the city decided to stage a one-day bus boycott in protest.[50]

The day after Rosa Parks was arrested, African-American religious and civic leaders met at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where King was pastor. They drafted a leaflet, and mimeographed it in the church office for public distribution. The leaflet said,

> Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5. Another Negro Woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat. Don't ride the buses to work to town, to school, or any where on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk. Come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 P.M. at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instruction.[51]

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[49] Washington, 342-343.

[50] Rowe, 13.

[51] Clayborne Carson, ed., "Don't Ride the Bus" (Leaflet facsimile), *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67.

This incident propelled the prophetic voice and message of King into prominence and the eye of the American people:

> Dr. King was chosen president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, an organization formed to run the boycott. For 381 more days Negroes refused to ride the Montgomery City Line buses. They walked, they rode in wagons drawn by mules and horses, they organized a car pool. They were determined to sacrifice for their dignity. From pulpits throughout the city King urged his people to follow Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent struggle. His talents as a leader and a speaker were first noted in this fight for freedom.[52]

King became a leader in a movement to right the injustices of American Society and law in regards to prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. The Civil Rights Movement gained momentum. In 1963, a "March on Washington" was organized and King gave the keynote speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial on the mall on 28 August 1963. Because of television, the entire nation watched King plead for justice and freedom. He then delivered what is perhaps the most well-known and famous addresses of his life, "I Have a Dream." The message which he sought to have the nation converted to was summed up in his concluding remarks:

> And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last."[53]

Coretta Scott King records her impression at that moment:

> As Martin ended, there was the awed silence that is the greatest tribute an orator can be paid. And then a tremendous crash of sound as two hundred and fifty thousand

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[52] Rowe, 14.
[53] Washington, 220.

> people shouted in ecstatic accord with his words. The feeling that they had of oneness and unity was complete. They kept on shouting in one thunderous voice, and for that brief moment the Kingdom of God seemed to have come on earth.[54]

Washington reports that Coretta King's comment regarding the appearance of the Kingdom of God was followed by, "But it only lasted for a moment."[55] King was committed to his message of the Kingdom of God and how it meant society needed to change. King didn't want to just believe it privately because he was prophetic, he wanted everyone to be as committed to God and the message given to him by God to deliver. He sought to convert the souls, actions, and attitudes of all people. He meets this criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

C. King's Charisma

The third characteristic of the Weberian ideal type of prophet is that the prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." "Charisma" is a hard criterion to objectively verify. It is a relative concept that a subject has and for which it is hard to show evidence. It is almost like "you know it when you see it." Martin Luther King, Jr. had charisma. As review, when Weber speaks of "prophetic charisma," it is originally conceived "to be a magical quality of an extraordinary person, leader, ruler who claims authority and leadership on its basis."[56] Charisma, as Weber observed is bestowed by Yahweh on the prophet, usually at the time of his calling. Richard Lischer points out that King seemed to

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[54] Coretta Scott King, 223.
[55] Washington, ed., 217.
[56] Weber, 465.

understand this: "King spoke of his role in the early movement as one that had been fated by history or God, and presented himself as a person who had been called to a special task."[57]

Prophetic charisma in the ancient canonical prophets was the basis for any leadership the prophet had and allowed for a group cohesion based on the "belief of the followers in the alleged, presumed, or actual extraordinariness and irreplaceability of the leader."[58] King's followers recognized that he was extraordinary and irreplaceable, although King didn't always agree with that assessment. Following the Selma march, Oates reports:

> Selma Negroes rejoiced at the tremendous changes the movement had brought about. They spoke with unabashed reverence for "Dr. King," never forgetting the pensive way he had looked at them, his hands clasped before his face, during those wondrous mass meetings in Brown Chapel. "I just love that man," Marie Foster would say, her voice trailing off as she searched for words to describe all he meant to her . . . . Yes, they were surprised at themselves, proud of the strength they had displayed in confronting the state of Alabama, happy indeed, as Marie Foster said, to be "a new Negro in a new South—a Negro who is no longer afraid."
>
> And that perhaps was King's greatest gift to his long-suffering people in Dixie: he taught them how to confront those who oppressed them, how to take pride in their race and their history, how to demand and win their constitutional rights as American citizens. He helped them "destroy barriers of fear and insecurity that had been hundreds of years in the making," said a young Negro leader. "He made it possible for them to believe they could overcome." And the powerful civil-rights legislation generated by his tramping soldiers eventually ended statutory racism in the South, enabling Negroes there to realize at least the political and social promise of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.[59]

Speaking on the way King was viewed by his followers, Coretta Scott King relates:

> But it was very difficult for Martin to keep from being worshiped by the black masses. It was a great temptation to them, because they had never had the

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[57] Lischer, 166.
[58] Weber, 444.
[59] Oates, 361-362.

> opportunity to acclaim a great leader of their own before. They felt that nothing was too good for Dr. King, that he should ride in Cadillacs behind motorcycles and have every sort of pomp and tribute usually paid to the great leaders of mankind.
>
> You see, they thought of him as the outstanding person of their race in the world. He was, to many of them, the President of the African Americans.[60]

The evidence shows King had charisma. Even by Weber's definition, King had prophetic charisma. King meets this criterion of the ideal type.

D. King's Credibility

A fourth criteria to be described as an ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet "forth-tells" words which are later perceived to be credible and true. A true prophet (as opposed to a false prophet) is one whose message is proven over time to reflect truth.

There is little dispute that the prophetic message of King was a credible message that, even though under attack and arguably caused his death, has in the decades since proven to be the credible message that the nation needed to hear in the context of history.

Like Isaiah, whose prophetic messages included the prediction of a remnant that would return to Jerusalem after Babylonian captivity, King's words were prophetic regarding the "Dream" that he bestowed upon a generation. In his "I Have A Dream" speech, he spoke of equality among all men. One of his most famous phrases was regarding his children: "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their

[60] Coretta Scott King, 165-166.

character."[61] While in 1999, racism and prejudice have not been eradicated, it is clear that King's prophetic words of 1963 are now much closer to reality 36 years later. When asked by *Playboy* whether the goal of freedom will be achieved in his lifetime, King replied,

> I confess that I do not believe this day is around the corner. The concept of supremacy is so imbedded in the white society that it will take many years for color to cease to be a judgmental factor. But it is certainly my hope and dream. Indeed, it is the keystone of my faith in the future that we will someday achieve a thoroughly integrated society. I believe that before the turn of the century, if trends continue to move and develop as presently, we will have moved a long, long way toward such a society.[62]

It has taken a generation, but King's message is now accepted as credible.

To be fair, King's credibility had its critics. There were racists who would argue with the content of his message which have since been shown to be foolish. When asked during a Playboy interview whether he had made any mistakes in the movement, King said,

> Well, the most pervasive mistake I have made was in believing that because our cause was just, we could be sure that the white ministers of the South, once their Christian consciences were challenged, would rise to our aid. I felt that white ministers would take our cause to the white power structures. I ended up, of course, chastened and disillusioned. As our movement unfolded, and direct appeals were made to white ministers, most folded their hands—and some even took stands against us.[63]

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[61] Washington, ed., 219.
[62] *Ibid.*, 375.
[63] *Ibid.*, 344-345.

However, there were those who attacked the credibility of his personal life and ministry, on a number of grounds, but generally the only one which had any merit was the charge of sexual transgressions.

In his biography of King, Oates acknowledges King's sexual indiscretions and the fact that King's close associates were aware of it.

> Yet he also needed love personally, needed companionship, acceptance and approval. To be sure, he cared deeply for his wife and could be tender to her when they were together, extremely tender. By his own estimation, though, he spent only about 10 percent of his time at home, and his long absences took their toll. Lonely and troubled, gone from home so much of the time, he surrendered himself to his passionate nature and sought intimacy and reassurance in the arms of other women, sometimes casually, sometimes with "a very real feeling," as he told a confidant. He needed desperately not just to be free as a man, but to be cherished and loved as a man. "My life," he complained constantly, "is one of always giving out and never stopping to take in." At night, away from the crowds and the cameras, he found a way to take in.
>
> His close associates were aware that he strayed and did not judge him for it. "I didn't see Martin as a saint, a god, no way, shape, or form," recalled one staff member, echoing what others said. "I saw him as a man." Some white friends argued that King had an unconscious need to demonstrate that he was as virile as his father. Certain black friends, on the other hand, cited "the historic obligations of evangelical preachers in the South to the women of their congregations." As one Negro put it, "Martin really believed in the gospel of love." And there were plenty of women who wanted him, who were attracted by his impassioned voice, his gentleness, his air of vulnerability. Wherever he went, females of both races, old and young, married and single, sought him out.[64]

The FBI used illegal and unauthorized methods to investigate King's private life and eventually some of his indiscretions came to light.[65]

The detractors of King's credibility also came from the African-American community. This is evidenced by, for example Malcolm X calling the "March on

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[64] Oates, 274-275.

Washington" in 1963 when King gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, "the Farce on Washington."[65] During a *Playboy* interview, the detractors of King were a topic:

> PLAYBOY: Your detractors in the Negro community often refer to you snidely as "De Lawd" and "Booker T. King." What's your reaction to this sort of Uncle Tom label?
>
> KING: I hear some of those names, but my reaction to them is never emotional. I don't think you can be in public life without being called bad names. As Lincoln said, "If I answered all criticism, I'd have time for nothing else." But with regard to both of the names you mentioned, I've always tried to be what I call militantly nonviolent. I don't believe that anyone could seriously accuse me of not being totally committed to the breakdown of segregation.[67]

King's credibility was attacked from many fronts. In the spirit of "hindsight is 20/20," and while there are lapses in integrity, King's message is accepted as credible. King meets this criterion of the ideal type by a preponderance of the evidence.

E. King As A Public Speaker

Weber says that ancient prophets were primarily *speakers*, and addressed their audiences in public, "to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[68] The fifth criteria of the ideal type is that a prophet delivers his message primarily by speaking. While it is true that as an academician and as a theologian and activist, King

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[65] *Ibid.*, 276.
[66] *Ibid.*, 255.
[67] Washington, 348.
[68] Weber, 269.

wrote many of his messages and many have been published,[69] this may be the easiest criterion for which to show evidence. In fact, King being primarily a speaker is such a well known part of his ministry and reputation that it could almost be concurred without evidence. Nevertheless, some of the evidence is so interesting that it needs to be reported.

King's verbal prowess was evident very early in his life. Even as a child King was known for his love of language and talkativeness:

> Yes, the adults said, he was a brilliant child, a gifted child, who could talk like he was grown sometimes. My, how that boy loved language. 'You just wait and see,' he once told his parents. 'When I grow up I'm going to get me some big words.' . . . And his memory was phenomenal. By age five, he could recite whole Bible passages and sing entire hymns from memory. His parents and grandmother all praised him for his precocious ways, making with flush with self-esteem. In fact, he was so bright that his parents slipped him into grade school a year early. Daddy recalled what happened next. 'He was always a talkative chap you know. So he shot his mouth off and told them he was only five while the other children were six, so they booted him right out of that class.'[70]

King was aware that he was a gifted speaker, and Richard Lischer describes how he handled a high self-esteem; "King's ambition created something of a problem for him. Good rhetorical technique dictates that even the most ambitious of speakers must mask that ambition from his audience by presenting it under the guise of other qualities and

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[69] The King Papers Project is a 14 volume collection of King's speeches, sermons, and writings. The King Library and Archives contains more than 2 million documents, not counting the documents held in Boston University

[70] Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1982), 7-8.

forces. . . . (He) presented himself as a person who had been called for a special task."[71]

When describing the speaking style of King, Lischer compares him to an actor,

> . . . King was, in the fullest and most positive sense of the word, an actor. He perfected his craft in the black church, where he learned how to assume the appropriate role and to perform according to expectations of his public. . . . When speaking prophetically, for example, no unseemly aside, unmeant gesture, or hint of backstage behavior ever detracted from his role or diminished the high ground he had chosen for himself. Like a Greek actor, he moved across the stage speaking his lines with a passion appropriate to his mask. He never broke character.[72]

When recalling in her book King's oratorical style, Coretta Scott King says:

> After Martin had ascended to the pulpit, he began to preach, his rich, clear voice filling the cathedral. His style of preaching grew out of the tradition of the southern Baptist ministers, with cadences and timing which he had heard from his father and other ministers as long as he could remember. But anyone who has ever heard him knows that what made Martin's sermons memorable was not the oratorical skill with which he was so abundantly blessed, but the message which he brought and which came from his heart, straight to the heart of the listener.[73]

This is undoubtedly true; King captivated his audiences. I have only heard tapes (I was five when he died), yet all accounts mention the hold he had on his audiences, partly because of his charisma, partly because of his advanced oratorical skills, and mostly because of the power of his message. Even those who disagreed with him, couldn't help but listen closely. In his description of King's chapel sermon at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1961, Dr. Henlee Barnette relates the following: "He delivered the whole message without a note, looking straight at the people in the pews who sat

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[71] Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166.
[72] *Ibid.*, 163.
[73] Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin Books, 1993), 5.

spellbound throughout the speech."[74] The evidence for King's life and ministry meeting this criterion is overwhelming. Clearly, King meets this criterion of the ideal type of the biblical prophet.

F. King's Message In Tension

The sixth criteria of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture. Because of the visibility and fame of King's ministry, most are aware that his message, while history has shown it credible, was certainly in tension with large portions of society, and certainly the religious community.

Kings' message might be summed up as a religious message of nonviolence, a social message of integration, and a political message of civil rights. This message was forged in the context of his home, church, race, culture, and time of history.

> Martin Luther King's theology and ethics did not develop 'from scratch' or in a vacuum. They had a very definite historical and intellectual sources; chief among these were Protestant liberalism and the philosophy of personalism. The liberalizing process began at Morehouse College with George Kelsey's Bible course and Benjamin May's preaching, waxed strong at Crozer Seminary under the liberalism of George W. Davis, and matured at Boston with the personalism of Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf.[75]

During King's first year at Crozer, he studied the social gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch as well as being exposed to the pacifism and the message of nonviolence

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[74] Henlee H. Barnette, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Civil Right Movement: The Visit of Martin Luther King, Jr., Part Two" *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996): 83.

