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Prophetic Preaching as Social Preaching

Chang-Hoon Kim

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THIS STUDY HAS ITS origin in the recognition of a deep misunderstanding of 'prophetic preaching as social preaching' in the contemporary homiletics.¹ Generally the prophets in the Old Testament have been viewed in a false light as social reformers who merely or mainly proclaimed repentance, judgment and doom in the corrupt world and were directly involved in social action to accomplish social justice.² Those who regard the prophets as social reformers mistakenly see

prophetic preaching to be just sermons which rebuke or judge the congregation or society with regard to social injustices; or they consider prophetic preaching only as a means to participate directly in social or political affairs, or as the homiletical aspect of the so-called liberation movement.

As a result of this misconception, two mistakes have been made in terms of the use of prophetic preaching in the church.³ On the one hand, prophetic preaching is considered undesirable in local churches, because ministers regard sermons that merely challenge and criticize people and situations to be harmful to a successful ministry. On the other hand, prophetic preaching is often used merely as a tool to perform a mission of the church in terms of its involvement in social action. The former mistake is mainly found in conservatively-inclined churches, the latter in liberally-inclined churches.⁴ In this study, first of all I am going to examine the nature of the judgment message

¹ Prophetic preaching can be discussed in diverse directions. But in this paper, I will argue just about its social aspect.

² W Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp. 14-15; S. E. Balentine, 'The Prophetic Message: Its Origin, Setting and Significance', *Faith and Mission* (1989), 16: 3-17, p. 10.; J. K. Wiles, 'The Prophetic Critique of the Social and Economic Order', *Faith and Mission* (1989), 16:18-40, pp. 18-19; M. Siler 'Reflections on Prophetic Preaching', *Faith and Mission* (1989), 16:76-78.

³ See the contributions in E. E. Shelp and R. H. Sunderland (eds.), *The Pastor as Prophet* (New York: Pilgrim, 1985).

⁴ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, pp. 14-15.

concerning social injustice and corruption in Israel, because the misunderstanding of prophetic preaching today, in my judgment, is closely connected to a wrong or faulty evaluation of the role and message of the Old Testament prophets. And then, I will suggest what the designation 'prophetic preaching as social preaching' means, and how prophetic preaching as social preaching can be practically performed.

I The prophets against social injustice

In attempts to explore the nature of the judgment message concerning social injustice and corruption in Israel, in my view, two types of approach are necessary: by examining some passages in prophetic books and by investigating the commandments regarding justice and the protection of the weak in the Law as the source which is later (re)interpreted and applied in the prophetic message.

A. Prophetic books

Isaiah 1:16-17 (1:10-17)

This passage demands just social and moral behaviour in society through a series of nine imperatives. The prescriptions occur in the context of the critique of one-sided cultic practices, which the prophet directed at the leaders and people (v. 10). In other words, the uselessness of their cultic practices is connected with the proclamation that the worshippers' hands were full of blood, a term which is generally understood as involvement in violence and injustice in society. The prophet

declared that their cultic activities were meaningless to God because they were isolated from their daily social lives. God abhors a dichotomy between cultic life and unjust social life.

The situation sketched in vv. 4-9 provides the background for the socio-ethical demands on society.⁵ Their present chaotic predicament is depicted as the result of God's punishment—a punishment of social injustice in spite of a cultic 'boom'.⁶ Israel faultily thought that they could be forgiven and be free from God's punishment by the cultic acts of worship or that they fulfilled their duty in their relationship with God by it.⁷ The prophet, however, emphasized that their ethical behaviour or social practices stood between forgiveness and punishment (vv. 16-20).

However, it should be noted that the prophet did not condemn cultic activities in themselves but proclaimed that worship without a corresponding daily

⁵ There is a general agreement that Is. 1:10-17 is an inseparable literary unit. Also, many suggest that this passage should be read in the light of Is. 1:2-20. This means that Is. 1:16-17 should be understood in the context of both 1:10-17 as the narrower context and of 1:2-20 as the broader one.

⁶ Even though the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC (cf. Isaiah chapters 36, 37) is generally suggested as the historical background to this passage, we cannot confirm this. The context might also be the Syro-Ephraimite war of 734/5 BC (cf. Is. 7:1ff).

