

UTOPIA AND REALITY IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT

by BINYAMIN UFFENHEIMER*

The wide semantic field of Utopia requires a preliminary clarification of the special meaning of the term to be used in this paper. Likewise, let us briefly sketch our general approach pertaining to the mutual relationship between Utopia and reality – a problem which has been dealt with in recent philosophical and sociological literature. As outstanding examples in this field we would like to mention the writings of Ernst Bloch, Karl Mannheim, and last but not least, Martin Buber's elucidating remarks on this subject.¹ The common denominator of the above thinkers is the seriousness with which they treat this subject as against the demonstrated contempt by Marx and Engels who took pains to emphasize the abyss between their social philosophy and any kind of Utopia whatsoever; it should however, be emphasized that their philosophy belongs to the outstanding Utopian schemes in human thought. Today it is commonplace that Utopia is not the creation of wild imagination or of futile images from the sub-conscious which overtake an unprotected soul. Moreover, Utopia is no mere idea belonging to the pure spiritual spheres, but one to be expressed in terms of reality, an idea containing concrete demands towards life. It is the yearning of man for what should be, an image and a sketch of the proper and just which has never existed before; it follows that the

* Professor Binyamin Uffenheimer is Professor of Bible at Tel-Aviv University. The above paper is based on a lecture given at the Israel Academy of Sciences in Jerusalem on the 25th of June 1978 at a symposium on "Utopia and Reality" in honour of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Martin Buber. It was originally entitled in Hebrew: "סימפוזיון על 'אוטופיה ומצי' – ארת" לכבוד יום הולדתו המאה של מרטין בובר ז"ל, באקדמיה הלאומית הישראלית למדעים, ביום 25.6.78.

1. K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, n.d.); E. Bloch, *Das Princip Hoffnung*, Vols. I–V, (Frankfurt, 1959); M. Buber, *Der utopische Sozialismus*, Köln, 1967, p. 16ff.

area of its realization is not the individual but society. This yearning transcends every empirical social framework, although its outer appearance and its mode of realization are widely conditioned by the concrete fact. Moreover, the authenticity of any Utopia is the result of its organic connection with reality, its molders' striving to overcome the internal contradictions of the existing social reality.

However, any social limitation of Utopia will fail to meet the requirements of the biblical term. There, this concept often transcends the social sphere and takes on cosmic dimensions, aiming to bring about the integration of man and society with the natural environment. The ideal society and Israel's eschatological status are to be brought about by revolutionary changes in the structure of the whole cosmos, which are conceived by Deutero-Isaiah as final consummation of the creation.

We argue that there are two main variations of biblical Utopia: the ancient one, the social Utopia, which is weaved into the existing social fabric; the second type is very common in prophetic literature. It is of a visionary nature, essentially presenting those expectations which have failed in history. It is the ancient social legislation which expresses the earliest utopian expectations in Israel; relying on human initiative alone, it is limited to the social and ecological framework dominated by man. The prophetic utopia, on the other hand, which heavily drawing on Divine intervention in history encompasses all spheres of the Cosmos. The very nature of prophetic Utopia is the appeal to free human decision and action; from its very beginning it had, however, to confront deterministic trends, which finally came to the surface and controlled the apocalyptic Utopia of the Second Commonwealth. This determinism which also entails a passive attitude to history may under certain historical circumstances convert to fiery historical activism, as may be gained by the close connection between the events described in the Book of Daniel and those in the Book of Maccabees I.² The common feature of prophetic Utopia is the trend to disconnect the ideal rhythm of history from the eternal death bringing return to which nature and man are subjected. History is concerned with the final fulfillment of the transcendent word of God rather than an eternal return – a meaningless cycling of nature as in Canaanite religion. The principle of hope inherent in ancient social utopia is brought about by reshaping and integrating natural truth into a meaningful rhythm of life which harbours renewal and regeneration.