[75] Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community; The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1974), 6.

of Gandhi.[76] Calloway points out that according to Smith and Zepp, King was influenced by the scholarship of Walter Rauschenbusch, the life and works of Gandhi, and by Reinhold Niebuhr.[77] This combination of social sensitivity, nonviolence, and neo-orthodoxy combine to make the genius of the message of King.

> The ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the embodiment of theological contemplation and nonviolent direct action as a Christian method to achieve social change. Dr. King, in order to be understood or classified as a theologian, must first be seen as a minister of the Gospel.[78]

Literally volumes of evidence could be provided on the tension caused by King's message; hardly any evidence is needed because the tension is so well known. Yet this study will focus in on one obscure event which has seldom been written about to illustrate the message in tension criterion in King's ministry, especially the white Southern evangelical culture: King's visit to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky on April 19, 1961. Dr. Henlee H. Barnette recounted King's visit and the reactions to it, which is an excellent illustration that King's message was in tension with the culture and definitely meets this criterion of the ideal type. Barnette says,

> At the time when Dr. King was invited to give the Julius Brown Gay Lectures, each department was permitted to request speakers of that particular discipline. Hence, I [Barnette] requested for Christian Ethics, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When others who had been invited to lecture during the week cancelled, the question arose about having Dr. King. We all agreed that a commitment had been made and that we should not go back on it. So Dr. Graves issued the invitation. Both faculty and

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[76] Taylor Branch, *Parting The Waters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 73-74.
[77] Calloway, 7.
[78] *Ibid.*, 10.

> administrator's who gave support to King's visit are to be commended for their courage.[79]

The historical context of King's visit is important to understanding the reaction to his visit to the seminary. Tension was present because the Bay of Pigs invasion had happened two days prior. The Berlin Wall was being built. Nationally, and with regard to King in particular, tensions were high.

> Nationally, racial tensions were mounting. Prior to King's arrival he had successfully led the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1956). Public schools were being pushed toward integration following Brown vs. Board of Education (1954). . . . Here in Louisville racial tension was running high. Protest demonstrations aimed at integrating public facilities were occurring in the downtown area. On April 15, four days before King arrived, black students conducted sit-ins at ten eating places. . . . During King's presence at the Seminary and in Louisville, demonstrations continued. On April 20, more than 140 were arrested while demonstrating in restaurants or at lunch counters. Such was the political and social climate and context surrounding King's visit. Media coverage was extensive.[80]

King came to the campus and went to the chapel to speak. The crowd was standing room only and estimated to be 1400. During the formal introduction by Dr. Nolan P. Howington, he "noted that King had been given many labels: American Gandhi, Modern Thoreau, the Moses of his people, Prophet of Social Justice, and a few names less complimentary."[81] King was gracious, and gave his speech in the chapel:

> "The Church on the Frontier of Racial Tension' was the subject of King's address. In summary, King declared that integration was not merely a political problem but a moral one. The old order is passing away, and the church must make the new order possible. The church must develop a world perspective and we must learn 'to live together as brothers or we will perish as fools.' Moreover the church must get at the

[79] Henlee H. Barnette, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Civil Rights Movement: The Visit of Martin Luther King, Jr., Part Two," *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996): 77.
[80] Barnette, 78.
[81] *Ibid.*, 81.

> ideational roots of racial prejudice. It must be made clear that the Negro's basic aim is to be the white man's brother and not his brother-in-law. Again the church can develop a program of action. Wherever there is economic injustice, segregation in the church itself, and racial discrimination, the church must act. Creative love (*agape*) which is redemptive good will toward all people is the type of love that must guide us through this period of transition.[82]

King's speech was well-received and his charisma captivated the audience. He was "calm, deliberate, articulate, (and) serious."[83] The reaction to King's visit was swift and strong. At a reception following the chapel service, Dr. John Claypool, pastor of the Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, came by and was photographed by a local newspaper with King. "Claypool received some flack from his flock as a result of this incident."[84]

> Both positive and negative responses were expressed to King's being on The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary campus. Faculty, administration/staff, and students on the whole received King warmly and his messages with great interest. Some Baptist churches reacted swiftly and with anger. . . . In the light of the tidal wave of criticism, Dr. Allen Graves was asked to frame a statement to the Board of Trustees of the Seminary, and on April 26, one week after Dr. King's visit, I presented the statement to the faculty.[85]
>
> Some churches reacted swiftly and threatened to cut off support of the seminary. Some did withdraw their financial support. Angered because King spoke at the seminary, three churches in south Alabama voted to withhold funds. These were the First Baptist Church and Beulah Baptist Church of Dothan and the First Baptist Church of Columbia. . . . A Baptist layman, Mr. W.A. Malone, a member of the First Baptist Church of Dothan, Alabama, raised $50,000 for mass mailing to all Southern Baptist Churches for the expressed purpose of enlisting the churches in an effort to get Dr. McCall fired as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.[86]

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[82] *Ibid.*, 79.
[83] *Ibid.*, 83.
[84] *Ibid.*, 79.
[85] *Ibid.*, 86.
[86] *Ibid.*, 93.

King's visit to the Seminary illustrates that his message and ministry were in tension with the Southern culture where he was from and especially the white Southern Protestant and other conservative religious cultures of the time. King's message caused so much tension that his life was threatened regularly. His family "had become used to menacing telephone calls and letters."[87] On the evening of April 4, 1968, King was killed by a single bullet to his neck as he stood on he balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a prophet of peace and America's foremost leader of the nonviolent civil rights movement, was dead at the age of thirty-nine. He had been courageous in the totality of his commitment to nonviolence. He was caught between the anger of black militants who preached a more aggressive position and white extremists who could not stand to see any change at all. He faced insult and danger constantly. It is ironic that a man so devoted to peace should have been followed so often by the very violence he was trying so hard to defeat. But Dr. King's outcry for justice was dramatized to the world, and to many he was the Moses of his people.[88]

Following King's death, Henlee Barnette spoke at chapel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

> Memorial services for King were being held in his honor all across the nation but not at Southern Seminary. When it came my turn to speak in chapel, I made it a memorial for King. For my message I received some flack. In it I had observed that America had produced three great prophets. Abraham Lincoln (brought up a Baptist), Walter Rauschenbusch (Baptist social reformer and historian), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Baptist preacher and civil rights leader). Two pastors wrote: "It is blasphemy to put Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the same category." Apparently they didn't know who Rauschenbusch was. King, they said, could not be compared to a biblical prophet. My response appeared in *The Gadfly* (a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary student newspaper). I drew the following specific comparisons:
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> - Like Amos, he stressed justice in economics, politics, and social relationship.
> - Like Hosea, he stressed love.

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[87] Jeanne A Rowe, *An Album of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1970), 62.
[88] *Ibid.*, 67.

- Like Jeremiah, he advocated an unpopular view in was time.
- Like Isaiah, he counseled rulers and kings.
- Like Moses, he conceived of himself as a leader to guide his people out of bondage and slavery.
- Like Jesus, King advocated non-violence and a setting aside of laws when they conflict with human need.
- Like Micah, King believed in democracy.
- And, like all the prophets, King was human and had weaknesses.

Baptist papers also carried the speech and responses. A couple of examples from letters I received will suffice. A man from Memphis, Tennessee wrote, "I am amazed at this article entitled, 'Martin Luther King A Major Prophet.' So you class him alongside one of our greatest presidents! Amazing! Disgusting!" And these words come from a man in Rockwell, Maryland:

> I read your article "Martin Luther King in Retrospect." I could only come to one conclusion, and that is, it's a shame we have such poorly informed men teaching young men who will some day be teaching our children and grandchildren.

These are from the mild letters but do give expression to the general disgust, fear, and hate for King by some religious responders.[89]

King's message caused tension not just in the religious community of Southern Protestants and other conservatives, but his message caused tension for the militant blacks. Nevertheless, King was a prophet to African Americans, and African American Christians, and to all Christians. He spoke prophetically that the church needed to be the agent of change:

> So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice...
>
> There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period when early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the

[89] Barnette, 97-98.

> ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.
>
> Things are different now. The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound...
>
> If the church today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.[90]

King's life and ministry definitely meets the criteria that his message is in tension with the culture, especially the religious culture. There is obviously more evidence to substantiate this than can be realistically reported in this study.

G. King As An Ecstatic

According to Weber's analysis of the ancient prophets, a seventh criteria can be proposed as the ideal type of a modern prophet; a prophet has an ecstatic psychological profile.

When Weber makes his observations about prophetic ecstasy, one of his key observations is: "The prophet's ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts."[91] There is not much evidence of ecstatic states and acts in King's life. There were plenty of negative stereotypes of the black preacher that even if King had an ecstatic psychological profile, he probably would have hidden or suppressed it so as to appear mainstream in terms of acceptability.

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[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James Melvin Washington, ed. "*Letter From Birmingham City Jail*," 16 April 1963, 289-302 (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 299-300.

[91] Weber, 286.

Coretta Scott King makes an intimate observation regarding King's psychology: "My husband was what psychologists might call a guilt-ridden man."[92] Evidently he "felt guilty about his sexual transgressions."[93] Regarding this issue, Oates reports:

> King confided to friends that "I am conscious of two Martin Luther Kings" and that "the Martin Luther King that the people talk about seems to be somebody foreign to me." "Each of us is two selves," he remarked in a later sermon. "And the great burden of life is to always try to keep that higher self in command. Don't let the lower self take over." But he confessed that "every now and then you'll be unfaithful to those that you should be faithful to. It's a mixture in human nature.[94]

Although there is an observation that King was guilt-ridden, there is little evidence about King having an ecstatic psychological profile. He may have but there is little evidence for it. King does not meet this criteria of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

H. King's Piety

The final criteria examined in this study is that the ideal type of modern prophet would claim to have heard the "voice" of God and to be perceived by their peers to have genuine piety in relationship to God. This goes hand in hand with the prophet's ecstatic personality profile. King strongly influenced the religious and societal thought in the twentieth century. James M. Washington's comments in the introduction of his books reflects the feelings that King's supporters had towards King and God's relationship with him.

> Those of us who were both King's contemporaries and his sympathizers believed that some strange providence guided the course of his life. Many of us came to believe

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[92] Coretta Scott King, 158.
[93] Oates, 275.
[94] *Ibid.*, 275-276.

> that Dr. King's leadership embodied the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, a powerful moment in the career of the struggle for freedom. We wanted to believe that God was on our side, and we believed that King's life, and the movement he led, constituted a powerful "testament of hope."[95]

There is so much written about King's life and ministry that it is quite a task wading through the commentary. Washington points out what others also confirm: King's commitment to genuine piety in relationship to God is a part of his legacy.

> . . . fairness and empathy should require all evaluators to remember that Dr. King bequeathed to both his biological and spiritual heirs nothing more nor less than what he called "a committed life." Dr. King, and the unheralded prophetic martyrs of the civil rights movement, have unintentionally placed all of us strangely and uncomfortably in their debt.[96]

Part of the piety that King had with the divine was exemplified in his philosophy and expression of love. In an introduction to the sermon, "Loving Your Enemies," Joan Brown Campbell says,

> King's enemies wanted to silence his prophetic word. They were desperate to still the marching feet. Those of us who believed in King and who had been transformed by his message wanted him to deal harshly with "the enemy." As he states in the sermon that follows, "The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil." This was King's most persistent and most difficult message. He would often repeat the words you will find in this sermon: "Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut hate off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love."[97]

In preaching from Jesus' "Sermon On the Mount" in Matthew 5, King addresses the issue of love in his sermon entitled, "Loving Your Enemies." In addressing the practical issues

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[95] Washington, xvi.
[96] *Ibid.*, xxiii.
[97] Carson and Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight* (New York: Time Warner, 1998), 38.

of love, he refers back to the individual's piety towards God. King said, "Love your enemies that you may be children of your father which is in heaven. We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of his holiness."[98]

King's genuine piety was expressed in his love towards others, and his love towards others was a symptom of his love of God. In a sermon to Ebenezer Baptist Church where he was co-pastor for eight years, King spoke on these issues:

> King not only preached love but modeled it for his congregation. Sellers criticized King's doctrine for the unreasonable demands it placed on its practitioners—they must be transformed by the love of Jesus in the very practice of it—which was precisely King's spiritual aim and the aim of any serious expositor of God's love. The practice of love is self-validating. Although tactics have their place in social change, ultimately the Christian does what is right not merely to avoid hell or to gain entrance into heaven. "You must love, ultimately, because it's lovely to love. You must be just," he chides Ebenezer, "because it's right to be just."[99]

King recognized that the power to practice love, non-violence, and at the same time seek to reform the social ills of society could only come from genuine piety in relationship to God. King professed genuine piety towards God. King was perceived by his peers to have genuine piety. In many of his sermons which have been published we can read his words of prayer to God. Nevertheless, the evidence of this criterion in King's life is not the written or spoken words of King. It is that he demonstrated in action the truths which he taught in his sermons. King lived in a fishbowl for all the world to see, even in his private world, whether he "practiced what he preached." Part of the reason for King's

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[98] *Ibid.*, 39.
[99] Lischer, 232

great influence and fame is because he was recognized as a person of deep faith, who was in tune with the heart and mind of Christ, an that he lived it in his everyday life. If he didn't, much of his message would have been discredited. King meets this criterion of the ideal type of biblical prophet.

III. Conclusions

When using the tool of the ideal type as a measuring tool of comparison, King meets seven of the eight criteria of the ideal type, to varying degrees. Seven criteria are present, however the evidence is slightly weaker in regards to his credibility, although history has taken care of the questions of credibility. The evidence is basically absent regarding an ecstatic psychological profile. In regards to an ecstatic psychological profile, even if King had one, he probably would have felt a pressure to hide or suppress it in order to appear mainstream. There were already enough negative stereotypes of black preachers without him exhibiting ecstatic behavior. Consequently his call experience falls slightly short of the ideal type, only in the sense that it wasn't a sudden occurrence but rather a sense of God's will that he grew into.

> Martin Luther King, Jr., was a product of this company of prophets, and he accepted his "call" to be a part of this ministry even before he finished college. As the son of a black preacher, he had an obligation to give serious consideration to becoming one himself. The pressure was especially great in his case because his maternal great-grandfather, grandfather, and his father were all black Baptist preachers. King became one of the outstanding preachers of our era. And his life was his greatest sermon.[100]

[100] Washington, xvii.

