

## Contents

### Pentecost 11, Proper 14

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	Page
1. Lectionary Selection Isaiah 1:1, 10-20	32
2. Exploring the Pattern	34
3. Reading Between the Lines	39
4. Parallel Readings	41
From: <i>The New Yorker</i> <i>Called to Question</i>	
5. Critical Background Norman K. Gottwald	45

#### • *Lectionary Readings (Year C)*

***Revised Common Lectionary***

First Reading	<b><i>Isaiah 1:1, 10-20</i></b> or Genesis 15:1-6
Second Reading	Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Gospel	Luke 12:32-40
Psalm	50:1-8, 22-23 or 33:12-22

**Isaiah 1:1, 10-20**

1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in  
2 the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

3 *[Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: I reared*  
4 *children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.*

5 *The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not*  
6 *know, my people do not understand.*

7 *Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children*  
8 *who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the LORD, who have despised the Holy*  
9 *One of Israel, who are utterly estranged!*

10 *Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole*  
11 *head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*

12 *From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but*  
13 *bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or*  
14 *bound up, or softened with oil.*

15 *Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very*  
16 *presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.*

17 *And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a*  
18 *cucumber field, like a besieged city.*

19 *If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like*  
20 *Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.]*

21 Hear the word of the LORD,  
22 you rulers of Sodom!  
23 Listen to the teaching of our God,  
24 you people of Gomorrah!  
25 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?  
26 says the LORD;  
27 I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams  
28 and the fat of fed beasts;  
29 I do not delight in the blood of bulls,  
30 or of lambs, or of goats.

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**Lectionary Selection**  
**Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 • August 8, 2010**

31 When you come to appear before me,  
32 who asked this from your hand?  
33 Trample my courts no more;  
34 bringing offerings is futile;  
35 incense is an abomination to me.  
36 New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—  
37 I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.  
38 Your new moons and your appointed festivals  
39 my soul hates;  
40 they have become a burden to me,  
41 I am weary of bearing them.  
42 When you stretch out your hands,  
43 I will hide my eyes from you;  
44 even though you make many prayers,  
45 I will not listen;  
46 your hands are full of blood.  
47 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
48 remove the evil of your doings  
49 from before my eyes;  
50 cease to do evil,  
51 learn to do good;  
52 seek justice,  
53 rescue the oppressed,  
54 defend the orphan,  
55 plead for the widow.

56 Come now, let us argue it out,  
57 says the LORD:  
58 though your sins are like scarlet,  
59 they shall be like snow;  
60 though they are red like crimson,  
61 they shall become like wool.  
62 If you are willing and obedient,  
63 you shall eat the good of the land;  
64 but if you refuse and rebel,  
65 you shall be devoured by the sword;  
66 for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

## *Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs*

Biblical scholars usually recognize that our book of Isaiah is a collection of prophetic material from at least three different periods in the history of Israel. Chapters 1-39 are generally attributed to the original prophet Isaiah, who was active in Jerusalem (in the southern country of Judah) during the final years of the eighth century BCE. This was a time of chaos and anxiety within the country, as the conquering armies of the Assyrians closed in from the North, crushing the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrian King Sennacherib and his armies eventually laid siege to Jerusalem and demanded tribute, but turned back to fight a force coming up from Egypt.

1. What might the people of Jerusalem be feeling as they stand on the walls of the city and look out over the remnants of siegeworks, the burnt lands and devastation left behind by the invading army?

What questions might they be asking—of themselves? Of their leaders? Of God?

Read through today's text. What do you imagine the response of the people would be to hearing these words from Isaiah?

Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism—an idea is stated, and then repeated in different words. For example:

*they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks [Isaiah 2:4b]*

Sometimes the parallel will state the opposite idea:

*A wise child makes a glad father,  
but a foolish child is a mother's grief. [Proverbs 10:1]*

Still other times, the second phrase will build on the first, adding some further information:

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. [Psalms 29:1]*

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## Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 • August 8, 2010

Furthermore, a simple parallel between phrases in a sentence may also be paralleled in larger sections, as in the full verse of Isaiah 2:4:

*He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;*

*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 any more.*

Return to today's text and see how many parallels you can identify. What themes, ideas, or images does Isaiah evoke in his poem? List some of them here:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

As you look over your list, how would you summarize the key points of Isaiah's proclamation?