⁷ R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 32; Y. Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1991), pp. 14ff.; H. Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of Eighth-Century Prophets*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 255-7.

life and social concern was worthless.⁸ In other words, in this passage the prophet gave the instruction that true worship must be connected to the right way of living.⁹

In summary, in Isaiah 1:10-17 the prophet proclaimed judgment against the people and their rulers with regard to their improper social and moral behaviour. They brought sacrifices and offerings without a corresponding and appropriate life as God's people. It therefore may be said that in vv. 16-17 Israel was challenged to an appropriate social life and responsibility as God's people in the contemporary society.¹⁰

Isaiah 1:23 (1:21-26)

This passage is again a prophetic verdict on the contemporary social corruption.¹¹ The social critique was

directed mainly against the political leaders who were responsible for Zion's wholeness in its relationship with God.¹² The passage is in the middle of descriptions of the past, present and future status of Zion, which symbolically refers to the whole of Israel as God's people. The prophet employed several metaphors such as 'harlot', 'alloy of silver', and 'weakness of wine' to describe the present perversion of Zion (vv. 21-22). This suggests that the main problems of Zion were its unfaithfulness in its relationship to God and its impurity. But this unfaithfulness was expressed in horrible social injustices. These horrible social injustices and corruption, of which the upper class was guilty, were presented as the main content of Zion's sinful situation. The prophet proclaimed that God would punish Zion on account of her sins in order to restore her as she was before. In other words, the passage says that God will purify Zion as God's people so that it may be faithful in its relationship with God by being cleansed of social corruption.¹³ This suggests that the prophetic critique against the social corruption of the

8 Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique*, pp. 265-271.

9 Clements *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 32; J. H. Hays and S. A. Irvine, *Isaiah: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), p. 70; H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 51; M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 78-79.

10 O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (London: SCM, 1972), pp. 13ff; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 33; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 78-79.

11 There has been considerable discussion regarding the immediate and broader context of this passage. Although attempts have been made to include Is. 2:1-5 in the unit which starts at 1:21 (or 1:2), I agree with many interpreters that it is natural to regard the heading at 2:1 as a mark of the beginning of a new unit. Also, even though it is agreed that 1:21-31 should be interpreted as a unit in the same context, there are different options in dividing this unit into subunits. In my view, it seems to

be better to divide 1:21-31 into 1:21-26 and 27-31 mainly because v. 29 begins with the particle 'ki (because)' which indicates a syntactically dependent and subordinate connection with the preceding verse.

12 Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 35; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 65-66. The fact that rulers and people appear in parallel in Is. 1:10 suggests that the two can be understood as synonyms.

13 Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39*, p. 85) observes that 'the basic concern of this passage is not with the city's leaders and their punishment but with the city itself and its restoration'.

rulers of the people in verse 23 must be understood in the context of the prophetic message against Zion (or God's people) for not fulfilling the social duties required by the covenant relationship with God.

That the passage is concerned with the just life of God's people in society as a duty imposed by their relationship to God can be also shown from Isaiah 1:27-31. Verses 27-31, as a conclusion of chapter 1,¹⁴ mention the salvation of Zion (v. 27) together with the warning of the coming judgment (vv. 28-31). Moreover, it can be said that according to this passage those who serve idols were guilty of being the harlot of verse 21, for the idolatry of the people was clearly an indication of a breach of the covenant relationship with God. In other words, 1:21-31 constitutes 'inclusio' formed by the same motif. This implies that 1:21-31 concerns Israel's inappropriate life in its relationship with God—an inappropriate life as expressed in their unjust social lives or their idolatrous practices. Therefore, the social corruption and injustice in Israel (v. 23) and the idolatry of people (vv. 28-30) must be understood in the same way. Both are tied to the judgment of Zion, which aims at her restoration or purification. The only difference between them is that one focuses on social-moral aspects and the other on spiritual aspects.

In conclusion, Isaiah 1:21-26 shows God's special interest in Zion. The prophet criticized Zion's unfaithful-

ness and adulteration. The social corruption of the leading class or the social injustice in Israel was a representative example of Zion's (or Israel's) sinful life. Therefore it is fair to say that Isaiah 1:23 should be regarded as the prophetic judgment against Israel's disobedience to specific social commandments required within the covenant relationship.