Let us exemplify our theses about the two variations of Utopia by a close analysis of the pertinent sources. As may be gained by my book *Ancient Prophecy in Israel*, monotheism is far from being the outcome of a slow evolution as the Protestant school of Wellhausen would have it. Neither was it born by a sudden spark which was kindled in the heart of the nation at its very beginning, as Yehezkel Kaufmann contends.³ Moreover, it was the result of an historic event, the covenant between

2. On this question see my book, *The Visions of Zechariah* (Hebrew). (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 153-160.

3. See my article, "Yehezkel Kaufmann – The Militant Bible Scholar," (in Hebrew), *Molad*, Vol. 35 (1976), pp. 415-438.

Israel and God. Indeed, the sources regarding this event are dressed in legendary attire. Nevertheless it should be emphasized that this is not a literary fiction but rather an historical event which took place in ancient times. This essence of this act was the proclamation, by the scribes, of God as the Lord King of Israel and the solemn commitment of Israel to be His people.⁴

Pharaonic slavery was conceived by Israel as the symbol of human bondage. As against it, the Kingdom of God was meant to be free from any kind of human domination. They accepted the Divine commandments and obligations by an act of free commitment thus creating the utopian counterpart to any kind of rule based on human force. The antiquity and basic historicity of the sources pertaining to the Sinai covenant and the establishment of the Kingdom of God may be corroborated by their literary affinity to the ancient Hittite state treaties as well as by the fact that the biblical testimonies relating to the Kingdom of God are those poetic passages like the Balaam pericope (Num. 23-25), the Song of the Ark (Num. 10, 35-36), the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), and the historical introduction of the Blessings of Moses (Deut. 33: 1-5), which belong according to general consensus to the most ancient parts of biblical literature. It was Martin Buber⁵ who persuasively demonstrated the authenticity of the anti-monarchic nature of the Sinai covenant, the Yotam fable and Gideon's answer to the elders of Israel (Judges 8:22-23; 9:9-16), emphasizing that these sources unanimously reject any kind of human royal domination as a sin or against the real King of men.

The cultic symbol of the Kingdom of God was the Ark of Covenant whereas the charismatic Judges who made their appearance in times of national emergency and war were its political representatives. In peacetime, the Kingdom of God may be characterized by the lack of any central political rule in Israel. However, daily life was directed by the old tribal regime, and by the old agricultural legislation.

A short analysis of the main stipulations pertaining to the sabbatical and jubilee years⁶ will demonstrate the decisive influence of Utopia in shaping the social reality: we contend that the legal amendments (Lev. 25:14-54), which were added to the body of the law relating to the sabbatical and jubilee years (Ibid vs. 1-13), bear testimony that these laws were activated during the period of the First Commonwealth. It may be assumed that the amendments were meant to meet the new conditions created by the process of urbanization which reached its pinnacle during the reign of King Solomon and later on during the reign of the Omri dynasty in northern Israel. Then the lawmaker exempted the inhabited areas of the walled cities as well as the immovable property, which had been sold by the Temple ad-

4. See my book, *Ancient Prophecy in Israel* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1973, p. 70 ff.

5. See, Buber, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II, pp. 548-74. See Kaufmann's critique in *Kirjath Sepher*, Vol. X, pp. 62-66 and *Ibid*, *History of the Faith of Israel* (Hebrew), vol. I; pp. 704-705, footnote 25. For a discussion about the above conceptions compare *Ancient Prophecy in Israel* (Hebrew), p. 121 ff.

6. B. Uffenheimer, "Die biblische Vorstellung vom Königstum Gottes und deren Dynamik," in: *Zukunft in Gegenwart*, ed. C. Thoma, Bern-Frankfurt a/M, 1976, pp. 18-39.

ministration, from the jubilee year provisions that required the return of all to their original owners.⁷ This central provision aimed at restoring the original parcelling of the country between the tribes according to their size at the time of the Israelite conquest. The same may be said of the ancient laws of inheritance (Num. 27:9-11; 36:1-9) which expressly mention the preservation of "the ancestral plot" as its aim. The uniqueness of the sabbatical and jubilee provisions becomes evident in comparison to old Mesopotamian "mīsharum" provisions,⁸ which contain stipulations relating to the cancellation of debts and the release of slaves. Nevertheless, there exist two outstanding differences between biblical land provisions and these royal decrees from the ancient Near East:

1. These regulations were decreed by some Mesopotamian kings haphazardly according to their political considerations and interests. On the other hand, the sabbatical and jubilee years which were conceived as a divine commandment, returned in a fixed cyclical order.
2. The "mīsharum" provisions were, intended to improve the social and economic conditions as may be gained from the preamble stating: "Because the king establishes justice in the country . . ."; but as a matter of fact only a small social layer in whose welfare the king was interested took advantage of these provisions. On the other hand the provisions of the sabbatical and jubilee years were relevant to the society as a whole thus creating a life rhythm which shaped the character of the whole nation.

The special nature of this rhythm may be gained by the literary affinity of these provisions (Lev. 25) to the clause relating to the Sabbath. It should be emphasized that the stylistic formulation of the ancient Sabbath laws was directed against the Mesopotamian concept of the *shapattu*. Modern Near Eastern research⁹ has taught us that *shapattu* was in Babylonia, the fifteenth day of the month; another institution which also seems to be related to the Hebrew Sabbath were the ill-fated "days of the Assyrians" which followed one another after intervals of seven days. The *shapattu* seems to have been a day of prayer and sacrifices, called "the day of the rest of the heart" (ūm nuḥ libbi), when men calmed their gods by cultic performances. As to the ill-fated days, these were, according to Assyrian sources, days of bad luck when people were advised to refrain from performing their regular daily business. The date of these days as well as that of *shapattu* fixed according to astronomical calculations starting with the new moon, thus symbolizing the dependency on the rotations of the celestial bodies which were revered as divine beings. As against this, the Sabbath passage which is the conclusion of the story of Creation emphasizes three times that it was on "the seventh day" that God finished His

7. S.E. Loewenstamm, "Yovel" (Hebrew), *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, Vol. III, cols. 578-81.

8. J.J. Finkelstein, "Some New Mīsharum Material and its implications," in *B. Landsberger Festschrift*, ed. Güterbock, Jacobson, The Oriental Institute of Chicago, 1965, pp. 233-46; F.R. Krauss, *Ein Edikt der Königes Ammi-Šaduqu von Babylon* (Studia e documenta ad iura Orientis, antiqui pertinentia, V), 1958.

9. See M.D. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1953, pp. 33-44; Y.H. Tigay, "Sabbath," *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, Vol. VII, cols. 504-17.

work, rested, and blessed the seventh day. The Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:11) likewise is based on the argument that He “rested on the seventh day,” thus severing the Sabbath from any affinity with the heavenly bodies. The process of regeneration inherent in the Sabbath rest embraces slaves and sojourners, and even domesticated animals as written: “You and your son, and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, and your cattle, and your sojourner who is within your gates” (Ex. 20:10). According to Lev. 25:1-13, the jubilee is called the sabbatical year of the country.

The rhythm of the sabbatical and jubilee years is based on the number seven like the Sabbath, as may be demonstrated by the following comparison: “Six years you shall sow your field and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord” (Lev. 25:3-4). Like the Sabbath, the jubilee year is hallowed to God and it aims to demonstrate His exclusive ownership of the country: “. . . for the land is mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23). The stipulations regarding the sabbatical year require that the land be left fallow, thus encompassing the natural environment in the process of regeneration, which is essential to the ecological stability of human society. This is the first human legislation to take care not only of the inner social structure but also of the environmental conditions — a fact which has been neglected by most of modern social schemes. Additionally it should be emphasized, that by leaving the produce of the fields during that year to the use of everyone, conditions of economic equality are created which embrace the whole social structure.

The jubilee rhythm which is seven times seven plus one completes the egalitarian tendency by annulling all property transactions which have been executed during the last fifty years and restoring the land to those families to whom it was allotted after the conquest from the Canaanites. This is intimately intertwined with the release of all slaves and their return to their families and their property. The major tendency inherent in this legislation is the guarantee of human freedom in the Kingdom of God where God is conceived as the single ruler: “For to me the sons of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 25:55).