2. *Hear the word of the LORD,  
you rulers of Sodom!  
Listen to the teaching of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah!*

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as examples of wickedness throughout the Bible: *Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD* [Genesis 13:13]. Although many believe it was sexual sin that condemned the cities, the prophet Ezekiel refers to Sodom and Gomorrah in this way:

*This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. [Ezekiel 16:49-50]*

How might the people listening to Isaiah react to being called *people of Gomorrah*? To hearing their leaders called *rulers of Sodom*?

## At the Workbench: Pentecost 11, Proper 14

*What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?*

What purpose did sacrifices serve? Who made them? Where were they offered?

What might a person expect to gain from his or her sacrifices? Who told them to make sacrifices? In this time of turmoil, what might drive people to offer a *multitude of sacrifices*?

What is the problem with *the multitude of your sacrifices*?

According to Isaiah, what does *the LORD* ask of the people?

*Come now, let us argue it out,  
says the LORD*

What is it like to argue with God?

What might one of Isaiah's hearers say in an effort to *argue it out*? What is there to argue about? What justifications might he or she give?

According to the prophet, what is required in being *willing and obedient*?

What will be the outcome?

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## Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 • August 8, 2010

What would be the outcome of choosing to *refuse and rebel*?

3. In times of turmoil and chaos, of threats to life and national security, to economic stability and employment, what sacrifices do people around you offer up, in your home, your workplace, your neighborhood, or your nation? What are the “many prayers” that are offered? To whom are they offered? For what purpose?

What do the people making the sacrifices hope to gain by making them?

What “counts” in making a sacrifice effective, powerful, appropriate, and significant?

Is there a “right way” to make the sacrifice?  
A “right place”? A “right attitude”?

What difference would it make if, instead of making these sacrifices, one were to “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”? What might change in our national priorities? Our personal choices?

What would be at risk in making those changes?

What might be gained?

## **At the Workbench: Pentecost 11, Proper 14**

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4. What do you know of a part of yourself that desires to appear pious, righteous, and religious? What sacrifices do you make in your own inner world to maintain that self-image? What benefits do you gain from making those sacrifices? What do you give up?

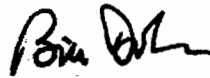
What promises do you make as you “argue it out” with God?

What justifications for your own choices do you give? What responses do you hear?

If you were to give up making sacrifices, what might you do instead?

## *Reading Between the Lines*

Florence and Edward face one another on Chesil Beach in Ian McEwan's novel, *On Chesil Beach*. On their wedding night they are in a mess and having fled their wedding bed are on the spit of stones stretching between channel and lagoon. They are helpless and inept—unable to deal with the disappointment that is tearing them apart. Edward kicks a spray of small stones towards her. "His anger stirred and she suddenly thought she understood their problem: they were too polite, too constrained, too timorous, they went around each other on tiptoes, murmuring, whispering, deferring, agreeing. They barely knew each other, and never could because of the blanket of companionable near silence that smothered their differences and blinded them as much as it bound them. They had been frightened of ever disagreeing, and now his anger was setting her free" (New York: Doubleday 2007, pg. 180). What have you known of Florence and Edward within you at moments when anger that might set you free continued as a blanket of deadly polite silence? What of that anger with a lover, colleague, spouse, sibling, stranger, or even self? And Isaiah adds God to the list: "Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD. . . ." What of all those feelings that feed an argument so long denied as a bridge to the Holiness of your life? When was the last time you risked an argument with a beloved friend or with the Lord?



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## *Reading Between the Lines*

### *Ritual Sacrifice*

*What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?  
says the lord. . .*

*Who asked this from your hand?*

—Isaiah 1: 11-12

“Come talk to me,”  
my mother yelled from the bathtub.

Torn between the longing  
for her attention and my more  
modest nature that preferred not to  
observe her nakedness, I weighed  
whether to enter her steamy  
inner sanctum  
or to remain outside in the  
cooler, drier air with my book.

If I pretended not to hear,  
she might call my sisters instead.