Isaiah 5:8-23

This passage contains the prophetic critique of the corrupt society expressed in a series of six woe oracles (i.e. 'Woe to those who...').¹⁵ In this passage, the prophet criticized the unjust acquisition of land, addiction to sensual pleasures, pride, the unreasonableness of the people, and the sin of taking bribes. Therefore the prophet proclaimed the divine punishment of their sins. This passage occurs in the midst of the so-called vineyard song (vv. 1-7) and the judgment of God's people (vv. 25-30).¹⁶ This means that the judgment against social corruption in Israel is best understood in the context of the rest of chapter 5.

Through the parable of the vineyard the prophet criticized Israel for not living up to God's will and expectations, yielding only bad fruit. This implies

¹⁵ It is generally recognized that this passage is composed according to the indictment/punishment or woe/therefore pattern.

¹⁶ Some commentators interpret Is. 5:1-7, 8-24 and 25-30 as separate units because these passages seem to refer to different themes. However, chap 5, as we have it now, should be understood as a unit because the themes of these passages often appear together in the same context in the book of Isaiah.

¹⁴ J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 108-9; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 65ff.

that the sins enumerated in vv. 8-24 were due to Israel's life being contrary to God's expectations. These sins are the bad fruit in terms of the parable. After criticizing the social corruption of Israel, he also proclaimed God's judgment of war against God's people as a whole (vv. 25-30). Israel's corrupt social situation caused God's judgment of her.

From the context, we can say that in Isaiah 5:8-24 the prophet criticized Israel's inappropriate life as God's covenant people as it was demonstrated in allowing social injustice and corruption. The connection between social injustice in Israel and Israel's life as God's people is also confirmed in the passage. Verse 12 says that 'they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands!'. The passage concludes therefore that 'they have rejected the instruction of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel'. In summary, the passage is related to their social life as the responsibility of God's specially chosen people.

In the foregoing discussion of these passages, I have argued that the concern of the prophet with the social injustice and corruption in Israel should be understood in terms of the proper social life of Israel as God's people and her social responsibility. God commanded Israel to live properly in society and to fulfil her social responsibility as God's specially chosen people. In other words, God is concerned not only with an inward obedience to the Law as ritual ceremony, keeping the Sabbath, fasting, etc., but also with the appropriate life of justice relating to neighbours and society as outward obedience. Therefore the social corrup-

tion in Israel can be defined as the violation of the Torah (or the Law) as the way of life given in the covenant relationship between God and Israel (cf. Is. 1:10; 5:24).¹⁷ This conclusion will be confirmed by examination of the references to the weak in the Law.

B. The 'weak' in the Law

The references to the weak—the poor, the widows, fatherless or the alien (the sojourner)—are found in several contexts in the Law. These can be classified as follows:

1. In connection with the judicial process (trial): Ex. 23:6; Dt. 24:17; 27:19 (e.g. Dt. 27:19 says, 'Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.')
2. In connection with their protection
 - a) Regarding pledges: 'Do not take anything as a pledge from the poor and the widow' (Dt. 24:12-13; 24:17)
 - b) Regarding wages: 'Pay the poor and the needy the wages each day before the sunset' (Dt. 24:14-15; cf. Lev. 19:13)
 - c) Regarding charity (kindness): 'At the harvest time, leave what remains such as some fruit and a sheaf for the poor, the widow, the fatherless and the alien' (Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Dt. 24:19-21)
 - d) Regarding their feasts: 'At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes for the weak to come, eat and

¹⁷ Importantly, we have to remember that in the judgment message against the neighboring nations the prophet did not mention the injustice and corruption in their society.

be satisfied' (Dt. 14:28, 29; 26:12, 13). 'At the Feast of Passover or Tabernacles, be joyful with the weak' (Dt. 16:11, 14)

- e) Regarding help: 'Lend freely to the poor whatever he needs' (Dt. 15:7), 'Help the people who become poor' (Lev. 25:35-38)
- f) In general: 'Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him' (Ex. 22:21; 23:9), 'Do not abuse the alien' (Ex. 22:22).

To conclude, the above shows that the corruption of the juridical process or system and the unjust accumulation of the wealth and property by depriving from the weak and the poor mentioned in the prophetic books were already forbidden by the Law. Therefore it can be said that the commandments regarding justice towards and protection of the weak in the Law formed the basis of the prophetic judgment against social corruption and injustices in the prophetic books, even though there was no direct quotation from the Law. In other words, the Law (or the legal tradition) was (re)interpreted and applied in terms of a new historical, religious and social context.