The legislation of the sabbatical and jubilee years allude to the land in anthropomorphic language demanding that the land be allowed to rest. On parallel lines, the prohibitions regarding sexual relationships have been formulated. Israel is warned to guard these prohibitions, saying: “That the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out,” (Lev. 20:22). Again in the following admonition to the people against forsaking the jubilee regulation Israel is threatened with destruction and exile: “Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath as long as it lies desolate.” (Lev. 26:34); “As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest . . . and enjoy its Sabbaths.” (Ibid vs. 35, 43). Thus the land is conceived as the full partner of man in the process of regeneration. These three concentric life cycles aim at severing the life of Israel from the natural life cycle with its inherent death and destruc-

tion. The inner cycle, the seven-day week including the Sabbath, is conceived of as the imitation of the Creator's rest; it bestows on the whole society the principle of rest. The cycle of sabbatical year widens its orbit by including the land, thus creating the ecological equilibrium which is vital for the stability of every society. The jubilee cycle completes the egalitarian tendencies by restoring all immovable property to its original owners and by commanding the release of all slaves thus establishing the principle of freedom based on the utopian social concept of divine kingship.

But the Hebrew lawmaker is aware that equality and freedom can never be obtained completely in this world: "For the poor will never cease from the midst of the land." (Deut. 15:11). The life rhythm to be created by the legislation will however draw Israel towards the ideal goal, but the goal as such is out of human reach. In other words, the transcendent character of Utopia will be an eternal challenge to Israel.

Summing up our previous observations, we contend that two major tendencies characterize the utopian rhythm of constant regeneration:

1. To overcome the danger of death and destruction inherent in the natural rhythm is common to all ancient Near Eastern religions.
2. To integrate man and society into their natural environment by a voluntary principle based on *imitatio Dei*, egalitarian tendency, and the principle of voluntary freedom instead of the state of cosmic continuity in Near Eastern paganism which was founded upon the principle of eternal return.

The dominating tenor of the ancient land legislation is that of optimism and confidence, that Israel will be able to respond to the religious and social challenge inherent in it. The prophet Hosea, who lived in the period of the kingdom of Northern Israel's decline is haunted by the feeling that Israel has failed by giving way to the impact of Canaanite paganism. This failure is expounded as Israel's betrayal of God's love for her, a situation which is described by Hosea in terms of matrimonial relations between Israel and her God. In the second chapter of his book, Hosea speaks about Israel being sent out again into the wilderness in order to be cleansed from sin. In the end God will receive His people again in love, and even conclude a new covenant for them "with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land" (Hosea 2:18). The new matrimonial covenant with Israel will be founded on the divine qualities which are justice and righteousness, charity and mercy, faithfulness and knowledge of God. The new cosmic harmony thus to be created is described as a chain of responses: "God will respond to the heavens, the heavens will respond to the earth, the earth will respond to the grain, the wine and the oil; and they shall respond to Jezreel. And I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not Pitied and I will say Not my people, 'You are my people; and he shall say Thou art my God,' " (Hosea 2:21-23).

The new dialogistic relation to be created between God and Israel is perceived in

terms of a new harmony to embrace the whole cosmos. The anthropomorphic expressions of the ancient legislation alluding to the land, e.g. "the land shall rest, the land shall vomit, the land shall enjoy her Sabbath," etc., etc., are now expanded to describe the new, ideal cosmos and integration of Israel; history and cosmos will be integrated in one continuous process to be established on the divine qualities. This new integration was meant to be the counterpart of vitality which was the underlying principle of Canaanite paganism. The pinnacle of this integration will be the renewal of the dialogue between Israel and her God, which will reshape the whole universe. This is an unprecedented utopian perfection to be brought about by divine initiative, which will redress Israel's failure in the past.¹⁰

There is also a political aspect to Hosea's eschatology: "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to His goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3:5). It should however be emphasized that according to most scholars this verse is a later addition. True, this is the only allusion to King David by Hosea, but nevertheless this is not sufficient to deny Hosea's authorship. On the contrary, here he integrates the political motive pertaining to the rebirth of David's kingdom over all Israel into the cosmic harmony, which is the general setting of his vision of the future.