While the evidence is not perfect in every criteria of the ideal type of biblical propnet in King's life and ministry, King meets the ideal type by a preponderance of the evidence. Recalling Dr. Henlee Barnette's words in response to King's presence at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1961 are helpful in understanding King's prophetic characteristics. Barnette said, "I address Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a prophet because his messages at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on April 19, 1961, were genuinely prophetic in the biblical sense of the term."[101] To repeat, the concept of King as prophet is not an original thought. He has been recognized as a prophet by experts in the social sciences and by lay novices—it was that obvious.

[101] Barnette, 81.

CHAPTER 6

CLARENCE JORDAN

I. Jordan As Prophet

Clarence Leonard Jordan was born July 29, 1912 in Talbotton, Georgia. Jordan is probably not a household name in most homes in the twentieth century, yet the fruits of his ministry are probably familiar to most. Jordan is somewhat known for being the founder and leader of a Christian community outside of Americus, Georgia called Koinonia Farm. He is more well-known for his Cotton Patch Version of various parts of the Bible. However, the most well-known ministry for which he is given seminal credit is the worldwide endeavor to build affordable housing for the poor, Habitat for Humanity. Habitat for Humanity has almost entirely developed after Jordan's death in 1969, yet all who are asked will acknowledge that it was the prophetic voice of Jordan which laid the foundation for all that has happened since.[1]

"Prophet" can be used to describe someone favorably in our twentieth-century culture. However, for the title to have integrity, it cannot be used loosely. To label a person a "prophet" should not to be done lightly or in a way that seems less than educated, yet the

[1] "Project That Works," *The Atlanta Journal*, 27 December 1978, 4-A. This article generally tells about Habitat for Humanity, interviews Millard Fuller, and makes the following statement, "It is especially fitting

task of this study is to attempt to identify criteria by which a subject's life can be more objectively analyzed in order to make a determination to what degree, if at all, that a person's life and ministry fits the definition. Based on the observations of biblical prophecy by Weber that have been developed into an "ideal type," Clarence Jordan is clearly a modern manifestation of the type of prophet which was analyzed from the eighth century BC biblical personalities, like Hosea. Millard Fuller, Jordan's close friend and ministry partner, said Jordan "was very prophetic in the sense that he was radical in terms of trying to help people understand and comprehend the meaning of the gospel within the context of the southern culture (in America)."[2] When asked to elaborate on what Fuller meant when labeling Jordan a "prophetic character," he responded with the following quote:

> Prophetic in the sense that he challenged society. He challenged the money-oriented, racist, militaristic society. He said the way of Jesus was God's way and it's the way that people who are serious about being God's people are to consider this punitive way of living. The world may say that you are to discriminate against black folks, for example, but that's not God's way. You should love black people , just like you should love people of all races. You should not have any favorites. You should be willing to love and accept and cherish people from all races and all walks of life. So he was prophetic in that sense. And prophetic in the sense of opting out of our money-oriented society which just says go out and try to get the best paying job you can get and lay up all of the money you can possibly lay up and get as rich as you possibly can get. And he also said that as peace by gifts that we should give the things that make for peace and not just be against war or against violence but do positive things that make for peace, reaching out and loving and helping people so that you are an aggressive peacemaker. So all those

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that such an approach came from Koinonia Partners, a non-profit farm cooperative founded by Clarence Jordan 36 years ago to promote 'kinship of community both black and white."

[2] Millard Fuller, interview with author, transcript of tape recording, Americus, Georgia, 1 April 1994.

> things made him very much a prophetic person. He always talked in terms of a God Movement.[3]

"From Scripture and experience, Jordan developed his theological concepts of radical discipleship, koinonia, incarnational evangelism, and the God Movement or the Kingdom of God."[4]

Jordan's theological ethics are thoroughly expressed in his work, *The Substance of Faith*,[5] published posthumously. "James McClenden, Jr. *Biography as Theology*[6] presents the most serious analysis of Clarence's theological ideas."[7] Jordan's Major theological emphases were incarnationism, faith as action, and koinonia community. McClenden summarizes Jordan's theology as follows:

> Jordan's changing theology was never fixed in a single pattern. At the beginning, he was closest, save on a few issues (but those were crucial ones), to the traditional orthodoxy of the Baptist South. By the time of his death, biblical study fertilized by a life of profound Christian action had reshaped many of his convictions. Three strands seem prominent throughout this development. (1) Jordan was, as his biographer Lee emphasized, an "incarnationist." But this did not mean that his Jesus was a God-man, a masquerading deity. Rather, in the man Jesus we learn that God is not an absentee landlord. Jordan sometimes put this point with a totality and force that might have satisfied Thomas Altizer. God is not *there*, in heaven; he is *here* in Jesus and his brothers. This theme provided a doctrinal backbone, as far as I can tell, through all

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[3] *Ibid.* The "God Movement" is what Jordan called the Kingdom of God. Barnette succinctly explains this in his writings.

"Clarence's ethical ideal was that of a community in which the love of God, personal equality, and economic justice could find full expression by its members regardless of race, class, or nationality. He sought an all embracing theological concept that would support his ideal. He discovered it in the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. Generally, Clarence translates *baseleia* as 'the God Movement.' He also renders it 'New Order,' 'Spiritual Order,' 'Kingdom Movement,' 'Spiritual Movement,' and 'Spiritual Family.'" Henlee H. Barnette, *Clarence Jordan: Turning Dreams Into Deeds* (Macon, Georgia: Smythe and Helwys, 1992), 22.

[4] Barnette, 14.

[5] Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith* (New York: Association Press, 1972).

[6] James Wm. McClenden, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1974).

[7] Barnette, 14.

> his thought. (2) He made "faith" central in Christian life, but "faith" had neither the rationalist's sense of belief in the improbable, nor the Reformation sense of self-abandoning trust in God. Faith is always understood as the ground of *action*. . . . In brief, he did not believe it was faith unless it was what one lived by. Thus the well-known characterization of faith in Hebrews 11:1 came out in the *Cotton Patch Version:* "Now faith is the turning of dreams into deeds."[8] (3) As the image *koinonia* has shown us, the faith with which Jordan was concerned was faith-lived-in-community; it was (to coin a word) koinonic ethics, and Jordan's ethics was always a koinonic ethics, which valued community, under God, highest of all. No one community or form of community was essential, but God intended disciples to be together with their brothers and their sisters.[9]

Clearly this relates to the definition of prophecy which understands that a prophet is one who "forthtells the truth" rather than "foretelling the future." Jordan was not making any predictions of future events, rather he was pointing out the evils of the day. He wanted to communicate in such a way that people could see their lives, culture, and actions from a different perspective than they were used to looking at it.

II. The Analysis of Jordan As A "Modern Prophet"

A. Jordan's "Calling"

Remembering Weber's words in regards to the prophetic calling of the ancient Israelite prophets, he refers to the "ecstasy of calling" as the "first ecstasy."[10] A distinguishing criterion for the ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet experiences a sense of "calling" from God. As a modern prophet, Jordan is no exception.

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[8] It is from this translated verse that Barnette subtitled his book on Jordan, "*Turning Dreams Into Deeds.*"

[9] McClenden, 112-113.

[10] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 294.

Jordan was born the seventh of ten children, but of those that survived infancy, he was the middle child of seven. He grew up in a privileged family in Talbotton, Georgia in a Protestant puritanical home and attended the Baptist church.

> The Jordans were loyal Baptists and the local Baptist church was a central part of their lives. Sunday School and stern preaching and hot nights at the August revivals were primary in the heritage of Clarence and his five brothers and one sister. All the children, in good tradition, made professions of faith and joined the church when they were about twelve.[11]

He was very sensitive to the difference of treatment between whites and blacks in his town, and often saw examples of mistreatment. Several of these made deep impressions on him, for example, one time he remembers seeing the warden who had beaten a black man in a chain gang singing "Love Lifted Me" in the church choir. He commented on that incident, "The same man who only hours before was carried away singing 'Love Lifted Me' was now lifting that man's body on the stretcher. That nearly tore me to pieces. I identified totally with that man in the stretcher. His agony was my agony. I really got mad with God. If He was love and the warden was an example of it, I didn't want anything to do with Him."[12]

> So Clarence Jordan, at 12, fresh from an August revival experience, was jolted into full recognition of the fact that the religion he aspired to and the life he was so much a part of simply did not jibe. He did not reject his church or raise a protest or risk his new understanding by exposing it to his family or friends. In fact, he may not have been capable of articulating all that he felt. And so it remained a secret, stuffed deep into the chemistry of his body and soul, where guilt abides, where fear is rooted, and where conviction slowly matures to action.[13]

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[11] Dallas Lee, *The Cotton Patch Evidence* (Americus, Georgia: Koinonia Partners, 1971), 7.
[12] *Ibid.*, 9.
[13] *Ibid.*

Jordan loved verbal encounter and had an answer it seemed for every situation and his family expected him to be a lawyer. His brother Frank recalled, "Clarence would fight with anyone in the family. It didn't matter if he was going up the line or down the line. That was why we nicknamed him 'Grump'"[14] There was a time that Jordan thought about becoming a lawyer, believing that he could make a difference in the fight against racism.

> He dreamed of going off to the state law school and then raging back into the county like a savior to see that justice was done in the county jails and work camps. But this was a short-lived impulse, as he became increasingly aware that injustice and suffering were not confined to the chain gangs. The insidious fog of racism and greed, he began to see, was choking the whole county and the next, and the next, and the next. The victims of sharecropping- that system of legal peonage that enriched so many white farmers-huddled along every stretch of road. "I realized," he said later, "that most people are not stretched by ropes but by hunger, by oppression."
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> Toward the end of high school, he decided to be a farmer- a scientific farmer- and to try to lift the awful burden from the poor man's back by showing him how to get a lot from a little land. He would seek to work in partnership with the poor farmers.[15]

In 1929-1933, Jordan attended and graduated from the Georgia State College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia in Athens. He earned a bachelor of science degree in agriculture, yet he was feeling as if something was lacking and so he was in a desperate search for spiritual resources.

> At that point, Clarence responded to the inner urging to become a preacher. Nothing, it seemed, could have been further from the four-year investment in agricultural training that he was about to complete, but he seized upon it as God-provoked.[16]

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[14] *Ibid*, 6.
[15] *Ibid*, 9-10.
[16] *Ibid*., 11.

After college, he resigned his commission in the ROTC after realizing that it was incompatible to his understanding of the teachings of Christ, and returned to the First Baptist Church in Athens and requested to be licensed to preach. During the service in which this occurred, he read a statement to the congregation which reflected the emerging prophet and the sense of calling from God:

> If, according to popular opinion, being called to the ministry means spending all night in prayer, fighting constantly that voice which persistently speaks, being borne on the floods of passion, or having an "experience"-I repeat-if it means all that, I doubt very much that I have been called. But if being in the ministry means lending an attentive ear to a simple statement, "My child, I want you to preach for me," then most assuredly I have been called to the ministry.
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> While I admit that God may choose the former method of speaking to those whom He wishes to preach, nevertheless I contend that it is not necessary nor is it the only method. Behold a tree. Does it not speak to us thusly: "Don't you see that God is not working Himself into a frenzy in me? I am calmly, quietly, silently pouring forth my life and bringing forth fruit. Do thou likewise."
>
> And so it was with me. No battle was fought. My heart and soul were not torn by doubt, for when His voice came I was sure of its source. My strength was never pitted against His. He spoke. I listened. I can still hear Him just as vividly: "My child, I want you to preach for me." You wish my answer? Here it is: "Yes, Lord, whatever you say, just promise me that you'll go with me." "And lo, I am with thee always, even until the end of the world." "Lead on, O Christ, I'll follow." And that's all there was to it.[17]

After he was licensed, Jordan went to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and graduated with a Master of Divinity in Greek New Testament. Remembering the observation of Weber regarding the call experience, "(The call) is never presented as the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits. On the contrary, it is always in agreement with the endogenous

nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[18] While Jordan had prior thoughts toward the ministry, it seems that one day he heard God's voice asking Jordan to be his spokesman. Jordan accepted the call without contemplation. His call experience fits this criterion very closely. He experienced a calling to preach and also a "calling" to be a farmer, trained for both, and ultimately combined them into a unique ministry headquartered at Koinonia farm. Clearly, using Weberian methodology, it can objectively be stated that Jordan perceived a calling, a "sudden unmotivated occurrence", to be the spokesman of God

B. Jordan's Attempt To Convert

The second criterion of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that a prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes. In the case of Jordan, his main audience were people who outwardly professed belief in the scriptures, but their lives professed hypocrisy Sometimes they were not even aware of the difference between what they said they believed and what they did. We are reminded that in his chapter, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" Heschel points out that prophets see the world differently than those without the gift of prophecy. What may seem trivial to the common man is quite important to a prophet because he is more sensitive to evil and issues which effect the welfare of the people. This describes well the prophetic ministry

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[17] *Ibid.*, 14.
[18] Weber, 294.

of Jordan. In the case of Jordan there were at least three main ways that his prophetic speaking manifested itself.

Since the days that Jordan was licensed into the ministry, he held positions as pastor, professor, and itinerant preacher. The main way that he sought to convert people with his message was as a speaker. He was in high demand to speak in many different contexts, including churches. He was often in conflict with the white southern Protestant churches because he preached a message against racism. He even was "churched" by the Rehoboth Baptist Church, along with all the other members of the church who lived at Koinonia Farm because, among other things, they opposed the church's policy towards other races. Jordan's speaking engagements unintentionally became a way that Koinonia Farm members were recruited. It was sometimes directly as someone heard him speak, and other times indirectly as others were referred by someone who had heard him speak.

> Among those who arrived to stay for several years in the early 1950s were Claud and Billie Nelson, who had heard Clarence speak in 1944 to a Baptist student meeting at the Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, where Billie had been a student. Both Claud and his wife were deeply committed to pacifism and racial brotherhood and they met with Clarence to express an interest in joining Koinonia. At that time, however, they chose to do volunteer work through the American Friends Service Committee in a slum area of Indianapolis. Later, Claud worked for Hampton Institute in Virginia and, inevitably, Clarence spoke there in 1950 and again prompted the interest of the Nelsons. They visited Koinonia that year and came again to spend the summer in 1952. At the end of that summer they committed themselves to joining Koinonia.[19]

The Koinonia Farm was a working farm where everyone shared their possessions. They also worked together to help provide a living for each other. When Jordan was

away on speaking trips, he was not able to help in the work of the daily chores of the farm. At times, there was tension among the other members of the farm who resented his travels.

