

Part One: The Love-of-History Challenge

The story of Christianity is not two thousand years old but three thousand years old. Jesus is a major turning point in this story, but he is also a continuation of the older story. We cannot understand the New Testament without an understanding of the Old Testament. When Jesus speaks of God, he speaks of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Moses and the Prophets. Jesus did not see himself as a Christian. Even Paul did not see himself as a Christian. Jesus issued a call to true Judaism, and Paul was a Christ-way Jew. In their lifetimes neither Christianity nor Judaism existed as separate religions.

And even after separate religions began to form toward the later portion of the first century, Christianity maintained its ties with the ancient writings, with the old stories, with the Exodus event, the Exile event, and most important of all with the core truth surrounding the word "God." Understanding what that word points to and what trust in God means is a topic that is in serious crisis in both typical Christianity and typical Judaism today.

Also, Christianity maintained ancient Judaism's passion for the importance of Law as a description of the Demand of God. The view of Law that we see in Jesus is a break with the understanding of Law as an objective rule that did not go to the core of the self in that self's relation with God. The view of Law that we see in Paul was a break with Law seen as a means of making oneself righteous in God's sight, a righteousness of which one can boast. For Paul there is no way to be "righteousness" through human effort. Only the grace of God and the faith that grace make possible is the route to righteousness. After such a healing of our lives, the Law remains holy and good, an indicator of appropriate behavior in relation to the Demand of God. These Pauline attitudes toward the Jewish Law created a flexibility in how obeying the Law was to be practiced. The Spirit of the Law was now more important than the letter of the Law. Tradition was opened up, a fresh creativity for the religious and moral life was initiated from a deeper place than the more objective, authoritative, scribal teachings of right and wrong.

The enigmatic depths of these topics need to be more fully explored. Part One is about a love of history that was well established in the Old Testament period, and about the historical turning points in the history of religion that were initiated by Jesus, Paul, and John.

1. Christianity and the Love of History

When I first encountered the topic of history in a high school history course, I was bored to distraction – memorizing dates, learning facts about my nation’s origins. It made no contact with me. I loved mathematics. I loved literature. But history, ugh. And I was living within World War II history at the time. I hoped our side would win the war. I knew how to name and identify all the war planes. But the topic of history did not grab me until I was in college and read an obscure book entitled *Wake Up or Blow Up*. A man named Frank Laubach wrote this book about Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the nuclear arms race between the US and the USSR. For me, this was an engaging experience with history. It involved me and my species of life on this planet. And it made the meaning of “history” a matter of the future as well as the past.

My love of history reached a sort of peak many years later as I walked the streets of Jackson, Mississippi with Martin Luther King Jr. and went to Washington D.C. to hear him give his “I have a Dream” speech. I knew then that in my small way I was not only living history, I was making history. By that time I was a deeply committed Christian, familiar with the Bible and clear that when Martin Luther King spoke of racial justice as a “promised land,” he too was deeply embedding in Biblical imagery. He too knew that the Bible expressed a love of history and that those events of the dim past had meaning for talking about the present and future. I too was able to relate the Promised Land of the Moses story to our own Promised Land of racial justice in the US of A.

History

Sometime later, I had developed, with a lot of help from others, a philosophy of history. I could give a lecture on the three types of history: (1) **scientific history**, the clarification of facts – like who shot Abraham Lincoln, (2) **rational history**, seeing in the mind’s eye an organization of the various eras of time – like the stone age, the industrial age, and era of civilization, etc., (3) **existential history**, a swing of memory into the past in order to create a swing of anticipation into the future in order to make relevant decisions in the present. I counted all three of these types of historical thinking as important, but it was existential history that engaged me. It taught me the importance of the past for anticipating the future and making decisions in the present. It also taught me that “history” did not mean inevitable progress or inevitable descent or any other set of determined outcomes. History was open ended and “bendable” through human decisions. The future would be a surprise, but that surprise could be different if humans today choose this rather than that. I was now aware that such existential history was the kind of history that characterized the Bible. In the biblical story, I read with delight sayings like: “Behold I set before you life and death, so chose life and live.” Such words as these were framed as the Word of God. If “God” means the Final Reality we are meeting in the events and challenges of history, then God’s Word is not specific Hebrew or Greek words magically infused into some Bible writer’s mind. Rather, “God’s Word” is a revelation to me and others of what confronts us in history.