Isaiah's utopian conception is fundamentally different from Hosea's. Its two main sources are the vision of "the End of Days" (Is. 2:1-4)¹¹ and the prophecy relating to the shoot from the stump of Jesse (Is. 11). We have no data as to the historical setting of the first vision mentioned heretofore; it is even difficult to take a stand in the scholarly debate whether it is a youthful creation of Isaiah's (Kaufmann) or the vision of his old age (Buber, Procksch). In any case, it is the counterpart to Isaiah's historical theory, saying that Assyria be the staff of God's fury against Israel (Is. 10:5ff.). The inherent assumption of this theory revolves on the central meaning of Israel in world history, i.e. the only cause of the sudden rise of the Assyrian empire is the divine decision to punish Israel for its sins.¹² It seems, that according to Isaiah there is no imminent meaning to the events of world history, as they are conceived by him as a sheer function of Israel's relationship to its God. In other words, the disastrous events of his times give, in his view, negative testimony to Israel's central meaning in world history, whereas the vision of "the End of Days" contains its positive expression. In the End of Days this recognition will be commonplace to all nations, who will ascend to Zion in order to ask for the word of God as the supreme authority in questions concerning justice and truth amongst themselves. Peace and the abolition of the tools of war will be the result of this

10. See my article "Amos and Hosea – Two Ways in Hebrew Prophecy," (Hebrew), *Shazar Festschrift*, ed. Ben-Zion Luria, Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 284-319.

11. On the authenticity of this vision compare my article "History and Eschatology in the Book of Micah," (Hebrew), *Beit Mikra* (1962), pp. 48-65. Recently, compare H. Wildberger, "Jesaja," Kap. 1-12, *BKAT*, (1972), p. 75ff.

12. For Isaiah's political conception compare my article "Political action and political thought among the prophets," (Hebrew), *Ben Gurion Festschrift*, (The Israel Academy of Sciences), 1973, pp. 37-54.

change in the human mind: “. . . And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Is. 2:4).

The uniqueness of this vision is the universal reinterpretation of ancient traditional elements known to Isaiah: the nations are depicted as pilgrims and Jerusalem as the center of world justice, following Deut. 17:8-12, where the “chosen place” is the seat of justice in Israel, and in line with Ps. 122:5 according to which Jerusalem is the royal center of justice for the tribes of Israel: “There, thrones for judgement were set, the thrones of the House of David.” Lastly, it gives concrete universal meaning to the ancient belief saying that the Temple is the earthly abode of God. Shortly, the future relations between the nations are conceived by this vision as a universal extension of the ideal intertribal relationships in ancient Israel.

As to the future king depicted in Is. 11, he is the spiritual transformation of the traditional ideal image of the king of Israel as depicted in Ps. Chaps. 2, 45, 72. There he is conceived as a righteous judge who gives deliverance to the needy and crushes the oppressors, like in the relevant texts of the ancient Near East. His second feature, is that of a warrior who saves his people from enemies and expands his “dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:8). So an ancient court poet exclaims enthusiastically calling to the young king: “gird your sword upon your thigh O mighty one . . . In your majesty ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right” (Ps. 45:3-4). According to these lines, the prophet Micah sketches the image of the future Davidic monarch (Mi. 5:1-5). Isaiah, on the other hand spiritualizes the warrior traits, saying: “. . . and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins” (Is. 11:4-5). In contrast to the psalmist, according to whom the king of Israel will smite the nations “with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Ps. 2:9). Isaiah mentions “the rod of his mouth” as his weapon, and righteousness as “the girdle of his loins.”

Shortly the future king will rule by the force of spirit and not by the sword. This view is part and parcel of the prophet’s general philosophy of history saying that Assyria will be smashed by sudden divine interventions before the future king will make his appearance (Is. 10:24-25 and 11:1ff.; 14:24-25).