There were two phones  
in our little apartment, but  
neither cord stretched as far as  
the bathroom. So it was up to my  
sisters and me to assuage her co-  
dependency for the length of her  
nightly half-hour soak.  
She only wanted to hear  
about my day or to  
complain about my dad  
and the slut he left her for—  
a small sacrifice for the blessing of  
her good-night kiss.

So I learned the proper liturgy precisely,  
which topics pleasing, which taboo;  
learned to endure her questions and her  
rants without shedding tears—to divert  
my eyes from her rage as it rose in the steam,  
red and raw as her naked body.

I gave most of myself away  
to keep the peace, to preserve the secret  
garden within my heart to which I  
could escape once I was alone in bed.

There I dreamed of the  
kingdom of God, some new world—  
next week or next month—in which my  
father would have enough work to pay  
our bills and my mother would be happy  
enough to let me be sad.

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## Parallel Readings

### From *The New Yorker*

#### *The Movement: The Rise of Tea Party Activism*

Spring brought the founding of the Tea Party Patriots, a centralized Web destination for decentralized malcontents, and the start of Glenn Beck's side gig as a social organizer, through his 9.12 Project. The numbers nine and twelve referred to a checklist of principles and values, but their greater significance lay in the allusion to September 11th. "The day after America was attacked, we were not obsessed with Red States, Blue States or political parties," the project's mission statement read. "We want to get everyone thinking like it is September 12, 2001, again." The chosen values were inarguable: things like honesty and hope and courage. Only two of the principles ("I believe in God and He is the center of my life"; "I work hard for what I have and I will share it with who I want to. Government cannot force me to be charitable") indicated any kind of political agenda. Inclusiveness was the point.

Ben McGrath

### From *Called to Question*

The problem came for me when I discovered without any intention of my own, I had become one of them. Women religious, like the icons around them, were also pious statues in the public mind. We were the collector's items of the tradition, neuter gender and anonymous. People made nun dolls and sold them at craft fairs the same way they made teddy bears and plastic rosaries. We were the statuettes of the living tradition. But I never knew it until we began to realize that heaven wasn't just out there. Heaven started here, the reign of God started here, we came to realize. And we were to have something to do with bringing it. So, we began to live accordingly.

As George W. Bush threatened to launch a second war with Iraq, I wrote a small publication called "The Unjust War." It was in response to the long-defined Just War Theory that had been coined by Augustine in the fifth century, updated by Thomas Aquinas, preached by the Cistercians in the thirteenth century, and embedded in their 1985 document on nuclear weapons by the bishops of the United States. I had been speaking on the characteristics of a just war as laid out in this ancient theory for more than twenty years.

Ben McGrath, "The Movement: The Rise of Tea Party Activism," *A Reporter At Large, The New Yorker*, February 1, 2010, p. 43.

Joan Chittister, *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir*, (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2004), pp. 132-136.

*The more difficult decision comes when the passion for justice conflicts with the practices of the church itself.*

This new article marked my first published attempt to determine whether war could ever be just in this technological world and under these conditions. I wasn't being radical, in other words. If anything, the article was conservative, steeped in texts long considered part of the tradition and sincere in its effort to determine the place of war, if any, in modern society. Furthermore, it was a purely speculative reflection, not a call to arms, not a critique of any specific policies or plans of the U.S. government itself. But some people began to howl. They weren't upset simply because they disagreed with the material. They didn't even advert to the material. No, they were upset because, they said, I was supposed to be in a monastery and "not in politics." It was an argument that had been used against me, against my whole community, ever since the emergence of peace demonstrations during the Vietnam War. I had answered that question for myself a long time ago. Now the journal triggered it in me again: "Unless we are involved in naming the evil in the world, we could slip into the silence of racism, sexism and ageism," Elizabeth Francis Caldwell wrote. And I agreed, not out of any particular political bias, but because I had seen Jesus do it over and over again with the Pharisees. I wrote,

The truth is, I think, that what we don't name we enable. We become blind to the evils in which we live and breathe and call our culture. We take the unacceptable as natural. We take injustice for granted. We call sin normal. But if and when we begin to call evil, evil . . . then we ourselves begin to confront the problem.