I knew that Moses, factually speaking, was an obscure person who may have lived in the vicinity of 1290 BCE. But it was his story, much elaborated by later history-loving people, that spoke to me personally. I could identify with: leaving the horrors of slavery in Egypt; escaping into the wilderness; building a new kind of law by which to order a post-Egyptian life; building that new life on the basis of loyalty to that Wild Openness in the nature of history; engaging in possibilities, challenges, and surprises never known by those who stayed back in the patterns of Egyptian civilization. I understood that I too could experience my own Exodus from the familiar patterns that most people took for granted. I too could enter into a wondrous, challenging, and

surprising journey of freedom that came with loyalty to the Sovereign Power who spoke to me in the events of history – who called me to action and required me to figure out how to say in relevant language what this Word from the event-speaking God was saying to me and my society.

Christianity

Practicing Christianity in a thoroughgoing way includes a love of history and a responsiveness to the God of history worshipped and struggled with for over a thousand years before the life of Jesus. In Christianity, fully appropriated, Spirit and history are melded. This is also true of Judaism. Indeed, Christianity learned this emphasis from its Hebrew roots. Leaving Egypt was about a love of history. Creating stories about ancient legendary ancestors migrating from Ur (Iraq) to Israel was about a love of history. While this love of history was not definitively put to paper until the J-writing in the vicinity of 950 BCE, this love of history was a characteristic of this Hebraic culture reaching back into the very dim past. This history-loving heritage had reached a cultural fullness in the writing of the closing chapters of the book of Isaiah (560 BCE).

The book of Isaiah was not written by one person, but by a community of people through several hundred years of history. The early chapters of Isaiah were written by a seer who had the name "Isaiah." He lived at the time of the Assyrian Invasions of Palestine in around 835 BCE. He composed these words, "Ah, Assyria the rod of my Anger." He put these words into the mouth of the God of history. He believed that whatever was happening in history was meaningful as the acts of this Sovereign God. He spelled out this Sovereignty as something Kingly, but not fatalistic. History included the freedom of Isaiah, or any other human, to act this way or that way – to be obedient or disobedient, to be realistic or illusory. Nevertheless, in the course of history there was a KING, beyond all human agency, whose purpose was present in everything that happened. Being a prophet, as Isaiah felt called to be, meant saying what this KING was doing in the history that was happening. Isaiah said that the KING was disciplining Israel and Judea with a cruel rod of discipline. According to Isaiah, the King of Assyria did not know that he was being so used by this Sovereign KING. The King of Assyria was only following his own arrogance, and the KING of history would deal with this arrogant man later on. But for now this arrogant unconscious ruler of a foreign power was a rod, a tool, in the hand of the KING who ruled all history and to whom the Spirit descendants of the Mosaic breakthrough were called to be loyal. Whatever was happening was a Word from the ever-present Eternal Reality. A loyalty to this Reality meant being radically realistic. If your nation is being beaten to death or so threatened, this is God speaking to you. You need to awake up and respond.

Contemporary Christians who are engaged in feminist and democratic commitments often have difficulty with the "KING" imagery used by Isaiah and others, including Jesus. We need to understand that these witnesses lived in an era in which their society never heard of democracy or of a liberation from patriarchy. Social power was invested in a King, and this "kingness" was a metaphor they used for the Almighty, Mysterious Ruler of history. Today, we might prefer another image than "KING" or "Sovereign," but we need to retain the ancient meaning of an All-powerful Power that meets us in our daily, weekly, annual experience of history.