The second major motive of Is. 11 concerns the future peace in the animal world; this has been expounded by scholars as an allegory pertaining to the relationship between Israel and the nations. But there is no allusion to this in the whole chapter. On the contrary, in an ancient source we already read: “. . . and I will remove evil beasts from the land” (Lev. 26:6). And so says Hosea as well: “And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beast of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety” (Hosea 2:18; cf. Is. 65:25). So we may conclude, that Isaiah indeed speaks about future miraculous changes in

nature, which will culminate in the uprooting of bestiality. This is indeed a utopian extension of the legendary harmony preceding man's expulsion from Eden. It follows that Isaiah's political approach, historical conception and utopian vision are essentially one, involving a new interpretation of the concrete historical situation. This aims at expounding the rise of the Assyrian empire in religious terms, thus answering the problem of theodicy in world history by emphasizing the universal significance of Israel's relation to God. The vision of "the End of Days" is based on the same belief, i.e., the centrality of Israel and Zion in world history. When sketching this vision he drew heavily on traditional material pertaining to the importance of Jerusalem and the Temple in Israel (Deut. 17:8-12; Ps. 46, 48, 50, 132, etc.). Again, the spiritual image of the future king is based on a reinterpretation of the ancient tradition. This affinity of Isaiah's Utopia with tradition is combined with his assessment of Israel as the heart of world history.

At the critical turning point when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.), he expressed his belief in concrete political terms, encouraging king and nation that Jerusalem, the abode of the Divine king, will never be delivered into the hands of the enemy. Indeed already thirty-five years before (735 B.C.E.) when the armies of Ephraim and Aram were besieging Jerusalem he essentially took the same stand. In both instances, Isaiah demanded a determined stand against the enemy. His theo-political slogan in 735 B.C.E. was his demand "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear and do not let your heart be faint . . ." (Is. 7:4) – its concrete meaning being that Judea should refrain from hazardous political steps or alliances with other nations. She should rely only upon the Holy of Israel: "If you will not be confident surely you shall not be established (ibid., v. 9). The confidence in the Holy of Israel is the risk Judea has to take upon herself in the realm of foreign relations; in this spirit, he interpreted the meaning of heroism years later (Is. 30:15). The tacit warning inherent in this declaration was obviously directed against the intention of King Ahaz to request Assyrian intervention. But the frightened king did not heed the prophet's call and made the fatal error of invoking Assyria's assistance (II Kings 16:6-7).

Again, years later, Isaiah voiced his criticism against Hezekiah's overtures to Egypt (Is. 30:1-5, 15-18; 31:1-3), probably after Assarhadon's death (705 B.C.E.). Any alliance with Egypt was in his view a sin against the Holy of Israel; it meant confidence in horses and men. His attitude towards Hezekiah changed only after the traumatic experience of the boastful and arrogant speech of Ravshakeh which was tantamount to a desecration of Israel's God. In his answer, Isaiah stressed again the eternity of Jerusalem, saying: "For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David." (II Kings 19:34). The second prominent motif in this speech is the belief that Assyria's destructive role in world history be the result of an ancient Divine decision: "Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins, while their inhabitants, shorn of strength are dismayed and confounded and have become like plants of the field, and like tender grass . . ." (II Kings 19:25-26). This is to say that Israel's fate is

completely different from that of the nations who shall perish and fade away like the plants of the fields. From this position there is only a short distance to the historical concept of Second Isaiah, who compares all flesh with the plants of the field which wither and fade away. On the other hand, Israel will stand forever, as the pinnacle of its history will be the fulfillment of the word of God (Is. 40:6-8).

This belief is combined in Second Isaiah's vision with the hope for an impending miraculous change in nature in order to smooth the way for those returning to Zion. The utopian element in his historical conception is enhanced whenever he mentions the exodus from Egypt as a very modest example in comparison to the expected miracles to occur (Is. 52:12; LXX 63:9-11). His Utopia is summed up by his declaration saying: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind" (Is. 65:17).