> Clarence was sensitive then, too, to the fact that many resented his frequent speaking trips. It had begun to be evident to him when he felt he was received "with tremendous coldness" upon his return from a speaking tour in the Northwest hungering deeply for the Koinonia fellowship.[20]

There were other people who were in demand as a speaker who lived at Koinonia (like Con Browne, for example), but Jordan was by far the most frequently requested. Jordan's message was intended to convert the listeners to a faith in Jesus Christ, or if that barrier had been broken, to literally follow the example set by Jesus for those who were desirous to be His disciples.

Another way that Jordan attempted to convert others was in his "translations" as a writer of the Cotton Patch Version of portions of the New Testament. Jordan recognized that the people who called themselves Christians in the culture in which he grew up, and late in which he ministered, claimed to place a high value on the Bible as the "Word of God." He recognized however, that in the almost two thousand years since most of the sacred writings were written, the meanings of the scriptures had been lost in time, language, and culture. Jordan understood that if he was going to change anyone's mind on any number of issues, particularly the teachings of Christ on racism, then he needed to help the common person get a better grasp on the teachings. He explained his purpose for

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[19] Lee, 89-90.

writing the Cotton Patch Version, "The purpose of the 'cotton patch' approach to the scriptures is to help the modern reader have the same sense of participation in them which the early Christians must have had."[21] Jordan elaborates on the reasons for his project. Millard Fuller recounts when he was first exposed to Jordan's Cotton Patch Version:

> In the evenings we would frequently sit around in the Jordan's apartment, munching popcorn and peanuts from the farm, and talk still more about Christ and what it means to be His disciple in our modern world. At that time Clarence was in the process of translating portions of the New Testament into his "Cotton Patch" versions, and he would often read to us what he had worked on that day to see if the meaning was clear. His purpose, he said, was to translate the scriptures in such a way that people in South Georgia would see Jesus and His message come alive in their locality, in their day.[22]

In the "Introduction" to his *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles,* Jordan elaborates on his thinking and his desire to see people changed or "converted" by the efforts of his translations:

> Why a "cotton patch" version? While there have bee many excellent translations of the Scriptures into modern English, they still have left us stranded in some faraway land in the long-distant past. We need to have the good news come to us not only in our own tongue but in our own time. We want to be *participants* in the faith, not merely spectators. . .So the "cotton patch" version is an attempt to translate not only the words but the events. We change the setting from the first-century Palestine to the twentieth-century America. We ask our brethren of long ago to cross the time-space barrier and talk to us not only in modern English but also about modern problems, feelings, frustrations, hopes, and assurances; to work beside us in our cotton patch or on our assembly line, so that the word becomes modern *flesh.*[23] Then perhaps, we too

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[20] *Ibid.*, 83.

[21] Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John* (Clinton, New Jersey: New Win Publishing, 1970), 9.

[22] Millard Fuller and Diane Scott, *Love in the Mortar Joints* (Clinton, New Jersey: New Win Publishing, 1980), 59.

[23] This is an analogy referring to John 1:8 which says "The Word (Christ) becomes flesh and dwelt among us," which is not only a reference to the incarnation of God in Christ, but which is the basis for a

> will be able to joyfully tell "of that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes and have felt with our hands, about the word of life" (I John 1:1).[24]

Jordan goes on to explain that there are other reasons which went into the making of the Cotton Patch Version. He felt like the Bible needed to be taken out of the stained glass environment of the sanctuaries, and into the context of God's skies where most people worked. He also felt that the cotton patch context made it more relevant to the Southern culture to which he was trying to communicate. Jordan's main reason though is that he wanted to address the prejudice and racism that was present in every aspect of his life. He says:

> Pernaps the main reason, though, is that the major portion of my life has been spent on a farm in southwest Georgia where I have struggled for a meaningful expression of my discipleship to Jesus Christ. With my companions along the dusty rows of cotton, corn and peanuts, the Word of Life has often come alive with encouragement, rebuke, correction and insight. I have witnessed the reenactment of one New Testament event after another until I can scarcely distinguish the original from its modern counterpart. And because the present participants are for the most part, like their predecessors, humble people, I have longed to share God's word with them. So in making the translation, I have kept in mind the little people of great faith who want to do better in their discipleship but have been hindered by big words they don't understand or by ancient concepts they don't grasp.[25]

As a Greek scholar, he was fully capable of translating the text virtually word for word from Greek to English, yet he knew it would lose something in the process. Jordan

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theology of preaching held by Barth and many others which states that preaching is an incarnation of God's Word into the lives of the modern hearer.

[24] Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles* (Clinton, New Jersey: New Win Publishing, 1968), 7.

[25] *Ibid.*, 8.

was aware that to call this version a translation was using a loose definition, and he recognized the limitations.

> Of course, one can never make a perfect translation even from one contemporary language to another, simply because words seldom have precise equivalents in a different language. It is even more difficult when the two languages are also separated by thousands or even hundreds of years. Then add the barriers of culture and space and the task is indeed formidable. I readily admit, then, that my attempts to find present-day equivalents to many New Testament expressions and concepts are often strained, crude and perhaps even inaccurate.[26]

Jordan goes on to give some examples of the difficulties and challenges of finding suitable modern-day equivalents, beginning with the translation of "crucifixion" as "lynching."

> For example, there just isn't any word in our vocabulary which adequately translates the Greek word for "crucifixion." Our crosses are so shined, so polished, so respectable that to be impaled on one of them would seem to be a blessed experience. We have thus emptied the term "crucifixion" of its original content of terrific emotion, of violence, of indignity and stigma, of defeat. I have translated it as "lynching," well aware that this is not technically correct. Jesus was officially tried and legally condemned, elements generally lacking in a lynching. But having observed the operation of Southern "justice," and at times having been its victim, I can testify that more people have been lynched "by judicial action" than by unofficial ropes. Pilate at least had the courage and the honesty to publicly wash his hands and disavow all legal responsibility. "See to it yourselves," he told the mob. And they did. They crucified him in Judea and they strung him up in Georgia, with a noose tied to a pine tree.[27]

Jordan then tackles the emotionally laden of translating the adequate equivalent of "Jew and Gentile." "My translation as 'white man and Negro' is clear evidence of superimposing my own personal feelings, which is the unpardonable sin of a self-

respecting translator. But in the Southern context, is there any other alternative?"[28] Jordan acknowledges the struggles he had in trying to be true to translating the "ideas" of the text to be meaningful to the contemporary South. He adds, "When I have strayed too far afield, I beg your forgiveness and patience, pleading that you keep in mind my plight."[29] Jordan summarizes his translation efforts with a classic Jordan illustration:

> There are places where it will appear that I have taken entirely too much liberty with the text. But let me point out that this is a translation, not of Paul's words, but of his ideas. If his actual words convey the wrong impression to a modern hearer, or if they make Paul say something which he obviously did not intend, then I do scuttle his words in favor of his idea. For example, someone would be perfectly understood if he wrote to a friend, "We had hot dogs and coke for lunch, fish and hush puppies for supper, and then sat around shooting the bull until midnight." But let that letter get lost for about two thousand years, then let some Ph.D. try to translate it into non-English language of A.D. 3967. If he faithfully translated the words it might run something like this. "We had steaming canines (possibly a small variety such as the Chihuahua -Ed.) and processed coal (the coke was probably not eaten but used to heat the dogs--Ed.) for the noon meal, and fish and mute, immature dogs (no doubt the defective offspring of the hot dog, with which twentieth-century Americans were so preoccupied--Ed.) for the evening meal, followed by passively engaging until midnight in the brutish sport of bull-shooting (the bulls were then processed into a large sausage called bologna, which sounded like "baloney"--Ed.) For such exacting scholarship the good doctor may have won world renown as the foremost authority on twentieth-century English—without having the slightest idea what was actually said! Even worse, imagine the impression his literalism gave his audience of American food and recreational habits! Trying to avoid such error, my search has been for the content of the word rather than its form.[30]

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[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*, 8-9.
[28] *Ibid.*, 9.
[29] *Ibid.*, 9.
[30] *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Jordan was well aware that his Cotton Patch Version wasn't a translation in the traditional sense. Even though he had the knowledge to be scholarly, it was not his intentions to impress anyone with his accuracy of Greek verb conjugations; it was his intentions to convert by communicating well. Besides, he knew there were others who had already done translations in a scholarly format. Jordan says, "Obviously the "cotton patch" version must not be used as a historical text. The Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible are excellent for this purpose."[31] The "cotton patch" version had a different purpose which was to "enlarge and strengthen" the faith of people in Jesus Christ. The "cotton patch" had the purpose of sharing a message which intended to convert others to a new faith or a new understanding of the faith they already professed.

The third way that the prophecy of Clarence Jordan was manifested was in Koinonia farm. It was in the farm experiment that Jordan put his words into action. Jordan's childhood in the culture of the South and his experiences early in ministry birthed and developed his convictions that racial prejudice was a terrible problem that was not only a cultural issue but a spiritual one. Clarence Jordan was affected by the New Testament passages which referred to a sharing of resources among the believers of Christ. One of the scriptures which is an example of this and which impacted Jordan was from Acts 2. The context of the passage was that a group of believers in Christ experienced an epiphany and it was explained in a sermon by Peter to an audience who listened quite

[31] *Ibid.*, 11.

carefully to the information presented. The following passage explains what happened next:

> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.[32]

These verses in conjunction with others led to a conviction in Jordan's life that the Christian community lived differently than the rest of the culture. He was convinced that it was not only possible, but prescribed by scripture that Christians live in community together and share possessions and meals. As a denominational worker in the early 1940s in Louisville, Kentucky he proposed a seminal version of this concept, called "The Lord's Storehouse."

> . . .(Jordan) hoped (the plan) would help alleviate the more immediate, pressing problems of the poor as well as give the affluent a feasible way of sharing their abundance. The idea was simple enough. An inner-city store would be established by the churches, with both new and used clothing, appliances, fuel, food, and Bibles. Modest prices would be marked on each item, and the customers would pay all, part, or none, according to their ability to pay. The churches could support the store with cash or products, and any profits would be plowed back into goods or in operating expenses.[33]

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[32] Acts 2:41-47 NASV.
[33] Lee, 23.

The proposal was tabled because of opposition but Jordan continued to believe that a shared community was prescribed for believers in Christ. While working with a group of students who looked to Jordan for leadership, Jordan again presented his ideas of doing life in shared community:

> Those who continued to participate with him slowly and informally evolved into an on-campus group which met several times a month for study and discussion. Clarence began to toss out his ideas about pacifism, racial equality, and the radical stewardship of complete sharing. As the group became more cohesive, they sought to define themselves. Clarence offered the Greek word *Koinonia* (pronounced coy-no-nee'-a). *Koinonia* was used repeatedly in Greek New Testament manuscripts and depending on the context, was translated "communion" or "collection" or "fellowship." The word was used in the Book of Acts, for example to describe the fellowship that developed among early Christian followers when they pooled their possessions, shared their lives, and distributed their common resources to each as he had need. It was a word meant to communicate the fellowship of those who continued to participate in the life of Christ by seeking to carry on his ministry of reconciliation. The students, primarily under Clarence's leadership, were struggling to express the idea of being a fellowship in which individuals both gave to and received from the others in a spirit of sharing. And so they called themselves a koinonia.[34]

They established a bank account and agreed to deposit any "excess" income. The experiment eventually dwindled because the student never had much income deemed to be "excess." One of the members of that group recalled that Jordan had shared "his dream of establishing a farm in the South that could become a resource for the rural poor. And Clarence then added that the farm could sustain a fellowship of Christians who pledged themselves to peace and brotherhood and shared their belongings in a common

[34] *Ibid.*, 26.

life."[35] Later, Jordan was exposed to an American Baptist missionary to Burma named Martin England. In a letter to supporters in the states, England shared some ideas which were almost identical with the dream that Jordan had of a shared community. They formed an agreement to cooperate together and in the summer of 1942, they incorporated their dream as Koinonia Farm, Inc. Mainly through contributions, they purchased 440 acres in Sumter County, Georgia, outside of Americus. Improvements were made to the farm which was badly in need of them and by Christmas of 1942, they had moved their families there to begin the Christian community experiment.

The history of Koinonia Farm is extensive and full of interesting stories, but in summary, the farm experiment slowly prospered and eventually grew to a community which supported over 60 full time members and many, many temporary and seasonal volunteers. At the height of its success, it had orchards of fruit trees, a huge chicken/egg operation, a peanut farm complete with processing plant and mail order business, a hog farm complete with processing and a roadside market to sell all their goods, including all kinds of vegetables grown in a huge garden by the members of the fellowship. The members of the fellowship, black and white, surrendered all possessions upon arriving and then shared everything, including taking most of their meals in a communal dining hall. The experiment was working until it met with opposition from religious and political forces.

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[35] *Ibid.*, 27.

> This Christian communal farm had been established in 1942 by Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England. The Englands left soon thereafter, but the Jordans had stayed on to oversee the development of the thriving community. It had been all but destroyed, however, by Ku Klux Klan violence in the late 1950's and early 60's.
>
> ...Blacks and whites lived and worked together at Koinonia in a spirit of Christian brotherhood.[36]

Clarence Jordan had a message that he intended to convert others to following. In Jordan's mind, it wasn't just enough to say the you believe in God, he was encouraging people to live it out in everyday life. The Koinonia Farm began as an experiment of what he saw as a biblical prescription for followers of Christ. It developed into the manifestation of his message and it developed into one of the tools which delivered the message to which he was trying to convert people.

C. Jordan's Charisma

The third characteristic of the ideal type of prophet is that the prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." Jordan was apparently a colorful character by all accounts, yet he was also different from many "pastors" in that he was known to be very "down to earth." Though it wasn't totally apparent as a child, it became clear that as a young man he was developing quite a bit of charisma.

