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The Concept of Election and Second Isaiah: Recent Literature

Joel S. Kaminsky

Abstract

In this article I contend that the conceptual categories utilized by many recent scholars engaged in analyzing the idea of election in the Hebrew Bible have led to a variety of interrelated misunderstandings, both of the idea of election in general and of specific texts invoked in such discussions. This article traces out the distortions in the scholarship on this central theological concept and shows how similarly problematic trends also occur in discussions of Second Isaiah, a text frequently cited in studies of election. I conclude by offering a brief sketch of both a new possible reading of Second Isaiah and the theological implications of such a reading for the contemporary situation.

It was over 50 years ago that H. H. Rowley wrote his book, THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF ELECTION, probably the most popular comprehensive theological examination of the full range of texts that are called to mind when one considers the biblical concept of Israel's election. While Rowley must be complimented for bringing renewed scholarly attention to the oft neglected and sometimes, as will be seen below, maligned concept of election, his own treatment of this issue was itself problematic in a number of ways. Rowley's understanding of the nature and function of election in the Hebrew Bible is tainted by his tendency to read the Hebrew Bible through the New Testament and subsequent Christian history. Thus he argues that Judaism failed to carry out its election responsibilities in two major ways. First, they rejected God's self-revelation in Christ.

> That Judaism has cared so little for One who, on lowest count, is the greatest of her sons, and the One who has most powerfully influenced the world, is a singular fact. . . . If, then, the first element of the service of the elect was to receive and cherish the revelation of God given to Israel, then the church performed it more fully than did Judaism [Rowley: 162].

Second, Rowley sees election as involving Israel's duty "to mediate to all men the law of her God, and to spread the heritage of her faith through all the world" (Rowley 164). And here too, as he notes, Israel has forfeited her status by abandoning her responsibilities.

> Through the Church Gentiles from every corner under heaven . . . have learned the law of God. The Jewish Bible has been translated into innumerable languages and has become the cherished Scripture by multitudes who would never have heard of it through Jews alone. These are objective facts. It is not merely that the church believed she was commissioned to take over the task of Israel. She did in fact take over from an Israel that was less willing to undertake it; and she has indisputably fulfilled that task in a great, though still insufficient, measure [Rowley: 165].

To some extent Rowley's biases are not purely Christian in nature, but are a rather complex mix of Christianity and various Enlightenment ideas that are closely knit together. On the Christian side of things, I would contend that Rowley's move to make the idea of an active mission to convert the world to biblical religion central to the Hebrew Bible's message is a Christian reading which reduces a much more nuanced idea into a simple binary opposition. What I mean by this is that Christianity's deep

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commitment to mission that Rowley wholeheartedly reads back into the Hebrew Bible appears to be driven at least partially by the sense that either one is elect or one is lost to God. However, while not usually noticed, much of the Hebrew Bible offers three categories of election which includes the elect, the non-elect and the anti-elect. And while the anti-elect like the Canaanites are generally seen as beyond the pale of divine mercy and doomed for destruction, the non-elect have a place within the divine economy even while they retain a different status than Israel, the elect of God.

As an unwitting child of the Enlightenment, Rowley assumes that Christianity is superior to Judaism because Christianity is a more inclusive and tolerant religion, as evidenced by its pervasiveness in the world today and its openness to converts. However Rowley's Enlightenment preference for tolerance and inclusiveness is itself tied up with a certain Christian reading of the Bible that assumes that Judaism became an exclusivistic and thus intolerant religion, thereby forfeiting its elect status to a tolerant and open Christianity which brought God's message of salvation to the gentiles. While such a stance is in my opinion fairly widespread, it is highly problematic on a number of fronts. To begin with, in much of the Hebrew Bible as well as in much of rabbinic thought being non-elect is in no way equivalent to being damned. Thus Jewish exclusivism properly understood might be more tolerant, by allowing the non-elect to serve God in their own way, than Rowley's Christian inclusivism that only recognizes a single path to salvation. Secondly, while there is a widespread tendency for contemporary Christians to see Christianity as a universal religion, meaning not only that all might attain salvation through it but also that all people are accepted as they are, historically it would be quite inaccurate to think of New Testament Christians as all embracing universalists and their Jewish counterparts as exclusivists who reject others out of hand. As Levenson points out, in the early New Testament period, "it was actually Judaism that was the larger community, spread throughout the world, with influence even in the centers of power, and attracting converts and semi-converts" (Levenson 1993, 216). Furthermore, early Christianity's sectarian and apocalyptic stance means that it conceived of itself as the rather small remnant who would survive the widespread coming divine judgment in which all non-believers would be subject to punishment.