II Practice

As we have argued above, the demonstration of the social concerns of the prophetic message does not mean that the prophet was interested only in society itself or in social justice itself in a general humanistic sense. Rather, in this concern with society and social justice, the prophet commanded Israel to live a social life befitting God's covenant people and to fulfil her social responsibility as God's specially chosen people.

Likewise, prophetic preaching as

social preaching in the contemporary homiletics should be understood in terms of the social life and responsibility of God's people. This suggests that prophetic preaching as social preaching should always recognize that:

- 1) the hearers, as well as the preachers themselves, not only belong to the church, but are also members of society. This means that God's people have a responsibility for the society to which they belong;
- 2) the church is not a closed community; that is, the church can influence and is influenced by the society of which it is part;
- 3) all social and political events that happen on the earth are finally related to God who rules over the world;
- 4) it is not appropriate to draw a sharp line between the sacred and the secular. Prophetic preaching believes that there is no realm over which the kingdom of God does not extend; as the apostle Paul states, 'there is no authority except that which God has established' (Rom. 13:1).¹⁸

Now, it is order to explore how prophetic preaching as social preaching can be practically performed.

A. Involvement in social concerns

The first practical means whereby prophetic preaching as social preaching can perform its task is to be homiletically involved in social con-

¹⁸ Thus, P. S. Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) pp. 160ff states that social analysis is not something we add to the gospel, but a part of the gospel.

cerns. This can be expressed in two ways: the consideration of the social context of the hearers in a sermon and the preaching on current social issues.

On the one hand, the task of prophetic preaching as social preaching can be fulfilled by reflecting on the social context of the hearers in sermon formation and delivery.¹⁹ For example, prophetic preaching should bring social situations such as starvation, wars, civil revolt, social disorder, economic depression, political chaos and the like into the kerygmatic scope of the text.²⁰ These events should be discussed in an appropriate way in a sermon. In addition, preachers should consider both national and international social contexts in their messages. Those that are considered to be national are also international and vice versa because the world is getting smaller on account of the remarkable progress of communication and transportation networks.

On the other hand, prophetic preaching can be done by preaching on current social issues. For instance, C. M. Smith²¹ suggests that preachers should proclaim God's Word in terms of social issues such as handicappism, ageism, sexism, racism, and classism.

J. A. Smith²² gives a longer list of social issues to be addressed in preaching, including the following: AIDS, abortion, human sexuality, euthanasia, bioethics, economics, nuclear waste, ecology, affirmative action, race and racism, science and scientism, third world and minority group concerns, apartheid, divestments of church bodies in financial institutions for religious/social/political reasons, the failure of the criminal justice system, non-violence, war, and the religious baptizing of partisan politics.

Prophetic preaching on social issues should not remain in the realm of the church. Prophetic preaching should often proclaim God's will on current issues in the public marketplace for the purpose of 'awakening the consciousness of the nation'.²³ For this, preachers can visit local or national governments or utilize the mass media.

However, we have to note that it is not easy to preach on social issues. On the one hand, when we preach on topics such as nuclear weapons, AIDS, and abortion it is not as easy to find a biblical text on the topics as it is to select a biblical passage addressing the love of God for the world. Moreover, diverse opinions exist even within Christianity on these issues. On the other hand, we should not handle social issues in a broad and general way, but from a specific and insightful perspective. Therefore, authentic, rele-

19 A. Van Seters (ed.), *Preaching as a Social Act* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), p. 264.

20 K. M. Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 34.

21 C. M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).

22 J. A. Smith, 'Preaching and Social Concerns' in M. Duduit, (ed.), *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) p. 509.

23 Shelp and Sunderland, *The Pastor as Prophet*, p. 13.

vant and authoritative prophetic preaching on social issues requires special preparation. As J. A. Smith²⁴ states, ill-prepared preaching on social issues can be more deadly and destructive than sermons that do not consider the social context and current issues. For preaching on social issues, two things are necessary: a disciplined looking at texts from a social view point (or a clear theological view on current social issues derived from a biblical text) and full awareness of the social issues themselves.²⁵ For the well prepared sermon on social issues, K. M. Smith²⁶ suggests the following: tap available human resources, i.e. specialists; utilize published materials that address current social issues, and become directly involved in the issues, i.e. identification.

To conclude, prophetic preaching as social preaching does more than merely reflect the social context of hearers in its message. It should actually address such concrete social issues as AIDS, abortion and racism.