> If Clarence had been slow and a little withdrawn as a youngster, he finally began to come alive at the university. He joined everything in sight- fraternities, debating teams, drama clubs, the student agricultural newspaper, the band, the YMCA, the

[36] Millard Fuller, *Bokotola* (Piscataway, New Jersey: 1977), 16.

> Baptist Student Union, the First Baptist Church, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. He was a "good dancer and a lot of fun," according to a classmate, and soon was elected to leadership positions in the organizations he joined.[37]

When Millard Fuller, the founder and Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity, first encountered Clarence Jordan, it left an impression which he later recalled. He was visiting Koinonia Farm and had been shown around and been told about Jordan and was very interested in all that he was seeing and learning. He says

> By noon, I was absolutely consumed with curiosity about this unusual community, and especially about this Clarence Jordan who took God's word so seriously and so literally.
> When I first saw Clarence in the small community dining hall, I was disappointed. He looked so ordinary. A man in his mid-fifties with a ruddy complexion and a deeply tanned face and neck, he was wearing faded overalls and an old plaid shirt. Could this be the Greek scholar, the brilliant lecturer, the fearless opponent of racism and the Ku Klux Klan, that Al (his friend) had been telling me about?[38]

In an interview in 1994, Fuller retold the same story but shared more of his feelings:

> . . .I've always felt that God led me to Koinonia and we came out to Koinonia to spend a couple of hours and stayed a month. I met Clarence. I had never heard of Clarence. I went there to see somebody else, a man named Al Henry. I met Clarence and was totally captivated by him.[39]

There was clearly a charismatic magnetism exuded by Jordan. When listening to him on tape, one is drawn to like him as a person with a lot of character. It is apparent on tapes that his audience is captivated, entertained, and enthralled with the messages they heard him speaking. Even those who opposed his message and views sometimes could not help

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[37] Lee, 10.
[38] Fuller and Scott, 57.
[39] Fuller, interview.

but like him, even if they later criticized or openly opposed him. The story is recounted that when Jordan and England first moved to Koinonia Farm, they hired a black man to help with the work. At lunch, they would all eat together, which in the southern culture, even in many places today, is not socially accepted. Several of Jordan's neighbors at times observed this behavior, and the following incident was recalled:

> Word got around quickly that those preachers were sharing their table with a black man. And one evening as Clarence was standing in the yard, a delegation arrived at the farm with the obvious intent of acting so utterly menacing that the two men would repent on the spot.
>
> As they stepped from their car, on of the men looked at Clarence and said: "We're looking for Clarence Jordan." Clarence identified himself as the others gathered around him silently. He smiled and nodded toward each of them expectantly. No small talk broke the icy silence, however. The spokesman for the group looked Clarence square in the eye and said: "We understand you been taking your meals with the nigger."
>
> Taken aback momentarily, Clarence replied softly: "Well, now, at lunchtime we usually eat with a man we've hired."
>
> Having so deftly wrung a confession from Clarence, the spokesman for the group jumped right to the point and blustered out what they had come to say. "We're from the Ku Klux Klan," he stated, "and we're here to tell you we don't allow the sun to set on anybody who eats with niggers." . . .
>
> (Jordan) knew these kinds of people. He was a southerner, and he was struggling to make a living the same way they did. In a stroke of inspiration he reached out a seized the man's hand and began shaking it, saying with his best big brother grin: "I'm a Baptist preacher and I just graduated from the Southern Baptist Seminary I've heard about people who had power over the sun, but I've never hoped to meet one."
>
> There was another pause, accentuated this time by the two hands pumping up and down in the air. The man gawked at Clarence in a petrified moment of disbelief, and then he said: "I'm a son of a- I'm a son of a Baptist preacher myself..." And so they talked and laughed and the old sun went right on down.[40]

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[40] Lee, 37-38.

One of the criterion which has been identified as part of the ideal type of prophet is that the subject would be deemed to be a person who has a charismatic personality. If this can be measured in an objective way. Clarence Jordan would score quite high by any measurement, and meets this criterion. He was clearly a man of charisma.

D. Jordan's Credibility

A fourth criterion to be described as an ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet "forthtells" words which are later perceived to be credible and true. A true prophet (as opposed to a false prophet) is one whose message is proven over time to reflect truth. Jordan's life and message was constantly attacked and criticized. As was mentioned previously, the KKK openly opposed the Koinonia Farm experiment. They almost destroyed Koinonia Farm.

> (Koinonia) had been all but destroyed, however, by Ku Klux Klan violence in the late 1950's and early 60's. Koinonia was the object of hostility because of its uncompromising witness to the universal brotherhood of man and its practical commitment to the idea that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one is Christ Jesus."[41] Blacks and whites lived and worked together at Koinonia in a spirit of Christian brotherhood. This enraged many of the white segregationists in the surrounding area, and eventually they set upon the community with a vengeance- beatings, bombings, burnings, and a total economic boycott. The fact that even a remnant of the community survived is a miracle.[42]

While in fairness, not all of the violence can be blamed on the KKK, they clearly were involved. On February 24, 1957, after a Klan rally in Americus, the Klan paid an official

visit to Koinonia; "At the close of the rally, the Klan members took off their robes, formed a motorcade of 70 to 80 cars, and struck out down the Dawson Road to Koinonia Farm."[43] They confronted the members of Koinonia, and afterwards the persecution increased. They were prohibited from buying or selling anything, their insurance was canceled, they were shot at almost daily (or nightly), including by shotguns, high-powered rifles, and once with a machine gun. They had their fences cut, their animals killed, sugar in their gas tanks, crosses burned in their yards, their buildings bombed and burned, their fruit orchards cut down. Their children were beaten up at school, and they were blamed for any questionable incident. Lee gives evidence of this mistreatment:

> At about this time, Sumter County solicitor general Charles Burgamy spoke at the Dougherty County chapter of the States Rights Council, stating that he favored a return to the Ku Klux Klan. The Albany Journal reported that he said:
>
> > Maybe that's what we need now is for the right kind of Klan to start up again and use a buggy whip on some of these race mixers. I believe that would stop them. . . . I don't know how they feel about it down here in Dougherty County, but I had rather see my little boy dead than sit beside a Negro in the public schools.
>
> Commenting on the violence at Koinonia Farm, Burgamy intimated that the people at Koinonia could be doing it themselves.[44]

Jordan was opposed in the courts by Burgamy in many regards from everything from licensing youth camps, harboring communists (a logical charge in the 50's from someone operating a "commune"), to being accused of blowing up their own farm buildings to collect insurance. He was accused by his church, the Rehoboth Baptist of Church, of

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[41] The passage quoted here is taken from Galatians 3:28.
[42] Fuller, *Bokotola,* 16.
[43] Lee, 124.

"engaging in advocating views and practices contrary to those of other members of the Rehoboth Church,"[45] including bringing other races to church.

> ...An agricultural student from India who was studying at Florida State University visited Koinonia Farm for a weekend, and he expressed an interest in attending an American Protestant worship service. The Brownes (a Koinonia family) escorted him to Rehoboth, where the presence of his dark skin miraculously chilled the hot, humid southern Georgia atmosphere. Obviously Koinonia had disguised a "nigger", called him an Indian, and sneaked him into divine worship.[46]

The church also charged Jordan and the rest of the Koinonia members with visiting Negro churches, holding services "where both white and colored attend together,"[47] causing friction in the church, misbehaving in the services, and making disparaging remarks about the denomination. So they voted to "withdraw fellowship from any who are members of Koinonia Farm, and that their names be stricken from the church role."[48]

It wasn't just the KKK and his church that reacted negatively to the message and lifestyle of Jordan. His clashes with white culture began early in his life. While he was a student in the Greek New Testament at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, he accepted an opportunity to teach English New Testament at Simmons University, a "Negro" seminary in Louisville. Jordan invited some of his students (who were "Negroes") to eat at his apartment, which was on the Southern Seminary campus. "When the student body (at Southern) got wind of this, a committee of fifteen or twenty

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[44] Lee, 112.
[45] Lee, 77.
[46] Lee, 75.
[47] Lee, 78.
[48] *Ibid.*

students marched into (President) Sampey's office to demand an explanation for what they considered unchristian conduct."[49] Sampey was able to resolve the issue satisfactorily, but not without an air of hypocrisy in Jordan's opinion. It was a short time later that Jordan expressed his interest in joining a black congregation, the Virginia Avenue Church in Louisville. He was hit with a storm of indignation among the white clergy with arguments like "Did not Jesus respect racial boundaries, and did not Paul maintain that he was Hebrew of the Hebrews[50]?"[51] This incident prompted Jordan to write in his personal journal a note which reflected his resentment at the culture:

> It was unethical and unchristian to join a Negro church because it was a Christian principle to abstain from meat if it caused your brother to stumble, and surely this would cause many to stumble.[52] I guess it is also a Christian principle to tear out of the New Testament all those pages which proclaim the universality of the Christian brotherhood and which so terribly upset our complacent social traditions.[53]

People also responded quite negatively to Jordan's preaching, even directly attacking his credibility. In the *Cotton Patch* translation of the story of the Good Samaritan[54], Jordan's translation was unique:

> In Clarence's translation[55], Atlanta was Jerusalem. Valdosta was Bethlehem, and the road from Jerusalem to Jericho started in Atlanta and ended in Albany. The

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[49] Lee, 20.

[50] This is a reference to a description that Paul made of himself in Philippians 3:5, in the context that it was nothing to boast about.

[51] Lee, 22.

[52] This statement is based on principles derived from Paul's writings in I Corinthians 8:13 NASV, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble."

[53] Lee, 22.

[54] This is a well-known parable told by Jesus in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" and recorded in Luke 10: 30-37.

> man who fell among thieves experienced that misfortune in Ellaville. A white revival preacher went by on the other side in a late-model Ford, and a gospel singer who was in charge of the music for the revival also drove by on the other side- singing as he went the chorus he was going to teach the children's choir that night: "Brighten the Corner Where You Are!" It was a poor black man who stopped to help. He put the badly beaten traveler in his rickety old car and drove him to the hospital in Albany, passing right by the church revival, where they were whooping it up on "Love Lifted Me." He left the man at the hospital and told the attendant he would stop back on Saturday to see about his patient and to pay any additional amount due.[56]

The reactions to his writings and even the preaching of these translations are an indicator of how credible he was perceived to be when he was alive. It seems that people had very strong opinions of Clarence Jordan. They were either captivated and reverently curious about his ministry and teaching or they were deeply opposed to him and responded with great emotion, as did the Ku Klux Klan. Strong reaction to him was by no means limited to the KKK, however, and some of his greatest critics came from people who claimed to be devout Christians (which many Klan members claimed as well). For example:

> One day a woman from Ellaville called about his "cotton patching" of the story of the Good Samaritan. Clarence had made a record of this particular parable, and apparently one of them had been circulated in Ellaville.
>
> "I want to speak to Clarence Jordan."
>
> "Yes. I am Clarence Jordan."
>
> "Are you the preacher who did a record about a man that got beat up in Ellaville?"
>
> "Yes, I did a record like that."
>
> "Well, I live in Ellaville, and I want to know where that happened!"
>
> Clarence tried to explain that the record was not telling of an actual event; it was a contemporary version of the parable, designed to get the message of Jesus across in a South Georgia setting.

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[55] This quote is a summary of the actual translation which can be found in Clarence Jordan's *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts* (Clinton, New Jersey: New Win Publishing, Inc., 1969), Luke 10:25-37, pages 46-47.

[56] Fuller and Scott, 60.

> "Don't give me your theology," the woman insisted. "I want to know the truth. Where did this incident occur? Who was that man who got beat up? Who was that preacher, and who was the song leader who drove by? And who was that nigger that picked him up?"
>
> "Ma'am, like I was saying, the story is not of an actual event. It-"
>
> "Are you telling me it's a lie? It didn't happen? You made it up? And you call yourself a preacher? You are a liar, and worse, you make records of you lies and sell them! That's what I thought. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Goodbye!" BLAM! (she hung up on Jordan)[57]

Jordan's message might have been better received outside of the southern culture of the United States in the era in which he lived. But in the context of his ministry, his ministry wasn't considered credible by many, and wouldn't be until the context of racial prejudice was changed in the culture. Arguably, in spite of the civil rights movement and all its influence, there are still many places in the South and other parts of the United States where Jordan's message still would not be received as credible.

During an interview with Millard Fuller at the headquarters of Habitat for Humanity in Americus, Georgia, a plaque[58] was noticed on the wall identifying the Clarence Jordan Center at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.[59] When asked about the plaque, Fuller said,

> "It's just a Center that promotes his life and work at the seminary where he went to seminary. It's kind of ironic that they have that honor at the seminary because for most of his life they wouldn't let him speak at the seminary. And after he died they set up a deal honoring him. That's how they do a lot of prophets, you know, the

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[57] *Ibid*, 60-61.

[58] In a letter, Fuller acknowledges receiving the plaque on the Tuesday morning prior to May 5, 1986. Fuller said "I deeply appreciated the plaque which was presented to me on Tuesday morning." Millard Fuller to Paul D. Simmons, 5 May 1986, Mitchell letters and files, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

[59] Rob Scott, Assistant to Dr. Greg Weilds, Archivists, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Interview by author, 6 April 1999. The "Clarence Jordan Center" is a lecture series that focused on ethical issues. It was defunct for awhile but recently has re-instituted by Dr. Ben Mitchell, Professor of Ethics.

> church takes prophetic characters and reviles them and curses them and spits on them in their lifetime and when they die they build monuments to them. They go 'Wow! He was a great person.' But they wouldn't have anything to do with him when he was alive."[60]

The essence of what Fuller said was true but needs to be corrected slightly. Jordan was allowed to speak at the Seminary on at least three occasions.[61] In 1940, Jordan preached in chapel at the invitation of President Sampey.[62] Additionally, Jordan's wife was from the Louisville area and they occasionally returned to visit family. On one such occasion in 1951, Jordan was invited to speak in all the ethics classes of Dr. Henlee H. Barnett, Professor of Christian Ethics. Later in 1968, Jordan was asked by Barnette to do a series of lectures at the seminary which contained the content of what later was compiled into *The Substance of Faith*.[63]

> Edward McDowell, Jr., sometime professor of New Testament at Southern Seminary and a friend of Clarence, notes in his introduction to *The Cotton Patch Version of Hebrew and the General Epistles* that in 1968 Clarence was invited to speak at Southern Baptist Seminary. (Apparently, he had not been invited to speak in chapel, though he had been invited to lecture in ethics classes, since President Sampey invited him to in 1941.) McDowell notes, 'Things do change.' Indeed when I became chairman of the Special Lectureship Committee, I thought it was time to have Clarence lecture to the entire seminary community. His response to my invitation reflected his reluctance to do this. His letter of May 15, 1968, read in part,

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[60] Fuller, interview.