While Christianity is often thought of positively for its openness to new converts, it is important to recognize that classical Judaism too developed a path to integrating converts, assuming they were willing to accept Judaism fully (Schiffman). Furthermore, it is not as if Christianity accepted converts as they were. Early Christians did not see themselves as universalists who accepted everyone because of their common descent from Adam, but rather as particularists who found a new way to link believing gentiles to Abraham and through him to God's elect people (Romans 4). Thus both religions saw converts as relinquishing their adamic state and joining the people of God. The argument was over whether this could be done through Sinai or Golgotha. And while Christianity ultimately spread more widely than Judaism, one could argue that in certain ways Judaism is in fact more, rather than less, universalistic. While the fate of the other nations is never fully worked out in the Hebrew Bible, in classical Jewish thinking those who are not Jewish are not excluded from salvation in the same manner in which much of classical Christian theology excludes those who fail to acknowledge Jesus as Christ from ultimate salvation. Thus Gentiles who observe the Noahide laws can attain the rewards of the righteous in the next world in at least some streams of rabbinic thinking as Rabbi Joshua's observation proves: "since Scripture stated, 'who have forgotten God,' it teaches that there are righteous (*yesh tzaddiqim*) among the nations and they do have a portion in the world-to-come" (Novak: 262, citing T. San. 13.2). Portraying Judaism as a particularistic religion with little openness to the larger world and Christianity as a universalistic religion that is completely open to others is far more polemical than historically accurate. And in fact, various Christians have started to recognize Christianity is indeed a particularistic religion as Christians have begun to find themselves in an increasingly secular and pluralistic world.

Thus when Rowley, and other more recent scholars who follow in his path, presume that the truest or best parts of the Bible are those that correlate most closely with a certain idea of universalism, this universalism is an Enlightenment ideal that is more indebted to Kant (Kant: esp. 115–90). than to anything in either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. And as Blenkinsopp notes, we cannot simply accept this notion of universalism and all that it implies as if it were an objective idea to which everyone always has and always will subscribe.

> The term "universalism," with its antonym "particularism," is one of those slippery words the precise meaning of which is rarely defined. In biblical theology it tends to recur in discussions of opposite trends in early Judaism, and especially where Judaism is contrasted unfavorably with early Christianity. The categories themselves are a relic of the Enlightenment with its postulate that true religion must be in conformity with the universally valid law of reason and a universally accessible moral law derived from them. . . . It

was in this prejudicial form that the terms came into use in the new discipline of Biblical Theology, which was itself a product of the Enlightenment [Blenkinsopp: 360].

The Problem of Election in More Recent Scholarship

While most contemporary scholars of the Hebrew Bible have managed to avoid Rowley's explicit supersessionism many actually end up embracing various forms of Enlightenment universalism even more fully than Rowley did and by doing so endorse an implicit supersessionism. I say most because one still finds statements such as the following from a work published in 1983 and still in print today: "This task of uniting 'election' with 'universal salvation' required the entire length of the Old Testament as a preparatory stage, the struggles of Jesus and the New Testament writers as a firm base for theological expression, and the missionary endeavors of the church for the last two millennia as only partial fulfillment" (Senior: 94). Interestingly, among those who strive to avoid explicit supersessionism even those who appear to be making radically different arguments often flatten the theological landscape of the text and not infrequently reach similar conclusions. While it is not possible to survey the field in an essay of this length, I will briefly comment on what I believe are the two most common contemporary approaches for dealing with the problem of election and try to uncover their underlying logic.