Isaiah lived a long and eventful life and created within the nation of Judea a strong community who preserved his words and added more words to the scrolls that bears his name. We do not know how many "Isaiahs" authored this book, but the scholars are clear that chapters 40 through 55 were written by one of the most insightful writers in the entire Bible. Scholars call this anonymous writer, Deutero-Isaiah, Second Isaiah. His words were added to the book in the vicinity of 545-540 BCE. He lived during the

last years of the Babylonian Exile when the Persian Empire was on the rise and promised new hope for exiled people. Cyrus the Great, the Persian king, conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. One of his first acts was to allow people exiled by the Babylonians (the Jews, among other captive peoples) to return to their respective homes. Back in 598-596 BCE the Babylonians had conquered Judea and carried off some of its people (especially the leadership) into exile in Babylon. Members of the Isaiah community were included. Second Isaiah was speaking to the Judean community in exile, and his words were that the KING of history was doing a new thing. The grand words of this anonymous prophet were adding to the Isaiah scrolls.

Comfort, comfort my people
– it is the voice of your God
speak tenderly to Jerusalem
and tell her this,
she has received at the Lord's hand
double measure for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2)

This prophet continues with a call to return home to Judea and rebuild the ruined land and cities: “clear a highway across the desert for our God.” This challenge may not have been appealing to every member of these exiled people. Some had become well established in Babylon, and making the long trip and then doing the hard work of social rebuilding may not have appealed to every hearer of these words. But according to Second Isaiah the opportunity to return was a calling from the Sovereign KING of history. Nowhere in the Bible is the vigorous, inclusive, Sovereignty of the God of History more vigorously stated.

Yahweh, the everlasting God, creator of the wide world,
grows neither weary nor faint;
no man can fathom his understanding.
He gives vigor to the weary,
new strength to the exhausted.
Young men may grow weary and faint,
even in their prime they may stumble and fall;
but those who look to the Lord will win new strength,
they will grow wings like eagles;
they will run and not be weary,
they will march on and never grow faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

Though we are now clear that all this is poetry, Second Isaiah is interpreting an experience of history. He is articulating a call to be obedient to Reality with a capital “R.” He was seeing an opportunity to leave exile, return to their homeland and rebuild their “Reality/history-loving society. If they had not done so, we might never have heard of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.

We who are choosing to continue this loyalty to the God of history do not need to get distracted into literalistic questions about the existence of a Male Superbeing. At that time in history, a super-realm mythology was the cultural custom. And “male” in that unconsciously patriarchal culture meant “power.” For 2nd Isaiah “the everlasting God” meant whatever POWER it IS that we are encountering in the flow of history. History matters. And if history matters to you, you probably learned this from 2nd Isaiah, 1st Isaiah, Moses, and yes, Jesus, Augustine, Luther and their Spirit descendants.

Not every religious practice or philosophy of life has this deep bond with history, but Judaism and Christianity, in their origins, certainly do. If in our churches and synagogues we have lost that love of history, we have lost something essential and precious about this 3000-year-long tradition of religions practice.

Jesus

Jesus lived in a time of Hellenistic Judaism, but unlike Paul he did not speak Greek. He was embedded in a rural Galilean village culture which was quite thoroughgoing toward the Hebrew side of this Hebrew/Greek cultural mixture. Jesus may have never heard of Plato and Aristotle, but he had heard of Moses and Isaiah. His language was a language of history that had been created for him since the time of Moses. His “kingdom of God” was something happening in history. “Look, the poor are hearing good news, the sick are healed, the blind see, the lame walk, the dead are rising.” This poetry is about history, and so is the following: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven” This is a prayer about history. Translated into a language for our times this sentence of prayer means: “May the peoplehood loyal to that Final Power experienced by us in our history (the Power obeyed by Moses, all the Isaiahs, and the other prophets) be realized now on this planet, for such living is the essence of realism.”