The concept seems clear enough when the protest is a public one. Public protest is part and parcel of being American. But there is a two-edged sword embedded in the principle of protest. If and when the evil—the clear and intentional harm of one by another—is more private than public, then, somehow or other, the justification of dissent begins to waver. The more difficult decision comes when the passion for justice conflicts with the practices of the church itself. Then, what does spirituality demand: obedience—conformity to the system—or obedience—to the spirit of the gospel?

It's questions like these that test what religion is about against what religion itself is meant to be. It is a question women live with every day of their lives. If we believe that religion gives us a mirror into the mind of God, but the mind of God and the mind of the system are at odds, the tension can be overwhelming. Some women leave the church because for them it would be irreligious to stay. Other women stay in the system because the most religious part of them demands that religion itself be called to its best. The journal touched the problem in me over and over again. "The only way we can move ahead is by living the reality we envision," Ada-Maria

Isasi-Diaz wrote. I have seen the cost of that for women, and I wrote back out of my own struggle to stay faithful to the church and committed to gospel at the same time:

Unless we begin to be the church we want, that church will never come. And yet, those who do it—and are discovered—will be ground to dust by that very church. It is a hard bargain: shall we die for this church as it must be or at the hands of this church as it is. I for one must simply go on—and let the seeds bloom where they can, the chips fall where they may, and life take whatever turn for better or worse that befalls me.

The conflict comes when we begin to realize that justice is a conscience question of its own. Those who love a system enough to want it to be what it says it is, too often find themselves labeled the enemy within. What is moral here; where does justice lie: to call the church itself to grow—and so run the risk of undermining its credibility, or to excuse the sins of the church and so run the risk of dooming it to condemnation by the very gospel it claims to preach? The journal raised the issue clearly: “Whom do I close myself against?” Deena Metzger wrote. The question is a piercing one. It is so easy to become hardened against any system that has become hardened against you. I have known the struggle it takes to be a loyal part of a dysfunctional family for a long, long time. I wrote,

I don't think I “close myself” against anyone. But I do know I have made up my mind never to give myself away again to anyone or anything that simply wants to use me for its own interests or against my own. I spent my life supporting a church that wants nothing to do with women and by staying in it, even to protest it, may be doing it yet . . . I am plagued by dishonesty. Am I really saying what I believe? Am I really doing what I want to do? Am I “putting a good face on an inherently bad thing”? And if so, I am part of the problem in the church. I and my kind hold it up, give it a legitimacy its illegitimacy does not deserve. As long as the church rejects women, it is no church at all.

The soul struggles in these in-between times with feelings of frustration, feelings of infidelity. Is the problem in the system—or in the self? Are we too bold—or not brave enough? Does virtue lie in endurance—or in indignation? Is it better to wait for time to change things—or can time possibly change anything if the change doesn't first start in us? Through us? Georgia O'Keeffe wrote, “I decided to start anew . . . to accept as true my own thinking. This was one of the best times of my life.” That's fine for a woman who lives unattached to an insti-

*Those who love a system  
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tution, who is the center and the fulcrum of her own life. But what about the rest of us who live in systems like marriage and religious life that demand conformity in return for security, that rest on public norms and traditional roles, good—even understandable as these may be—in many cases? What about those who live alone and are neither wealthy enough or talented enough not to have to compromise with any system to survive—the government, the corporation, the subsistence systems of life that regularly discard truth tellers of any ilk? I wrote,

Well, it may work for Georgia O'Keeffe but it's a long, hard journey for anyone else. To begin to believe your own truth is to begin to withdraw from dogmatism, institutionalism, authoritarianism, and parentalism. These things conspire to keep a woman "nice." They also manage to keep a person under control and underdeveloped. But I think my own truth anyway—as God has enabled me.

Joan Chittister

## *Critical Background*

### **From *The Hebrew Bible***

#### *Isaiah of Jerusalem*

A contemporary of Micah and Hosea, Isaiah was a Judahite prophet active at several crisis points between 740/739 and 701. In the former year he was called to prophesy by a stunning vision of Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, “high and lifted up” above sinful Israel, while “the whole earth is full of his glory” (chap. 6). Isaiah’s commission was to announce the unmitigated destruction of the twin kingdoms Israel and Judah. He lived to see the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 and the supine vassalage of the southern kingdom to the same world power: at first by Judah’s choice in 732 and later against its will in 701.