One strategy, represented by Rolf Knierim's theological program, recognizes the anti-Judaic bias in much biblical theology, but sees the root of the problem in biblical particularism itself. Knierim argues that passages "found in both the Old and the New Testaments, that [claim] all humanity is elected into the blessing of God's universal justice and salvation" (Knierim: 135) authorize one to dissolve the Bible's particularistic concept of election. Knierim must be complimented for not simply replacing Jewish exclusivist claims with Christian supersessionist ones that are equally exclusivist, as Rowley ends up doing. Rather he wishes to eliminate all such exclusivism. In this, Knierim is simply carrying out the Enlightenment embrace of universalism to its natural conclusion and by doing so he overcomes a serious flaw in Rowley's work. However, he can only accomplish this feat by giving no voice to the Bible's deep and pervasive particularism. While his goal is to be sensitive to issues of cultural diversity and pluralism, his solution ends up requiring Jews and Christians to give up one of their most cherished and central theological beliefs (see Kaminsky for fuller argumentation).

On the other end of the spectrum, one thinks of a recent essay by Jorge Pixley in which he apparently advocates a new found appreciation for biblical particularism. He sees God's election of the Jewish people as a biblical endorsement of the modern ethic "that the survival of peoples with their own particularities is a human value" and that we must build "societies in which 'all can find a place'" (Pixley: 235–36.) While such a view seems to celebrate particularity, it does so only in name and not in substance. Thus Pixley seems to think positively about tampering with cultures which resist modernity, such as ones where "kings have absolute rights" because they might benefit from being liberated from their own intolerable customs (Pixley: 235). Furthermore, as Levenson notes, Pixley is only able to use the biblical idea of chosenness as a support for the continuance of other ethnicities and cultures today, by ignoring one of its most distinctive dimensions: "In short, though the Hebrew Bible conceives of Israel as an ethnic group, its very existence is a standing reproach to ethnicity" (Levenson 2000: 243). This is because Israel owes its importance "to the universal God, who rules over nations, brooks no rivals, and demands submission of everyone" (Levenson 2000: 243). Thus once again while Pixley is to be commended for his sensitivity to issues of cultural diversity, in the end one senses that he cannot tolerate aspects of ancient Israelite or certain less than progressive modern cultures which embrace norms that run counter to the type of universalism that he ultimately endorses.

The fact that Pixley and Knierim end up in similar places is not surprising once one realizes that much of the current discussion of this issue is animated by the tendency to read the biblical text through certain contemporary events and ideas. In particular, the vivid memory of a number of recent attempts at ethnic cleansing and genocide in combination with current views of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism that have both grown out of and affected our understanding of these terrible events, have shaped recent scholarship on the concept of election in ways that cannot be ignored. While it is inevitable and even appropriate that this should occur, one must recognize that the biblical text might not be compatible with the now pervasive liberal democratic pluralistic ethic. More importantly, one must provide a corrective to the tendency to read the Bible through the lens of current popular notions of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism when such readings lead to serious distortions of the biblical text, especially those parts that deal with the idea of election. In their crudest form such readings equate the notion of election with modern racism. Thus the following excerpt from a 1937 CHRISTIAN CENTURY editorial blames the Jews for inventing and sustaining Nazi anti-semitism. "... it is just this

obsession with the doctrine of a covenant race that now menaces the whole world, ... [the Jewish] idea of an . . . exclusive culture, hallowed and kept unified by a racial religion, is itself the prototype of nazism" (CHRISTIAN CENTURY: 736). For those who think such ideas are limited to Christians or are not found in more recent scholarship, note the following quote, in which a recent Jewish author has reduced the idea of election to a concept inevitably resulting in genocidal xenophobia.

> As a way of working out and consolidating one's religious identity, the wholesale slaughter of people (whether in *ḥerem*, crusade, or *jihad*) is exactly what it seems to be, no more and no less. The pressure that builds up naturally in the idea of election is here unleashed, and the idea is given its fullest expression. The Conquest tradition is the primary expression and fulfillment of the idea—the *Urtext*. The biblical idea of election is the ultimate anti-humanistic idea [Cott: 204].