B. Nurturing the prophetic community

The second, but more important, practical means by which prophetic preaching as social preaching can accomplish its task is to build up a prophetic com-

munity. In other words, prophetic preaching is to nurture the church, either as individuals or as a whole, as a prophetic community in order to carry out its task in relation to society.²⁷ I would suggest two strategies in this connection: reinforcement of the identity of the church, and emphasis on its responsibility to or mission within society.

Reinforcement of church's identity

I have argued that the Old Testament prophets reflected the social, political and economical context and contemporary issues in their message. In these messages, the prophets accentuated the identity of Israel as a community of social concern. First of all, prophets emphasized that God had specially elected and protected Israel, and that God would continually take care of and/or restore her. In other words, they highlighted the idea that Israel was a special community in the world

²⁴ J. A. Smith, 'Preaching and Social Concerns', p. 509.

²⁵ R.J. Sider and M.A. King, *Preaching about Life in a Threatening World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) give examples of preaching on some social issues—abortion, economic justice, human rights, the earth, and war and violence.

²⁶ Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, pp. 37-40.

²⁷ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*; S. M. Hauerwas, 'The Pastor as Prophet' in E. E. Shelp and R. H. Sunderland (eds.), *The Pastor as Prophet* (New York: Pilgrim, 1985); Van Seters, *Preaching as a Social Act*; W. H. Willimon, 'Would that All the Lord's People Were A Prophet', *Journal for Preachers* 16/4 (1993), pp. 16-21; C. L. Campbell, guided by Hans Frei's work, argues that the preacher's task must be seen not as that of creating experiential events for individual hearers, but rather as that of building up the church: that is, the up-building of the church is the central function of preaching (*Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], p. 221ff).

because God had separated Israel from other nations. Secondly, the prophets stressed God's otherness. We often find phrases indicating God's uniqueness such as, 'To whom will you compare God?' 'Who is like YHWH?' or 'There is none like YHWH'. Thirdly, prophets declared that God wanted Israel to be a specific community unlike the neighbouring nations; in other words, that Israel should live in faith and have a life distinct from that of the neighbouring nations. In summary, the prophet asserted that Israel was elected to be a holy and dedicated community in the world, i.e. both separate from the other nations and dedicated to God, and that this separation is grounded in Israel's God as separated.

In a like manner, prophetic preaching as social preaching should reinforce the identity of the church, as individuals and as a whole, for the purpose of nurturing the identity of the prophetic community as a community with a God-given social responsibility. In other words, prophetic preaching should intensify the conviction that the church is a special community, having a distinctive identity, especially in the way it exists in the world.

In this regard, Brueggemann's argument is persuasive. He states that 'the contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism' and that 'the internal cause of such enculturation is our loss of identity through the abandonment of the faith tradition'.²⁸ According to him, the emergence of

Israel through the Exodus was not just in the interest in a new religion or a new religious idea, but marked the appearance of a new social community in history—a community governed by new laws and a new order. The participants in the Exodus had to be involved in the intentional formation of a new social reality to match the vision of God's freedom. Thus, the church should recover its distinctive tradition of faith if it wants to accomplish its prophetic ministry—to dismantle dominant culture and consciousness in society. In conclusion, he claims that the main task of prophetic ministry is to struggle to evoke, form, and reform an *alternative* or *counter-community* with a counter-consciousness.²⁹

Emphasis on church's responsibility or mission

In connection with the identity of Israel as a specially separated people, the prophets also emphasized Israel's

29 W.H. Willimon, 'Would that All the Lord's People Were A Prophet', takes a similar line regarding the task of prophetic ministry. He states that prophetic ministry is to urge the church towards the formation of a counter-community. Interestingly, in *Resident Aliens*, S. Hauerwas and W.H. Willimon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) designate the church as a 'colony' and Christians as 'resident aliens' in order to stress that the church should regain its identity. They state that 'The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves, resident aliens' (p. 12). They argue that the church should be concerned about how it is to be in the world, in what form, for what purpose (p. 43).

28 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 11.

responsibility or mission to society. Israel's responsibility was expressed in terms of her being a 'light for the Gentiles' (Is. 49:6). Furthermore, the prophet proclaimed that when God chose Israel he looked for something from her which may include social responsibility (Is. 5).