The basis of the announced destruction of the twin kingdoms was their rulers’ rampant violation of the rights of the common people and their headlong rush to amass quick wealth and political power at any cost (1: 12-17; 3:13-15; 5:1-7, 8-10). These leaders carried “blood guilt” for their crimes (1: 15; 5:7). Gross disregard of the fundamental requirements of Yahweh as known in the received traditions of Israel made both states vulnerable to attack and annihilation by Assyria, their *external* fate being directly linked with their internal abandonment of the Yahwistic charter of social justice and equality. Because Isaiah saw little or no prospect of a change of heart among the leaders and thus no meaningful reforms, he announced total national destruction.

To be sure, Isaiah is often credited with belief in a saving remnant that would survive the debacle and form a new community. Indeed, he may have struck such a note, but always ambiguously, hinting at a modest contingent hope at best. As with Hosea, he insisted that any hopeful future could only be realized after the total collapse of the existing perverse national structures.

Precise determination of the theological perspectives and political judgments of the prophet is complicated by the way his book has been edited so that everywhere his own words are mixed with later prophetic words that grew up as a carry-over of his influential outlook into later generations. These expansions and additions in an “Isaianic stream of tradition” are often credited to “disciples” who formed self-perpetuating groups which are somewhat loosely called “schools.” In general, a minimal note of hope—contingent on repentance—was picked up and developed by interpreters in following centuries

Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 377-382.

*Isaiah understood "what is right" for Judah to consist of a vigorous pursuit of domestic social justice coupled with neutrality in foreign affairs.*

and the core of the prophet's collected works was supplemented by extensive traditions of salvation appropriate to later sociohistoric settings. The most notable of these is chaps. 40-66 which come from sixth-century exilic and postexilic prophets.

Isaiah's resources in Israel's traditions are eccentric compared to Amos and Hosea. He did not appeal to the Mosaic exodus-settlement or Sinai traditions, although his understanding of the content of what constituted proper Israelite norms of behavior was broadly congruent with the content of those dominant traditions. Instead, Isaiah cited images and norms concerning Zion as a city of righteousness and Davidic rulers as executors of peace and justice in the community. Some interpreters have concluded that the Zion traditions which Isaiah drew upon were pre-Israelite beliefs in a sacrosanct Jerusalem whose security against all outsiders was ultimately assured, thus explaining how the prophet could relent and announce salvation for the city, after he had declared its destruction during Judah's revolt against Sennacherib in 705-701. This line of interpretation, however, calls the self-consistency and public credibility of the prophet into serious question. To the contrary, recent advances in redaction criticism of the Book of Isaiah tend to identify the words of Isaiah as consistently and soberly judgmental. At the same time it is understandable how his deep faith in Yahweh's justice over all nations could have given rise to surges of hope among those who looked at later historical situations through the lenses of his writings.

Toward the beginning of his prophetic project, Isaiah had to deal with the pro-Assyrian king Ahaz. In the face of pressure for the king either to join Israel and Syria in an alliance against Assyria or to ally with Assyria on favorable terms, Isaiah insisted on Judahite noninvolvement in international politics: neither to *submit* to Assyria nor to join in an *attack* on Assyria. This counsel, also attested in several other Israelite prophets, has often been understood as a narrowly religious judgment (since alliances required formally acknowledging the allies' deities) or as a wildly utopian view (since Yahweh will spare Judah without human effort). In fact, the prophet appears to have believed that what was religiously requisite was also politically practical. His conception of action in the world was what has been called "theopolitical." Since Yahweh is lord of the world of nations, what is right for Judah to do will also be in the best national interests and will lead to the total welfare of the people.

Isaiah understood "what is right" for Judah to consist of a vigorous pursuit of domestic social justice coupled with neutrality in foreign affairs.