The birth, life, teaching, doings, and death of Jesus, plus his resurrection in the body of his disciples is understood as the coming of the long expected Messiah. All this is an event in history that the New Testament writers considered to be the launch of a new era of history. Like the Exodus, this event constituted an agreement with the Sovereign KING of history, The Power that posits all things – their birth, their sustenance, their limitations, their death. This agreement did not renounce the old agreement, it deepened that agreement and was an agreement with the same Reality. It constituted an agreement to die to ego, personality, nation, race, humanity, everything and be raised up in absolute obedience to the Sovereign KING of history. We who take on this covenant choose to be born when we are born, be the gifts and limitations we are given, and die when we die. We obey the KING. One of our obediences today is to quit calling Reality “King” or “Queen.” New language is needed. “The Power that posits us” will do. “The Mystery that is the final Unknowableness in this somewhat known Reality” might work. “The No-Thing-Ness out of which all things come and to which all things return” might do. And let us not omit “The Every-Thing-Ness in which all things coexist.”

We need new poetry; but new words, though essential, are not what ultimately matters. What ultimately matters is our own personal experience of this Mysterious Power that is powering the history of our lives and times. And let us be clear that though we are powerless before this power, we are being given power and honor and freedom by this Power. We are in fact determined by this Power to be our freedom, to make choices that alter the course of history. But this Power does not relinquish to us the ability to fully determine how our choices will work out in history. All final outcomes remain in the control of this Sovereign Power. Whatever we envision, intend, or hope for, the outcomes of history will continually be surprises to us.

Paul

After Jesus and his Palestinian followers, the first big shift in the cultural history of Christianity begins with **Paul (5-67 CE)**. This shift includes and extends through the writings of Mark, Matthew and Luke/Acts (70 CE or slightly later). Rudolf Bultmann calls this the Hellenistic Judaism period of Christian practice. With Paul Christian practice is adapting to the towns and cities of the Roman empire. It is in dialogue with the cultural festering of that wider world. Nevertheless, this second stage of Christian practice was being developed within a thoroughgoing Hebraic subculture of the Roman Empire. The “Gentiles” who are involved in this community are the “God fearers” drawn to the devotional and ethical practices of the synagogues. They are thoroughly

Hebrewized even though uncircumcised. They know and worship the Hebraic God of history. They accept the teachings of Paul, Mark, Matthew, and Luke as enrichments of what it means to worship the Sovereign of history that was worshiped by Moses and the prophets.

John

The next big shift in the cultural history of Christianity begins with the writings of the Fourth Gospel and the three letters ascribed to the pseudonym “**John**” (90-100 CE). In these writings the Christian impetus is being communicated to people who are not familiar with Hellenistic Judaism or with the Hebraic historical story. Christianity is now beginning a thoroughgoing adaptation to Greco-Roman culture. John maintains his Hebrew roots by making it clear within the Greek worldview that the Word of God is not words in Greek or Hebrew, but an event in history, especially a particular body of flesh and blood encountered and “eaten” in a historical setting.

To be a competent practitioner of an up-to-date Christian practice in the 21st Century we need to be aware of at least this much detail about the early history of Christian practice. We cannot properly grasp the writings of the New Testament without a sense of this historical story. It is not necessary that every Christian practitioner be an expert on the intricate details of New Testament formation. What is needful is that we each have a sense of this basic story and the awareness that this historical story about Christian practice is an essential part of the Next Christian practice, if that practice is to be fully adequate as a continuation of a Christian mode of religious practice.

The Old Covenant

The first four fifths of the Christian Bible contains understandings about the God of history that preceded Jesus. Those who have suggested that Jesus worshiped a different God than Moses and the prophets do not understand a single word of the New Testament. Even the term “New Testament” is meaningless until we see that this term points to a New Covenant with the same Reality that was covenanted with by Moses and friends in the Exodus. We have no understanding of the Old Testament until we understand that the words for God used in the Old Testament writings are devotional words for Reality – the plain and simple Realty confronting us in the course of history, my personal history, my nation’s history, my planet’s history, and the history of the cosmos. And “history” in this context does not mean a dead past. History means something happening now. History means something anticipated in the future. And only within a present and future understanding of history does the history of the past come alive for us.