Likewise, prophetic preaching as social preaching should urge the church, as individuals or as a whole, to perform its responsibility in society. Prophetic preachers should emphasize that the church does not exist simply for itself.³⁰ As D. J. Bosch argues, the church lives in a double relationship: to God and to the world.³¹ The social responsibility of the church is an essential part of the gospel, not an extra duty. In other words, prophetic preaching should challenge the church as to why God chooses it as separated people and should help it to discover its social responsibility. In a sense, from this perspective, prophetic preaching is 'struggling with' the church not 'over against it' for its social role.³² In this regard, W.H. Willimon states the main task of prophetic preaching well: 'The purpose of prophetic preaching is the production and equipment of a

community of prophets. Therefore, our summertime preaching has as its goal the evocation of prophetic schoolteachers, shopkeepers, nursing home residents and sixteen year olds who can speak the truth to power.'³³

Regarding the social responsibility of church as prophetic community, prophetic preaching should remember that there are social and political needs which can be fulfilled by the church. Social needs means needs that people have economically and physically in terms of their social life. Political needs means needs which the political victims have under unjust political systems or in unjust situations. The church should not overlook these needs. The church is charged with the responsibility of fulfilling the needs practically by taking action. Prophetic preaching should proclaim that the church, as individuals or as a whole, is under the obligation to respond to the social and political needs in proper ways.

In conclusion, in order to nurture a prophetic community (the church's relation to society and its role in it), I would stress that the church should neither be totally isolated from society nor be totally included in it. In this regard, Müller and Smit³⁴ point out that 'the church tells its own story in ways between the extremes of becoming merely a repetition of the public stories already at hand, or of being so radically different from the public stories that no meaningful connection is possible'.

30 B. A. Müller and D. J. Smit, 'Public Worship: A Tale of Two Stories' in J. Mouton and B. C. Lategan (eds.), *The Relevance of Theology for the 1990s* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1994), p. 405.

31 D. J. Bosch, *Witness to the World* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), p. 222. He also states that 'Without a faithful and sustained contact with God the church loses her transcendence. Without a true solidarity with the world she loses her relevance.'

32 Van Seters, *Preaching as a Social Act*, p. 252.

33 Willimon, 'Would that All the Lord's People Were A Prophet', p. 20.

34 Müller and Smit, 'Public Worship', p. 389.

We can also say that the nurturing of the prophetic community, by reinforcing its identity and stressing its responsibility to or mission within society, can be an effective means of prophetic involvement in social affairs and a valid instrument to accomplish the social responsibility of the church. Furthermore, the idea of nurturing the prophetic community provides us with a clear understanding of prophetic preaching as social preaching. First of all, this suggests that prophetic preaching as social preaching is more than a reflection of the social context of the hearers or a discourse on such social issues as AIDS, abortion and racism.³⁵ It requires the church to be involved practically in society to fulfil its responsibility. Secondly, however, prophetic preaching as social preaching does not mean that preachers should 'participate in marches, serve as leaders of movements, address protesters, and serve as negotiators'.³⁶

Conclusion

In this study, we have defined prophetic preaching as social preaching. Through the examination of some

passages in the book of Isaiah and references to the protection of the weak in the Law, I have suggested that:

- 1) The prophetic message against the social injustice and corruption in Israel was proclaimed on the basis of the Law; that is, it was a (re)interpretation and application of the legal tradition.
- 2) It was mainly concerned with Israel's proper social life as God's special people and her social responsibility as God's chosen people.

As the result of the examination of some passages in the book of Isaiah, I have also suggested how prophetic preaching as social preaching in the contemporary homiletics should be understood. I have suggested as follows:

- 1) prophetic preaching should reflect the social context of the hearers in the sermon,
- 2) it should actually preach on current social issues,
- 3) more importantly, it should nurture the church, as individuals or as a whole, as a prophetic community or an alternative community.

Especially, in nurturing the prophetic community, prophetic preachers should emphasize the identity of church as a specially elected people both separated from society and dedicated to God. Moreover, prophetic preaching challenges the church to discover its social responsibility practically and to fulfill its responsibility in society by responding actively to the social and political needs.

35 Siler, 'Reflections on Prophetic Preaching', p. 77; Willimon, 'Would that All the Lord's People Were A Prophet'.

36 Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, p. 11; W. K. McElvancy, *Preaching from Camelot to Covenant. Announcing God's Action in the World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), p. 57.