[61] Dr. Leo Sandon points out that none of these appearances were in the time frame when Koinonia was most controversial and persecuted. He pointed out that when he visited Koinonia in 1956 that Jordan would not have been accepted at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (May 1999).

[62] Henlee H. Barnette, Interview by author, 9 April 1999. Barnette was a student at the Seminary and was present at the service when Jordan spoke. He remembered it clearly because he responded to a challenge by Jordan to go into a famous slum in Louisville, KY called the "Haymarket District" to work as a minister. Barnette accepted the challenge and lived and worked there for several years. He recalled that there were "90 businesses of ill repute" within a few blocks of his home.

[63] Dallas Lee, ed., *The Substance of Faith and other Cotton Patch Sermons by Clarence Jordan* (New York: Association Press, 1972.

> Those Gheens lectures sound like mighty high cotton for a pea-picking farmer like me, and I'm sort of scared to tackle it. But at the same time, because of our personal friendship, I do not feel disposed to decline it.
>
> Prior to this letter, Clarence had been lecturing at some of the most prestigious universities and seminaries in the country. His lectures at 'Mother Seminary' had a significant appeal and impact.[64]

After Jordan's death in 1969, a memorial service was held at the seminary chapel and "The Clarence Jordan Institute"[65] was founded on November 19, 1969. The first speakers featured by the Institute were Florence Jordan, who spoke of Koinonia Farm, and Robert Brancher who spoke on translating the Bible into modern language, one of Jordan's passions.[66] A brochure describing *The Clarence Jordan Center* says:

> The witness of Clarence Jordan to the transforming power of the Gospel in human social life was the inspiration for founding a lectureship in the name of this outstanding Greek scholar and Christian prophet. . . . The special task of the Jordan Center is to structure forums for discussion in the seminary community. . . .The purpose of the Clarence Jordan Center for Christian Ethical Concerns shall be to deal with crucial social and ethical issues confronting the contemporary church and society. Through various forums it is hoped that a Christian witness may be brought to bear upon such issues and that possible strategies for response may be determined.[67]

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[64] Barnette, 7-8.

[65] Later, in 1985, the name was changed to "The Clarence Jordan Center," at the recommendation of Roy Honeycutt, the President of the seminary. Roy L Honeycutt, "The Clarence Jordan Institute." (Louisville, Kentucky: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 29 January 1985, photocopy).

[66] Barnette, interview by author.

[67] The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "The Clarence Jordan Center for Christian Ethical Concerns," (Louisville, Kentucky: n.d., printed brochure).

in December 1988. *The Clarence Jordan Center*, hosted a lecture series entitled "Christian Peacemaking in a Hostile World."[68] Recently, the Clarence Jordan Center has expanded to include a celebration of African American heritage at the seminary.[69] This seems appropriate since Jordan was an integrationist[70] who worked to oppose the principles of the Day Law.[71] Jordan's prophecy "forth-told the truth" about how the ministry of Jesus could be understood in the culture of the South and how it applied to how life in the South needed to be different. He provided accurate commentary on conditions and attitudes which were present in the South contemporaneous to his life there. There were a variety of reactions to his message, some favorable, some violent, and some just expressed disgust or denial. Many who were confronted with their perceived hypocrisy were angry and questioned the integrity and credibility of Jordan.

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[68] The Clarence Jordan Center for Christian Ethical Concerns, "Christian Peacemaking in a Hostile World" (Louisville, Kentucky: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1 December 1988, printed brochure).

[69] Ben Mitchell, interview by author, 7 April 1999.

[70] Henlee H. Barnette, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Civil Rights Movement: From 1859-1952. Part One." *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993): 541.

[71] The "Day Law" was a 1904 Kentucky statute introduced by Senator Carl Day of Breathitt County, Kentucky, which upheld the doctrine of "separate but equal." It basically prohibited African Americans and Caucasians from attending school together. It declared in part, "It shall be unlawful for any person, corporation, or association of persons to maintain or operate any college, school, or institution where persons of white and negro races are both received as pupils for instruction." 4367-8 1904, c65, Art. 1, §1. Effective June 14, 1904. "Penalties for violating this law were $100 per day for any teacher caught in a class of whites and blacks, $50 per student and $1000 for an institution that permitted black students in a class with whites. This included both public and private schools in Kentucky." Henlee H. Barnette, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Civil Rights Movement From 1859-1952 Part One," *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993): 537.

The statute was modified in 1950, to allow that African American could attend "white" schools if similar services were not offered in a segregated setting. Dr. Ben Mitchell points out that the "intent" of the law was broken regularly at Southern seminary, even having students graduate after having been caught in hallways and professors offices and homes, while attempting to keep the "letter" of the law, a story corroborated by Dr. Henlee Barnette. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court desegregated all public schools and the law was eliminated.

> But as often happens with prophets, this one in blue jeans is now - more than two decades following his death (in 1969) - receiving wider acclaim and adulation than he or anyone else ever expected. . . .a Broadway musical entitled *Cotton Patch Gospel* has received highly favorable reviews. This celebration of his views extended Clarence's influence into the secular arena in an unusual fashion.[72]

It is in hindsight that many who now have heard his message later, have affirmed the credibility of his message. Jordan meets this criterion to be an ideal type of prophet.

E. Jordan As A Public Speaker

It is important to be reminded that Weber says that ancient prophets were primarily *speakers*, and addressed their audiences in public, "to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[73] This criterion is one which clearly has the evidence to easily prove. At Koinonia Farm, they have the tapes of many of Jordan's public sermons on sale. When the tapes are listened to, you sometimes hear a slow southern drawl and sometimes the lively oration of a rural preacher that is common in the southern culture. It is obvious that Jordan was a very educated expositor of biblical texts, sometimes breaking into speaking the Greek language of ancient manuscripts and then telling the meaning of the Greek words in such a way that would fascinate and entertain the common man in southern culture with the principles of the scripture. Jordan's ability to be an interesting speaker with a message that he preached with great conviction, and lived

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[72] Barnette, 9-10.
[73] Weber, 269.

it out in his life, created a demand for him to speak in many places. Both Jordan and England were preachers, but Jordan clearly was a more skilled public speaker.

> The farm and (Jordan and Martin's) other activities consumed their energies like a whirlpool, however, and Clarence was already in demand as a speaker and Bible teacher nationwide. . . .The two families joined the little Rehoboth Baptist Church nearby and sought to make contributions as teachers, song leaders, and supply preachers. . . Clarence preached frequently and often led the singing.[74]

His speaking was not only in local churches but his demand soon became nationwide, to the point that it was considered an "industry" of the farm.

> (Jordan) was a popular speaker in Sumter County and the surrounding areas for several years, addressing church groups and graduating classes frequently until his radical messages finally undermined his charm and cut off invitations to speak.
>
> Nationwide, however, he was in increasing demand as a Bible teacher. He was well equipped academically, and he had a down home warmth and charisma as well as a thundering radicalism and a jolting earthiness: "We'll worship the hind legs off Jesus, but never do a thing he says." Student groups and pastors' conferences began calling on him regularly and his extensive lecturing began attracting student work teams to Koinonia Farm on weekends and for summer months. A web of communication was beginning to develop that eventually generated such a momentum of interest that talking with visitors became one of the farm's major industries.[75]

Millard Fuller commented on the speaking ability of Jordan: "I was profoundly affected by the teaching of this man of God. As a scholar and a humorist, Clarence was brilliant and yet thoroughly down-to-earth. His compelling preaching was in demand all over the

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[74] Lee, 44.

[75] *Ibid.*, 44-45.

country, but Clarence was most at home at Koinonia Farm in his faded overalls, sharing stories about the "God Movement," Clarence's term for the kingdom of God."[76]

Max Weber observed that in the lives of the biblical prophets of ancient Israel, that prophets were primarily speakers. Jordan delivered his message in written form in his translations and in living form in Koinonia Farm, but it is clear that Jordan was primarily a speaker, and therefore meets this criterion of an ideal type very well.

F. Jordan's Message In Tension

The sixth criterion of the ideal type of a modern prophet is that the prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture, a criterion which much evidence has already been cited in Jordan's life and ministry. "(Jordan) took Jesus seriously and, in addition, he read the Bible and attempted to practice what it says. This contributed to his alienation from politicians, some educational institutions, denominational bureaucrats, and church leaders."[77]

Jordan's message was a radical obedience to Jesus and his teachings. Fuller said, "As a Christian, he became totally convinced of the rightness of Jesus and his message. So he became a devoted disciple of Jesus. Clarence wrote himself many times that most people worship Jesus but they won't obey him."[78] The way this message manifested

[76] Millard Fuller and Diane Scott, *No More Shacks* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986), 29.
[77] Barnette, 9.
[78] Fuller, interview.

itself was in pacifism, racial equality, and communal living, all of which were in extreme tension to the southern culture in which Jordan lived and ministered, and resulted in persecution not only from society, but especially the religious society that he was criticizing. Fuller elaborates on these points as he explains Jordan's views:

> All stand on level ground with Jesus. And so within the context of the south Georgia setting he said what that means is that a black person is just as important in God's sight as a white person is. No different. And so even though the culture may dictate whites up here, blacks down there, whites over here, blacks over there, I say we ought to be together because we use the same Bible, we worship the same God, we pray to the same God, but we can't have any association with one another. And he (Jordan) said that's ridiculous. I don't care what the culture is. The Bible that I read and my understanding of God and God's message is that we ought to be together. And so that's the way they were. They just had the attitude, we're out here in the country and we're in Christian fellowship and it's going to be a totally non-racial fellowship and we're not trying to start trouble but if we do start trouble we won't run from it because the Bible promises if you're a disciple of Jesus you will be persecuted. So they said, if we're persecuted, at least that will be a sign that we're doing something right. And sure enough, they were persecuted.[79]

At times it seemed that Jordan recognized that his message was such in tension with culture and religion, that he knew it must be persecuted.

> With hostility smoking and blazing around Koinonia Farm and the embattled community experiment reeling under on assault after another, Clarence received a letter from a pastor of an affluent suburban congregation assuring him of sympathy and "our daily prayers." Clarence impatiently fired off a response by return mail: "Don't you sympathize with me. . . . I sympathize with you, in all your wealth and with men speaking highly of you. . . ."
>
> The "bath of fire" should be taken for granted by the serious Christian, Clarence believed, and he was quick to repudiate the association of "God's work" with absence of tension. . . . "If you want to share the life of Christ, you should be prepared for the suffering of Christ."[80]

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[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Lee, 143.

The message that Jordan taught and preached was a radical, literal, uncompromising obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and it constantly was in tension with his culture. His message was also in tension with the blossoming middle class and materialism of American culture in the 50's and 60's. Fuller recalls,

> Jesus also said that unless a person gives up everything, he cannot be Jesus' disciple. Of course, that applied to the simple fisherman of His day who didn't have much to give up. Surely Jesus doesn't expect us to take him literally and give up our cars and our air conditioners and our second homes and our fancy clothes and our investment portfolios? No, he doesn't mean that.
>
> Then Clarence would thunder, "Yes, He did mean it! The gospel of Christ is eternally relevant. He still calls on us, today, to take up the cross and follow Him, down our roads, in South Georgia or wherever we live. He calls on us to listen and obey!"[81]

There is no question that the message of Jordan was in tension in multifaceted ways with his culture, especially the religious. Barnette summarizes this criticism:

> 'A prophet is not without honor save in his own country.'[82] So it was with Clarence Jordan in his own beloved Georgia where he was subjected to bombings, boycotts, and rejection. The church where he was a member excluded him, his family, and other Koinonia folk from membership. He felt that, generally, Southern Baptist denominational leaders did not wish to be identified too closely with him because of his views on race, religion, and economics. . . . Even some of his Baptist brethren are belatedly acknowledging him, now that he's been safely buried without a marker or monument in the red clay of Georgia. It has always been so: even some religious leaders praise dead prophets but cannot bear the living ones.[83]

The KKK and the church persecution have already been documented. Clearly, Jordan's life and ministry meet this criterion as part of the ideal type of prophet.

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[81] Fuller and Scott, *Love in the Mortar Joints*, 61.

[82] This phrase is quoted from Matthew 13:57. It is a quote attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.

G. Jordan As An Ecstatic

According to Weber's analysis of the ancient prophets, a seventh criterion can be proposed as the ideal type of a modern prophet; a prophet has an ecstatic psychological profile. One of he ways that an ecstatic psychological profile is manifested is that the subject claims to hear the voice of God. There are many occasions that could be cited in Jordan's life, but none better than the example cited in the issue of his calling that has already been documented. There was a particularly interesting section of the statement which Jordan read to the congregation at First Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia. Jordan said:

> My heart and my soul were not torn by doubt, for when his voice came, I was sure of its source. My strength was never pitted against His. He spoke. I listened. I can still hear him just as vividly: "My child, I want you to preach for me." You wish my answer? Here it is: "Yes, Lord, whatever you say, just promise me that you'll go with me." "And lo, I am with thee always, even until the end of the world." "Lead on, O Christ, I'll follow." And that's all there was to it.[84]

Notice that Jordan believes he was listening clearly to the voice of God. God was asking Jordan to be His spokesman. Jordan was relating a give and take conversation that he had had with God. This conversation and the later retelling of it was seen as the source of authority for Jordan to be licensed as a preacher by his church. Hearing voices is considered ecstatic behavior and this ecstatic behavior mirrors closely the kind of

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[83] Barnette, 9-10.
[84] Lee, 14.

behavior recorded in the epiphany of Isaiah in Isaiah 6. The interesting difference in the story is that unlike Moses or Isaiah, Jordan did not relate an initial unwillingness to obey the voice. There was no excuses or no feeling of not being worthy of being the spokesperson for God. The account of Jordan's call experience is classically prophetic and is excellent evidence of the ecstatic psychological profile. It also further evidence of the statement that Weber makes when he refers to the "ecstasy of calling" as the "first ecstasy."[85]

Evidence of the ecstatic profile was observed by Fuller as he recalled part of the teachings of Jordan:

> (Jordan) said so many people want to make God conform to their image and that's why they build a church which he refers to as God boxes and they say here's our God box. Let's fashion a God that won't ruin our God box. So he said that God cannot be contained in a box. God is the God of the universe so if you would be wise, you would try not to conform God to our standard but we would try to extend our spiritual antennae to pick up the message from heaven of how God wanted us to change and modify our behavior and our thinking to conform to God's way.[86]

This is excellent evidence of modern ecstasy. A modern analogy of an antennae being extended to pick up the messages from God, is taught as the way to shape your thoughts and behavior. Jordan exemplified prophetic ecstasy but with a modern twist.