Also, let those of us who practice Christianity understand this New Covenant as a dynamic in both Christianity and Judaism rather than as an evolutionary advance for Christians over Jews. The New Covenanting dynamic began with Joshua at the Jordan River. Jeremiah spoke of a New Covenant when his nation was being conquered and exiled. Jeremiah was not predicting Christianity, but seeing the Mosaic covenant written anew on the hearts of his people, now without a nation. So when Christians spoke of the Jesus events as a New Covenant, they were reenacting an old understanding. And both contemporary Jews and Christians can and need to embrace Jesus’ rejection of nit-picking moralism and ethical hypocrisy. New covenanting with Final Reality is a dynamic in the whole of human history, not a special virtue of Christian-identified practitioners. The New Testament does indeed witness to a new covenanting of long lasting meaning, but it is also a thoroughgoing affirmation of the old covenant of the Exodus and of the Old Testament writings included in the Christian Bible.

Also, it is important to note that the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament are themselves happenings in history in which the Hebraic roots blossomed into full flower. These major sages – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah – are comparable with other sages across the planet who lived in the same time gap (750 - 540 BCE), the Buddha, Lao Tza, Zoroaster, and a number of others. The oldest of the Upanishads were slightly earlier. The Socrates, Plato, Aristotle upheaval was slightly later (450 - 322 BCE). These major prophets must be understood if we are to fully understand Jesus and the Christian sages that followed after Jesus. I will illustrate the relevance of this prophetic heritage with some further reflection on one of those prophets.

The Prophet Isaiah

“Prophet,” by the way, is a word that needs translation. Here is its meaning in language that we 21st Century humans might be able to absorb: A prophet is a visionary who sees what is happening in history more clearly than what is being seen by most of the people who are the companions of this awakening person. A prophet sees the future more clearly, not in the sense of a prediction of what is going to happen, but as clarity about the options for human action that can be taken NOW and the probable outcomes of those actions or inactions. So, with that in mind let us decode First Isaiah’s own story of his calling to be a prophet (Isaiah 6).

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the skirt of his robe filled the temple. About him were attendant seraphim, and each had six wings; one pair covered his face and one pair his feet, and one pair spread in flight.

This Divine King whose train filled the temple was not seen with biological eyes: it was seen in dream imagery; and even in this dream imagery only six-winged angels were seen. The KING was hidden behind these wings of flapping Awe.

In this trance that Isaiah was having in the temple, the super-angels were “calling ceaselessly to one another,”

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts
the whole Earth is full of his glory.

In his book *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto defines “holy” as an experience of a “tremendous mysteriousness” that produces dread and fascination and requires courage to sustain. “Awe” is another word for this experience. So I can imagine that the cry of these angels had a rather harsh tone like the caw of crows.

AWE, AWE, AWE
the whole Earth is filled with this cawing.

This seems to be pretty close to how Isaiah says he experienced it:

And as each one called, the threshold shook to its foundations, while the house was filled with smoke. Then I cried,

Woe is me! I am lost,
for I am a man of unclean lips
and I dwell among a people of unclean lips;
yet with these eyes I have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.

Isaiah is talking about a “tremendous mysteriousness” that is undoing his entire religion, convicting him of lying and of dwelling among liars who do not speak the truth. Isaiah’s “unclean lips” does not mean jam on them or four-letter words coming out of them. Isaiah was a preacher and his words had been false. His lips are dirty

because of the words that he had been speaking were lies, and he was telling these lies among a people who are also lying. Apparently, part of this lying had to do with not being willing to face that nation's vulnerability to the Assyrian conquests, their trusting in weak allies, and their general delusory attitude toward historical developments. I can certainly see such lying in my own society today.