Because Ahaz was impervious to Isaiah's counsel, the prophet appears to have withdrawn for a time from public life and

to have committed the incidents of that period to writing in what has been called his Memoirs or Testimony, or Book of Signs (6:1-8:18). In this way, Isaiah, although rebuffed, was fully "on record." With the coming of Hezekiah to the throne in 716/715, Isaiah may have had a somewhat more favorable hearing, at least for a period. He seems to have had some effect in limiting Hezekiah's participation in an anti-Assyrian revolt led by Ashdod in 713-711 (chap. 20). It is possible also that, along with other factors such as the recent fall of the northern kingdom, Isaiah was influential in moving Hezekiah toward reforms. The Deuteronomistic History speaks of these measures as cultic reforms (2 Kings 18:4), but whether Hezekiah also paid heed to the call of proto-Deuteronomy and of Isaiah for social justice in the land is not known. Failing the rectification of the plight of the impoverished and defrauded peasantry, Isaiah would not have found cultic improvements a substantial remedy of national ills (1:12-17; 22:12-14; 29:13-14).

By 705, with the death of the Assyrian king Sargon, Hezekiah became a ringleader in a major revolt of Syro-Palestinian states against Assyria that was backed by Egypt. We have seen the unhappy outcome of that venture for Judah, thereafter greatly reduced in territory and under heavier tribute. One strand of thought in the Book of Isaiah shows the prophet holding unswervingly to an announcement of doom throughout the revolt of Hezekiah and the decimation of Judah until only Jerusalem was left unmolested and Hezekiah had to surrender (22:1-4; 29:1-4; 30:1-5; 31:1-3). Another strand, both in narratives (chaps. 36-39, derived from 2 Kings 18-20) and in speeches of salvation (10:16-19; 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 29:5-8; 31:5 and 8-9), pictures Isaiah declaring a reprieve and imminent deliverance of Jerusalem coupled with the destruction of Assyria (§36.1).

This contradiction has been explained in different ways. One view is that Isaiah simply changed his mind as the siege of Jerusalem wore on and switched from a message of doom to one of salvation. Others, who favor the two-invasion hypothesis, see Isaiah as a staunch prophet of doom in the 701 invasion but, concluding that it was time for Assyria to be punished, had evolved into a prophet of Jerusalem's salvation by the time of the supposed second invasion about thirteen years later. Since the Book of Isaiah is a compilation and redaction of material over a long tradition history, it is far more plausible to attribute the salvation "relapse" connected with 701 to postdeliverance Isaianic traditionists who were impressed by the historical fact that Jerusalem proper had not been destroyed and who retrojected this marvel into the prophecies of the master.

It is obvious that later Isaianic traditionists played upon the many facets of Isaiah's fertile mind and modes of expression. The many-sidedness of Isaiah was a function of his

*Failing the rectification of the plight of the impoverished and defrauded peasantry, Isaiah would not have found cultic improvements a substantial remedy of national ills. . .*

dialectic way of thinking that often saw two or more aspects of a situation volatily combined and recombined in a zigzag course of events. His ever-moving way of viewing the same decisions, events, and processes provoked a constant unsettling of appearances. Motives, confidences, plans, expectations, and beliefs alike turn into their unexpected opposites. The “speech” and “deeds” of Yahweh in this world are distressingly “strange and alien” (28:11, 21). Accordingly, the international perspective of the prophet held all the ancient Near Eastern nations under scrutiny as accountable before the judgments of Yahweh.

*The idea that Isaiah preached the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 because he became a lightheaded patriot at the last moment erroneously implies that he had once been a lightheaded critic.*

On the one hand, the nations were used by Yahweh as punitive instruments against Israel and Judah (“Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!” 10:5). On the other hand, as free agents the nations exceed their assigned or permitted role as chastisers of others and engage in prideful excesses which Yahweh will in turn recompense (“Shall the ax vaunt itself over him who hews with it?” 10:15). Thus, 10:5-15 shows clearly that Isaiah expected Assyria to receive its own well-earned judgment—but in good time, *after* Judah’s punishment at the hands of Assyria. The idea that Isaiah preached the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 because he became a lightheaded patriot at the last moment erroneously implies that he had once been a lightheaded critic. If, as seems certain, his announcements of judgment on nations were dialectically thought through in a consistent fashion, then it would have made no sense at all for him to anticipate the breaking of Yahweh’s “rod” Assyria *before* Judah had received the thorough thrashing that constituted the central political content of the prophet’s message.

Norman K. Gottwald