Another way that the ecstatic profile manifested itself was only seen after Jordan died. On October 29, 1969, Jordan was writing a sermon in the shack he used as a study and he apparently just leaned his head back against the wall and died. He was buried in

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[85] Weber, 794.

[86] Fuller interview

an unmarked grave on Koinonia Farm an his wife was later buried next to him. Millard Fuller handled the arrangements for the funeral and when he was asked during an interview why he arranged it the way he did, he responded that he was following the wishes of Jordan. Fuller explained:

> Clarence always felt the human body when it was dead was put back in the earth. Let it go back to the earth. So we buried him in a pine box, no coffin. We bought a box that you put coffins in and buried him in that box. It was a very beautiful service.[87]

Weber observed that prophets in ancient Israel had an ecstatic psychological profile. It would be helpful at this point to remember Weber's observation:

> "Psychologically viewed most pre-Exile prophets were ecstatic men. At least Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel professed to be and undoubtedly were. Without gross carelessness, one may safely assume that all were ecstatic, though of various kinds and in different degree. . . . The prophets ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts. There can be no doubt that these very states, originally, were considered important legitimations of prophetic charisma and, hence, were to be expected in milder forms even when not reported."[88]

It would be easy to imagine that if Weber were objectively studying the life and ministry of Jordan that he could have described Jordan with the above statement. Sometimes the reason that Jordan was so misunderstood and sometimes took people off guard was the very reason that he was interesting to listen to and that people were drawn to his charisma: it was because he had an ecstatic psychological profile. It manifested itself all through his life and even in his death. Jordan meets this criterion as an ideal type of prophet.

H. Jordan's Piety

The final criterion examined in this study is that the ideal type of modern prophet would claim to have heard the "voice" of God and to be perceived by their peers to have genuine piety in relationship to God. In the previous section, Jordan hearing the "voice of God" was documented. It overlaps the "genuine piety" criterion. People who knew Jordan intimately almost always comment on how deep Jordan's commitment was to God.

Jordan spoke to this issue about himself. In his "Introduction" to *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles*, Jordan makes some interesting comments. He says, "Perhaps the main reason (for doing the Cotton Patch version) is that the major portion of my life has been spent on a farm in southwest Georgia where I have struggled for a meaningful expression of my discipleship to Jesus Christ."[89] Jordan calls himself a disciple of Christ and goes on to say at the very end of the "Introduction,"

> To have lived with Paul during these ardent months of translation has been within itself a fully rewarding experience for me. But if this humble work may be used of God to enlarge and strengthen the faith of others in his Son Jesus Christ, then indeed my joy will be full.[90]

Jordan valued his own piety towards God so much, that he wanted everyone else to experience a larger and stronger faith in God as well. He spent his life trying to help people to that end, for it was the stated reasons for his sermons, his translations, and his

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[87] *Ibid.*
[88] Weber., 286.
[89] Jordan, 8.

efforts at Koinonia Farm. Millard Fuller has often commented in both his writings and in an interview on the genuine piety with God that he observed in Jordan, "It was a powerful, exhilarating experience to be with Clarence and to realize the utter devotion he had to Christ."[91] Fuller said in an interview,

> So Clarence had all these wonderful insights and as you talk to him you felt "Wow. this is authentic." It's like people who could explain about Jesus who could not speak as other men spoke when he spoke with authority. And Clarence spoke with authority. You see I never met anybody who thought so much like Jesus. He obviously thought like Jesus. I felt that he had immersed himself so much in scripture and his life was such a life of devotion to Jesus that he had thought, he started thinking like Jesus. And so in every situation he reached a point in his life he actually thought like Jesus, had the thought processes of Jesus. The average person doesn't have that. They don't even approach it.[92]

It is at this point that the limitations of this research are evident. It would have been desirable to speak directly with Jordan on these issues, and since most of the written material leaves out names for obvious reasons, it would also be interesting to speak with people who opposed his teachings and message to ask them about how he was perceived in his piety. Nevertheless, those that knew him well reported that as closely as it can objectively be measured, Jordan meets this criteria as the ideal type of prophet.

III. Conclusions

Clarence Jordan is clearly an example of a modern manifestation of a "biblical prophet." He meets all the criteria developed in this analysis of biblical prophecy and clearly epitomizes the criteria for a "modern prophet." Every criteria of the ideal type

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[90] *Ibid.*, 11.
[91] Fuller and Scott, *Love in the Mortar Joints*, 61.
[92] Fuller, interview.

was met in Jordan's life. It seems that a prophetic model of old was alive and well in south Georgia from 1942 to 1969. Jordan was a "modern prophet."

CHAPTER 7

NIEBUHR, KING, AND JORDAN: MODELS FOR CONTEMPORARY PROPHETIC MINISTRY

I. Historic Context of Distinctive Western Prophetic Tradition

In the last three chapters, the argument of the hypothesis was developed which is that in the lives and ministry of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan, there exists the presence of criteria to be called prophetic and make the assertion that these three are models for contemporary prophetic ministry in various degrees. It is during the last three chapters that the hypothesis is developed, which is that aspects of classical biblical prophecy were present in the life and work of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan.

When the prophetic traditions of ancient Israel are discussed, it is a discussion of a process of evolution. This process began before the patriarchs and ended when Israelite prophecy was replaced by Apocalyptic.[1] Israelite prophetic traditions evolved from many influences including Mesopotamian, Indo-European, Canaanite, Phoenician, and those elements which were unique to Israel. Even though Israelite prophetic tradition began to develop and evolve into two distinct forms: the Ephraimite and the Judean traditions,

[1] Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 295.

both of these traditions evolved from the early periods of the conquest, to the monarchy and eventually through the exile.

The argument that prophetic traditions of previous cultures have influenced later traditions is crucial to the thesis of this work. Following the argument that prophetic traditions have evolved will move one out of the ancient period of history to formulate distinctives to give a framework to a "Western" prophetic tradition. A concept of "western" prophetic tradition cannot be divorced from the prophetic traditions of the past, nor understood and defined in the absence of this context. If it were somehow possible to objectively dissect biblical prophetic traditions into its individual parts, none of the individual parts stand alone as distinctive or original. Each have historical context in traditions of prophecy which were preceded or were contemporaneous in the cultures which intermingled in the Fertile Crescent to create the culture of ancient Judaism, and the prophetic traditions which were a part of it. Prophetic traditions are not limited to the Western traditions of religion, however they are distinctive.

Consider the evidence of the historical traditions which probably influenced the biblical traditions of prophecy. There were oracular prophetic traditions that have evidence pointing back to prehistoric times in ancient Greece and the surrounding areas. The oracular traditions of prophecy in that area included the Mother Goddess worship in pre-Grecian history, and in the rich traditions of prophecy in ancient Greece surrounding oracles, especially the mantic tradition of the Pythia priestess at Delphi. The invasions of Indo-Europeans brought traditions of ecstatic prophecy (madness) and allegiance to a

supreme male deity, in almost every area where they had a presence of conquest. The biblical patriarchs were exposed to and arguably influenced by Mesopotamian prophetic traditions such as divination, omens, extispicy, and hepatoscopy. Moses was at the beginning of a distinctive culture that could be called Judaism and his Sinai experiences almost certainly influenced the traditions of prophecy that developed in biblical traditions through the eighth century BC and beyond. The role of the ancient canonical prophets was relatively defined and distinctive. As Birch assessed Israel's history, he observes that the role of the prophet is that the prophet reminds the faith community of its tradition and identity.[2] Calloway summarizes how this manifests itself in the ministry of the prophets:

> The biblical prophets reminded the faith community of its tradition and identity. They were called by God into a relation with God that transcended their own community. They were called to preach the divine word. They were charged with the responsibility of holding together, criticizing, and energizing. They demythologized the established religious beliefs, ideas, customs and institutions. Finally, they brought the world into divine focus by pronouncing the judgment and hope of God.[3]

This analysis summarizes the distinctiveness of the role. Each individual part is not original or distinctive, but the way they evolved and were packaged together in the eighth century BC biblical tradition is distinctive. While some common thread can be noticed, the biblical traditions observed as a whole are certainly distinctive as traditions, which is

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[2] Bruce C. Birch, *What Does the Lord Require? The Old Testament Call To Social Witness* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 67.

[3] Kelvin Tipton Calloway, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Modern-Day Prophet: An Ethical Analysis of King's Preaching* (Dissertation: Graduate School of Theology at Claremont, 1988), 25.

[illegible] the biblical writings as inspired and authoritative, became extremely influential.

The "western concept of prophecy" as distinctive takes further shape when put into the overlay of church history. The Protestant influence which emerged from the Reformation and was a large part of the cultures of the United States, further caused modern manifestations of the prophetic traditions to become even more distinctive as "Western." When people develop in a culture which affirms the value of the biblical record as [illegible] American culture did, and the evils of society are present, it is no wonder that [illegible] leaders emerge who consciously or unconsciously model themselves after biblical prophetic characters. It is not surprising, as will be discussed later, that Reinhold Niebuhr and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were inspired with and aspired to be like the eighth century BC biblical prophet Amos.[4] Amos, a prophet himself said, "Surely the LORD God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets." It is also no wonder that Clarence Jordan was focused on understanding, teaching, and living the principles that Jesus of Nazareth taught. If the traditions of prophecy that were part of the biblical record were becoming more westernized than near-eastern, then that process definitely evolved through church history, political history, geography, and

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[4] With regards to Niebuhr, Fox says, "It was Amos he wished to follow. . . Niebuhr shared Amos' sense of crisis. He also shared Amos' awareness of the risk of pride. . .Niebuhr yearned to speak with Amos' authority and to appropriate his humility." Reinhold Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), viii.

With regards to King, Branch is recalling a reference in a sermon that King made and says, "The audience all but smothered this passage from Amos, the lowly herdsman prophet of Israel who, along with the priestly Isaiah, was King's favorite biblical authority on justice." Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 141.

culture. The result is that the traditions of prophecy which exist in the contemporary American religious culture, can be defined as "distinctive" and "western."

It is argued that the lives, messages, and ministries of Niebuhr, King, and Jordan are examples to various degrees of the prophetic tradition that is distinctively Western. Ramsey says that we can identify modern prophets by examining the message of the ancient canonical prophets.[5] This distinctive western concept of prophecy can be objectively observed in contemporary religious leaders in America. For the purposes of this study, Reinhold Niebuhr, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Clarence Jordan have been chosen to be analyzed as potential contemporary prophets which would exemplify this distinctive western tradition of prophecy.

II. Review of Weberian Methodology

Weber made a significant contribution to the social sciences by developing concepts and methodologies which have changed the ways that twentieth century scholars study religion and other human affairs. His methods have become a litmus test and required study for sociologists, religionists, and other social scientists. The words of Segady are clearly a reminder for those who study human affairs. "Max Weber's work is recognized by the majority of sociologists as the most important attempt yet to elaborate the foundations for the science of society. Weber's definition of the nature and scope of

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[5] Amos 3:7, NASV.

[6] William M. Ramsey, *Four Modern Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 3.

sociological inquiry has dominated all subsequent discussion of the matter."[7] Weber, building on the foundation of the neo-Kantians, attempted to establish the objectivity of the social sciences, focusing on the concept of "value." Weber believed that "reality must be understood in terms of concrete historical value schemes. It can and should be approached not only as nature but also as history of culture."[8]

Additionally, Weber follows Kant's critique of dogmatic rationalism, "for which concepts are in the last analysis copies of 'objective' reality."[9] Remembering that there is no systematic Weberian methodology, we must look to the principles and adapt them to our field of study, in this case prophecy. In his principle of "value orientation," Weber felt that social science should carefully separate objective analysis from ethical judgment. Weber says there are objective principles to examine "facts," without imposing a moral judgment.

The second major principle, which this study is using as a methodological tool, is the concept of the "ideal type." The concept of the ideal type was first thoroughly developed in the essays in *Gesammelte Aufsatze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, which were translated and republished after Weber's death. Until then, the concept of ideal type was likely unfamiliar to non-German readers. "It is one of the most important aspects of Weber's

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[7] Thomas W. Segady, *Values, Neo-Kantianism and the Development of Weberian Methodology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 1.

[8] Wolfgang Schluchter, *The rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*, trans. Guenther Roth (Berkeley: California University Press, 1981), 14-15.

[9] *Ibid.*, 13.

methodological work."[10] Freund defines the ideal type as "the sum total of concepts which the specialist in the human species constructs purely for the purposes of research."[11] Gerth and Mills summarize the tool given to us as a method of research by Weber:

> The much-discussed 'ideal-type,' a key term in Weber's methodological discussion, refers to the construction of certain elements of reality into a logically precise conception. The term 'ideal' has nothing to do with evaluations of any sort. For analytical purposes, one may construct ideal types of prostitution as well as of religious leaders. The term does not mean that either prophets or harlots are exemplary or should be imitated as representatives of an ideal way of life.
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> By using this term, Weber did not mean to introduce a new conceptual tool. He merely intended to bring full awareness what social scientists and historians had been doing when they used words like 'the economic man,' 'feudalism,' 'Gothic versus Romanesque architecture,' or 'kingship.' He felt that social scientists had the choice of using logically controlled and unambiguous conceptions, which are thus more removed from historical reality, or of using less precise concepts, which are more closely geared to the empirical world. Weber's interest in world-wide comparisons led him to consider extreme and 'pure cases.'. . . The quantitative approach to unique cultural constellations and the conception of ideal types are intimately linked with the comparative method. This method implies that two constellations are comparable in terms of some feature common to both. A statement of such common features implies the use of general concepts. . . . As general concepts, ideal types are tools with which Weber prepares the descriptive materials of world history for comparative analysis. These types vary in scope and in level of their abstraction.[12]

Since the main function of the ideal type is to provide the means to the researcher to assess objective characteristics of the subject of study, it is an excellent tool for use in

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[10] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930), translator's note, 200 *n.* 28.