We also need to unpack some of the other symbols Isaiah uses. The house that was filled with smoke was Isaiah's temple of worship. Whatever had gone on there had become cloudy. And the threshold that shook to its foundations was that same temple, that same worship that Isaiah and his nation practiced. Isaiah's religion was being shaken to its foundations by the death of King Uzziah and whatever else became an audit of the religious inadequacies that Isaiah practiced. As we see from Isaiah's further writings, he was dealing with the rise of Assyrian power and the danger of his nation in the light of that history. His companions in the worship of the God of Israel were unenlightened about what that loyalty to the God of history meant in those historical circumstances.

Interiorly, Isaiah felt his whole sense of self being undone, yet he saw himself staring at WHAT rules the cosmos. "King" is a symbol for being ruled, not a description of that indescribable Final Reality. The Final Reality Isaiah sees is not seen with the descriptive mind. It is seen with the image-making consciousness of Isaiah. Isaiah uses the poetry of his time to share his experience, but in order for us to hear Isaiah rightly, we need to hear that Isaiah's King of history is a "tremendous mysteriousness" mediated to us by experiences of Awe flapping between us and that Final Majesty.

"LORD of Hosts" might be translated as "YAHWEH, the GREAT I AM THAT I AM, the Source of all angels – all experiences of Awe." And "YAHWEH" is a historically rich term that reaches back in Isaiah's memory to the Exodus from slavery in Egypt and to the adventures in Awe-filled living told of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So, Isaiah sees something in his history, something important, however cryptic it may seem to us in the way Isaiah tells about it. It has to do with the impending conquests of the Assyrians, and perhaps with the death of Uzziah, a fairly competent King. Anyhow, Isaiah's story of his call continues:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me carrying in his hand a glowing coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said,

See, this has touched your lips;
your iniquity is removed,
and your sin is wiped away.

This forgiveness or fresh start for Isaiah is pictured as a hot experience. Lying lips are seared, burned clean with a hot truth that has been suppressed by Isaiah's frequently spoken untruths. What a wonderful teaching about forgiveness this is: forgiveness is not an indulgence of our falseness, but a welcome home to our reality. Being forgiven by The Final Reality means the burning of our false approaches to living and an opening to that mode of living that we are made for, the real historical situation to which we must respond.

I imagine that Isaiah is more or less stunned, but with eyes and ears open to see and hear something fresh about the way life is. And what Isaiah says he hears is YAHWEH discussing something with his angels as if Isaiah were not even there.

Then I heard the LORD saying, Whom shall we send? Who will go for us?

I imagine there was a bit of pause in the drama at this point, before Isaiah points out that he is listening and that he is ready to be the one who is sent.

And I answered, Here am I; send me.

Then the King, the LORD of Hosts says in effect, "GO and tell this people THE TRUTH."

The "Divine Voice" explains further that the people are not going to listen. So Isaiah asks, "How long do I have to endure saying what no one hears?" And the substance of the answer he got was this: "As long as it takes."

So what does it mean for us to be prophetic in our moment of history. Here is an obvious example of a prophetic truth we might proclaim:

Burning fossil fuels is a "crime" of massive destruction against the planet and all its life forms, including humanity.

If any of us are going to take up the Hebrew and Christian style of "prophet" in our historical setting, we will need to proclaim this truth for "as long as it takes" for humanity to hear it and live it. Global warming deniers are rejecting this truth because it calls into question almost everything they believe, as well as entailing a serious challenge to the self-interests that are protected by disbelieving this truth of the impending climate catastrophe. Their very "self" is being called in question by this truth. That is why their resistance is so strong.

And so a prophet speaking to our times will need to continue to enrich his or her poetry: "The Seas will rise, the hurricanes and tornadoes will become stronger and stronger. Eastern Seaboard cities of the US will become uninhabitable, washed to their deaths by so many floods that rebuilding is futile. Currently inhabited low-lying islands will disappear entirely. Bread baskets of rich agricultural land will become deserts. Previously dry places will become lakes. Floods and droughts will appear where never experienced before." Perhaps such poetry will get and is getting many people's attention. But more is required. The case needs to be made that lying is taking place in our denying of global warming; denying the extent of its consequences; denying that human agency is causing the CO₂ buildup; denying that burning fossil fuels is a crime against humanity, the Earth, and plain honesty. That these denials and their consequences are not yet a crime with regard to the laws of the society is not a justification for denial, but a challenge to change the laws.