Summing up, let us emphasize the following points: •

1. If the essence of Utopia is the striving for what should be, then this is the intrinsic aim of the ancient Sabbath laws and the laws pertaining to landed property. The ancient Israelite lawgiver aimed at overcoming the shortcomings of the cyclical time, which is governed by the mortal rhythm of nature. The new rhythm he establishes was based on general recreation and regeneration. Insofar as this rhythm related to Sabbath rest it was conceived as a collective social imitation of the Creator's rest. And as to the landed property laws, they were based on the assumption that God was the exclusive owner of land. As the stipulations of these laws were embracing the whole society, they created the pre-conditions for an egalitarian society. Moreover, as land was included in the rhythm of renewal, this law assured also the ecological, environmental balance which is essential for any social planning.

2. The first prophetic historical Utopia is Hosea's. Its essence is the antithesis of the organic conception of Canaanite paganism based on the principle of vitality. As opposed to it, the new covenant between God and His people will create cosmic continuity based on the Lord's righteousness, justice, charity and mercy (Hosea 2:19). This is a monotheistic conception of the universe, coined in terms of anthropomorphic language, which can be properly understood only as a challenge of the naturalistic elements inherent in pagan myth.

Fundamentally different is the Utopia of Isaiah which is the response to the general problem of theodicy inherent in the sudden rise of Assyrian power. Isaiah's answer was based on the assumption that the fate of Israel be the very core of world history. According to it the Lord's decision to use Assyria as the rod of His fury against His sinful people was the only meaning of the rise of Assyria to world power and of the devastation which it brought on the nations. In the prophet's mind, this theory was paradoxically substantiated by Assyria's fall before the gates of Jerusalem, which was conceived by him as the Divine punishment brought on the Assyrian tyrant for his arrogant pretensions to be the sole ruler of this world. This idea is the very essence of Isaiah's historic response to Ravshekeh's call for surrender (Is. 37). The defeat of the Assyrian tyrant will undoubtedly prove that he acted only as a blind tool in the hands of God. (Is. 37:29)

The prophecy of the future king from the seed of Jesse (Is. 11) and his vision of the last days (Is. 2:1-5) demonstrate the positive meaning of Israel's centrality in world history. The nations of the world are depicted as pilgrims who search after the word of the Lord in Zion. As to the future king, his universal rule will be solely based on the force of spirit.

The utopian feature of Isaiah's historical conception is intensified by the unknown prophet from the Babylonian exile called Second Isaiah. In his prophecies the history of Israel is absolutely separated from the mortal bio-historical cycle as it is the miraculous fulfillment of the word of the Lord (Is. 40:1-5). His prophecy constitutes the final breakthrough of the linear conception of time which depicts the "End of Days" as a situation which largely surpasses in its miraculousness all the legendary traits, inherent in the myth of the beginning of days (*Urzeit*). The motifs and coloration taken from the old Hebrew tradition regarding the Garden of Eden have been erroneously expounded by western scholars as if his vision of the "End of Days" was intended to be a return to the beginning of days. On the contrary, he depicts an ideal situation about which event the ancient legend dared not dream.

Similarly, he sketches the impending ingathering of the exiles in terms taken from the Exodus tradition. But again these are only colors and images to adorn the expected miracles which will dwarf and minimize all that has been narrated about God's greatness in Israel's past history. Ultimately, Second Isaiah's vision of the future crystalizes in the hope that a new earth and new heaven will be created (Is. 65:17). The affinity of his images and sketches relating to the impending redemption, and historical and mythical tradition, bridges between him and his prophetic forerunners. His breakthrough to the metahistorical conception of the fate of Israel which is ultimately dominated by the word of God, does away with all variations of the cyclical philosophy of history. Here prophetic utopian thought seems to have overcome the fears and anxieties which confront a nature-bound conception of history. Moreover, his belief that redemption is impending and that the woes and troubles of the traditional day of God belong to the past, disperse even the last doubts and fears which clouded in the visions of his forerunner, the outlook to the future.