[11] Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 48.

[12] H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 59-60.

studying the broad concept of prophecy, even if the scope is narrowed to a biblical or modern prophetic "ideal type."

I. Ideal Type of Prophet

Weber himself did a lot of research and writing on prophets and prophecy in *Ancient Judaism.* Weber never systematized or developed an ideal type of an Israelite prophet in *Ancient Judaism.* Using his writings, and his ideal type methodology, this study attempts to develop and systematize Weber's observations into an ideal type of prophet which can then be used as a tool for studying the lives of contemporary Christian personalities. The summary of the ideal type of biblical prophet developed in this study contains the following criteria:

1. A prophet experiences an ecstatic sense of "calling" from God.

   "In the accounts of their ecstasy of calling, this first ecstasy, giving the prophet his 'call,' is never presented as the fruit of asceticism or contemplation of moral attainments, penances, or other merits. On the contrary, it was always in agreement with the endogenous nature of the psychic state, a sudden unmotivated occurrence."[13]

2. A prophet attempts to convert people to an adherence to sacred writings and codes.

   "Every prophet is bound by the law and its commandments and whoever seeks to estrange men from them is a false prophet. Hence only one who converts men from their sins can be truly god-sent."[14]

[13] Weber, 294.
[14] *Ibid.*, 395.

3. A prophet is recognized by others as possessing a quality known as "charisma."

   The prophet must possess "prophetic charisma." "By virtue of their calling the prophets laid claim to special qualities; . . . the expression 'spiritual man' (ish haruach) is employed by a scriptural prophet."[15] "Such prophecy was authoritarian in character and averse to all orderly procedure."[16]

4. A prophet speaks words which are later perceived to be credible and true.

   Additionally, the prophet is "self evidently false if he teaches false gods or whose prophecy remains unfulfilled."[17]

5. A prophet delivers his message primarily by speaking in public.

   "The pre-exilic prophets from Amos to Jeremiah and Ezekiel, viewed through the eyes of the contemporary outsider, appeared to be, above all, political demagogues and, on occasion, pamphleteers. . . .This characterization of the prophets (as demagogues and pamphleteers) can indeed be misleading, but properly understood it permits indispensable insight. It means that the prophets were primarily *speakers*. Prophets as writers appear only after the Babylonian Exile. The early prophets addressed their audiences in public. . . .to the public in the market place or to the elders at the city gate."[18]

6. A prophet's message was primarily in tension with the predominate culture, especially the religious culture.

"The total attitude of the prophets has often been described as 'culture hostility."[19] Weber did not mean that the prophets had a personal lack of culture, as a matter of fact it was

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[15] *Ibid.*, 297.
[16] *Ibid.*, 271.
[17] *Ibid.*, 395.
[18] *Ibid.*, 267,268, 269.
[19] *Ibid.*, 285.

...ually quite the opposite in that most prophets were litera... well informed about their own culture and the cultures of neighboring societies. Were ... [illegible] by "culture hostility."

Not only all aesthetic and all values of genteel living in ge... but also ... world wisdom was viewed by them with quite alien eyes. These at... were ...rmed by the anti-chrematistic tradition of the puritanically pious in their ... ...ments and were suspicious of the court, the officials, the *gibborim* and the ...[21]

7. A prophet had an ecstatic psychological profile.

> "Psychologically viewed most pre-Exile prophets were ecst...men. At least, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel professed to be and undoubtedly were. Without gross carelessness, one may safely assume that all were ecstatics though of various kinds and in different degree. . . . The prophets ecstasy was accompanied or preceded by a variety of pathological states and acts. There can be no doubt that these very states, originally, were considered important legitimations of prophetic charisma and, hence, were to be expected in milder forms even when not reported."[22]

8. A prophet claims and is perceived to have genuine piety in relationship to God.

> "The decisive characteristic is that one must have personal intercourse with Yahwe. One must have stood 'in the counsel' of God and have personally heard the voice of the Lord if the oracle is to be valid."[23]

This ideal type gives us a tool to study not only ancient personalities, but these same criteria can be applied to modern personalities to determine if the pre-exilic biblical prophetic tradition still exists.

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[21] *Ibid.*, 285-286.
[22] *Ibid.*, 287.
[23] *Ibid.*, 6.

[illegible] which Weber made and which were summarized above, were also observed by other scholars who have studied ancient Israelite prophets. Their observations support and strengthen the ideal type developed in this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, Weber's observations are affirmed and elaborated upon in other scholars who have studied prophets such as, among others, Abraham Joshua Heschel in his work *The Prophets* and Gerhard von Rad in his work *The Message of the Prophets*. It isn't the observations of Weber are in question, it is the grouping of these characteristics [illegible] an ideal type to be used for comparative study which is distinctive.

IV. Western Prophetic Tradition Modeled in the Person and Work of Three Contemporary Christian Leaders, Niebuhr, King, and Jordan

An interesting part of researching the lives of these three contemporary Christian leaders, is that not only were they contemporaries, but their lives overlapped and in some cases influenced each other. Martin Luther King Jr. was heavily influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr. While a student at Crozer Seminary, King first studied Rauschenbusch, then Gandhi, and then Niebuhr.

> Although the Niebuhr influence went to the heart of the public and private King and affected him more deeply than did any modern figure including Gandhi, the connection between King and Niebuhr would be obscured by complicated twists of time, race, and popular imagery.[25]

[25] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 81.

All three of these men would have been known to the serious student or theologian of Christianity in America in their era and in many cases all three were household names. Certainly almost everyone in America knew who King was, many knew Niebuhr, and some were familiar with Jordan.

In doing this research, it became obvious that there were some similarities between King and Jordan. It is clear that there are obvious differences between Martin Luther King and Clarence Jordan. King was African American; Jordan was Caucasian. King's ministry was in the limelight of the media and in the public's eye. Even though they were contemporaries and died within a year of each other, Jordan's ministry was basically lived out in the obscurity of a remote farm in south Georgia, far from the eye of most Americans.

However, King and Jordan have much in common. They both were reared in a Baptist church background and professed Protestant Christianity as their faith. They both were reared in the south and had firsthand experience of the racial prejudice which was a large part of their prophetic message. They believed that racial prejudice went against the teachings of Christ. They both preached and practiced non-violence. Both were charismatic leaders who were opposed by the Ku Klux Klan. Both were well educated and had visions and dreams of a better tomorrow. Both were men of creativity and action. Both have reputations which are growing in respect as their ministries are studied and reflected upon. Barnette recognized that they fit into a similar category:

> A prophet is one who speaks God's message with courage and without compromise. Our nation has produced a paucity of such prophets. But among the few authentic prophets are Abraham Lincoln, Walter Rauschenbush, Georgia Harkness, **Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clarence Leonard Jordan.** [emphasis mine] Why do I classify these persons as prophets and God's speakers to their generations? Because they measure up to the characteristics of the biblical prophet.[24]

In discussing these characteristics of the biblical prophet, in an earlier attempt perhaps to identify criteria from comparing for the sake of objective study, Barnette says,

> An authentic prophet is often lonely, 'a voice crying in the wilderness.'[25] They do not cry, 'Peace, Peace,' where there is no peace or purvey pious palaver to please and 'tickle the ears' of their hearers. They have a passion for justice and righteousness. Yet their stern demand for justice is tempered with mercy and love. Their ultimate goal or ideal is that of a redeemed people in a righteous community under the sovereignty of God.
>
> After examining the lives and messages of Lincoln, Rauschenbusch, Harkness, **King, and Jordan** [emphasis mine], I have come to the conclusion that they meet to a significant degree the above criteria of a genuine prophet of the God of revelation. For example, . . . King's *Strength to Love* and *Trumpet of Conscience* contain prophetic elements. Jordan's *The Substance of Faith* is a collection of his earthy utterances in relation to social issues in the Deep South.[26]

King, Jordan, and Niebuhr are models of the western prophetic tradition that is developed in this research. The ideal type of prophet that has been developed using Weber's methodology and his observations have been an excellent tool for relatively objective comparisons and each have measured favorably as a modern prophet, to various degrees.

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[24] Henlee H. Barnette, *Clarence Jordan: Turning Dreams Into Deeds* (Macon, Georgia: Smythe and Helwys, 1992), 1.

[25] This is a reference to the New Testament prophet, John the Baptist, and similar language is used to describe him in Matthew 3:3 and John 1:23.

[26] Barnette, 1-2.

By the criteria outlined above, Clarence Jordan most closely resembles the ideal type of biblical prophet among those in this study of religious leaders in the modern period. Jordan "was a farmer, preacher, author, Bible translator, lecturer, and theologian."[27] "Jordan's theology grew out of his struggle with social injustice. From his encounter with injustice in society, he fashioned his theological stance. The major ethical issues of Clarence's concern were war and peace, poverty, and racism."[28] Jordan's theological and prophetic messages combined scripture and experience and included the concepts of radical discipleship, koinonia, incarnational evangelism, and the God movement.

Jordan embodied a contemporary Christian marketing slogan "What would Jesus do?" before it was ever popular.

> Clarence was a prophet who had one foot in the Holy Scriptures and the other in unholy society. He held that biblical teachings related to the conduct of life. He took Jesus seriously and, in addition, he read the Bible and attempted to practice what it says. This contributed to his alienation from politicians, some educational institutions, denominational bureaucrats, and church leaders.[29]

Barnette recognized Jordan as a prophet without the help of the ideal type. Barnette said,

> Clarence Jordan has been called 'a saint in overalls.' He was that indeed and much more. He was a *prophet* in blue jeans - that is what he wore most of the time at Koinonia Farm, the interracial community he founded in 1942 near Americus, Georgia. Clarence always - like a true prophet - presented a powerful challenge to his hearers for action to meet human need.[30]

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[27] *Ibid.*, 13.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*, 9.
[30] *Ibid.*, 2.

Jordan meets every criteria in the ideal type. While he isn't the epitome of each criterion, he tips the scale easily in the direction of fulfilling each.

King also fulfills the criteria of ideal type of the biblical type prophet in the modern period. Calloway recognized the prophetic nature of King's message and ministry. In his chapter entitled "King: A Model For Contemporary Prophetic Ministry," Calloway says,

> It [the implication for the church] is to see King aright by asserting the biblical prophetic tradition as his model for ministry. This is the universal quality that is often missing in King scholarship. King understood himself as a prophet, as evident his preaching and sought to live out this understanding of his role and message within his socio-religious context. It is the biblical prophetic tradition that defines the minister's role and message.[31]

King's prophetic role and message, quite understated, were extremely influential in not only the religious landscape but also the culture of modern America. His messages of non-violence, civil rights, and Christian equality have had profound impact on what not only the United States looks like, but also King influenced the global thinking on these issues. King meets seven of the criterion of the ideal type (only evidence of an ecstatic psychological profile are missing) and using that tool of comparison, King is, by that standard and almost any standard, a modern manifestation of the ancient prophetic tradition. King is a modern prophet.

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[31] Calloway, 109.

The last subject of this study was the life and ministry of Reinhold Niebuhr. While Niebuhr doesn't compare quite as favorably to the ideal type as the other subjects of this study, in general, Niebuhr matches the ideal type closely enough in some of the areas of is life and ministry to say that he manifest some prophetic qualities. Out of the eight criteria identified in this ideal type, Niebuhr compares favorably in at least six but not more than seven of the criteria, depending on how one would objectively evaluate partial credit of a characteristic. Niebuhr's life and ministry do not show evidence of an ecstatic psychological profile. Consequently, evidence of an ecstatic sudden call experience which is observed as part of the ideal type is absent from his biographical data. Nevertheless, Niebuhr has been called prophetic by others and justifiably so, and his life and ministry are further evidence that the ancient canonical prophetic traditions are alive and functioning in the modern period.

Remembering that from the beginning, this study has defined prophecy as "forth-telling" the truth rather than exclusively understood as "foretelling" the future, the ideal type developed in this study from Weberian methodology has affirmed the existence of a modern tradition of prophecy which meets that definition. The lives and ministries of Jordan, King, and Niebuhr are evidence which affirms the argument that prophecy is not only a tradition from ancient canonical history and before, but is still a tradition which is functional in the religious landscape of the modern period in the United States. The criteria in the ideal type spotlight the words of Heschel, "The prophet's word is a scream in the night. While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from

seven."[3] The comparative value of the ideal type of pr[illegible] study affirms the argument that prophecy is a tradition that is a[illegible] American religion.

[3] Hes[illegible]

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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Personal Life

Born — September 6, 1963, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Married — June 28, 1986, to Kathy Karr of Kansas

Children — Joshua David Karr, born October 19, 1988
Alyssa Nicole Karr, born October 3, 1990
Hannah Elizabeth Karr, born August [illegible]
Micah Allan-Caleb Karr, born December [illegible]

Career

Licensed to the Ministry: March 14, 1981 by Quail Springs Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (Formerly Nichols Hills Baptist Church).

Ordained to the Ministry: February 12, 1984 by First Baptist Church, Stratford, Oklahoma

October, 1995 to Present
Church Planter, Senior Pastor: Castle Valley Community Church (SBC), Castle Rock, CO

August, 1993 to September, 1995
Senior Pastor: Azalea City Baptist Church, Valdosta, GA

May, 1990 to August, 1993
Pastor: Gordon Heights Baptist Church, Cairo, GA

Other Church Employment
January, 1989 to May, 1990: Pastor: Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, FL
August, 1985 to December, 1988: Pastor: Flag Springs Baptist Church, Bon Secour, AL
November, 1982 to May, 1985: Minister of Students: First Baptist Church, Stratford, OK

Education

Ph.D. [illegible] with an emphasis in Religion at Florida State University, Tallahassee

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