Furthermore, this truthful, contemporary prophet will need to take on the moderate liberal in his or her halfway responding. "Even those of us who do believe the truth of global warming and its consequences and who are willing to act upon these realizations need to confess that we are nevertheless guilty of the crime of burning fossil fuels whenever we switch on a light or press the starter on our automobile. Even if we drive a Prius and opt for an electric bill that presupposes Green energy production, we only moderate the evil in which we participate. There is no escape from participation in this criminal society in which we are embedded.

Believing the truth of global warming means that for us to be persons of integrity, we must confess our guilt in supporting solutions to this crisis that are trivial. We are being called to upgrade our thought and action to a more serious level: namely, dismantling (rather than repairing) this entire social fabric and building an alternative way for all of us to live.

And that means: Starting wherever we can best start. For example, the unneeded industry of tar-sands oil that is just starting up can be resisted totally – stopped in its tracks no matter what the costs of doing so, no matter what our Presidents and Congress persons are not willing to do. We prophets must make plain to a blurry-minded population that burning the tar-sand energy source may be the end of life on earth for our species, at least a set of catastrophes so immense that we do not want to even think about it.

Secondly, we can support a moratorium on all new coal-fired power plants. Coal was making a comeback when it was cheaper than oil or natural gas, but as natural gas becomes cheaper, coal is not even needed for the transition away from fossil-fuel burning. Furthermore, we now have the technology to move toward an electro-hydrogen infrastructure energized mainly by solar and wind energy sources. We have to accept a period of transition from oil and natural gas to solar and wind, but we do not have to accept the lie that we cannot prosper without expanding our fossil fuel use.

Furthermore, we 21st Century prophets will need to call out our culture for minimizing the possibilities of an alternative energy system. The cost of solar and wind energy production has already come down to the same level as fossil fuels and is still falling. It is already the cheapest and least destructive way to go. People who claim that these technologies have not yet achieved the readiness needed for energizing our society are like the people who said the automobile was not ready because there were so few smooth roads for it, and it scared the horses. Yes, a new infrastructure for solar and wind energy must be constructed; but however big this task may be, the facts of our situation simply do not support the foot-dragging pessimism that tells us that this transition cannot be accomplished at a quick-time pace. The sophisticated lies of oil-company-financed think tanks can now be laughed off our TV screens and ripped out of our news magazines.

As history unfolds the above account may need to be changed in some details and expanded further, but it illustrates the style of the 21st Century prophet on this and many other issues. Getting people to listen to Reality is the prophetic task, but we prophets are called to speak the truth whether people listen or not. And we are called by the KING of history to continue telling the truth for *as long as it takes* for everyone to hear it.

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These honest detailed words about climate crisis call to our attention the meaning of a “Word” from the Sovereign KING of history. A 21st Century prophet is called to speak words to our illusion-ridden and lying society that are the WORD of REALITY. Such speaking is part of what it means to love history. Such speaking is part of what it means to practice a Next Christianity or a Next Judaism. Such speaking is also part of what it means to be a contemporary devotee of Allah and to renew the deep heritage of Islam. Such speaking is part of what it means to be an engaged Buddhist or a Gandhi-inspired Hindu. Judaism and Christianity have pioneered this deep love of history, this deep love of speaking for the God of history. But even the avowed atheist who sees the truth of global warming and acts upon this truth as a *call* from history to be a realistic person is thereby more Jewish and more Christian than he or she may want to claim.

Such an understanding within our historical times with regard to Isaiah’s witness within his historical times is an example of the process of decoding any part of the Biblical witness. Such a dealing with Christian scripture is a necessary part of creating a Next Christian practice that speaks to those of us who are choosing a Christian practice for our nurture. Such an interpretation of Scripture also informs our witness as Christians to our human companions who experience with us the history of our times and the Final or Eternal Reality that we all confront within that history.