One major flaw in the move to assimilate the biblical idea of election to modern notions of ethnicity and race, as pointed out with great clarity by Jon Levenson, is that the biblical authors did not utilize such contemporary notions.

> They did not think that their chosenness rested upon racial and cultural superiority or that the unchosen status of outsiders followed from some innate deficiency because they did not have a concept of race or culture at all . . . . Indeed, one of the hardest points of biblical thought to understand is the concept of peoplehood, which is familial and natural without being racial and biologistic [Levenson 1996: 160].

But a second problem is that such views misrepresent the biblical idea of election in a number of important ways. First, as I have mentioned they usually reduce the three categories of the elect, the non-elect and the anti-elect down to two categories, the elect and everybody else who is assumed to be doomed for destruction. Furthermore, such views fail to recognize that there is both movement among the three categories as well as some nuances even within them. In terms of the permeability between categories, one thinks of someone like Ruth who is among the non-elect, or Rahab who is originally part of the anti-elect (Joshua 2); both characters successfully attach themselves and their families to the elect. And should one argue this only happens to individuals, what about the Gibeonites (Joshua 9)? They certainly escape the fate of the anti-elect, although perhaps it would be wrong to say they have now fully joined the elect, inasmuch as they seem to serve as permanent menial laborers in the temple (Josh 9:27). Alternatively, Achan who was elect is annihilated along with his immediate family as if he had become through his sinful actions one of the anti-elect (Josh 7).

Evidence that there is even a spectrum within the categories of election is supported by the Joseph story, a narrative in which Jacob's whole family belongs to the people of Israel who are indeed described as God's elect, yet Joseph is the one person who is the elect of the elect. One can think of a host of other instances in the Bible, such as Judah, the tribe from which David and his descendants come, or God's choice of Aaron's family for the priesthood and specific branches within Aaron's family for the honor of the high priesthood. This idea may be what texts like Second Isaiah have in mind when they describe one part of Israel functioning as God's servant and messenger to the rest of Israel in exile. Even among the elect there are gradations of election.

Much the same can be said of the non-elect, as some seem quite close to the elect and others much more distant. Thus Deut. 23:3–8 draws some rather sharp distinctions between Moabites and Ammonites as opposed to Edomites and Egyptians. When one looks at the language in Genesis 17 and 21 describing Ishmael's status, it is clear that even though he is outside of the covenant (17:19, 21), he is barely outside it. For starters, he is circumcised and thus has the bodily mark of the covenant and receives a special divine blessing, even though he is explicitly excluded from that covenant (Gen 17:18–26; 21:12–13). The category of the non-elect is far more ambiguous than that of the anti-elect, for the non-elect may or may not find favor with God, whereas the anti-elect simply incur divine disfavor for which they clearly will be punished. Unfortunately, too frequently these important nuances have been overlooked in general discussions concerning the biblical concept of election.

Having sketched out the major problems that have arisen when scholars have treated the biblical concept of election in general, it is now time see how these issues have affected the treatment of election within the prophetic corpus, or at least one small piece of this corpus that is regularly invoked in discussions of election, Second Isaiah.

The Nations in Second Isaiah's Prophetic Eschatology

Proof of the overarching biases towards universalism and against particularism can be found in the profusion of articles and even whole books dedicated to examining exactly how universalistic or nationalistic a prophet like Second Isaiah was (de Boer, Davidson, Gelston, Halas, Hollenberg, Levenson 1996, Melugin, Orlinsky, Snaith,

Van Winkle, Weinfeld, Wilson, et al). Up until very recently, almost all of the many arguments to make sense of the textual inconsistencies in Deutero-Isaiah could be fit into two rubrics (see Wilson, 1–10 for summary). One position maintains that Second Isaiah is ultimately a universalist; in such a reading the more particularistic and nationalist elements are either ignored (Blank: 138–60), or played down in one of the following ways. They are attributed to his early ministry which he eventually overcame (Lindblom, 400–03, 428; Stuhlmueller), they are viewed as interpolations from a later more regressive nationalist writer (note Westermann, 360 where he explains the nationalistic thrust of Isa 60:12, a passage from Third Isaiah with close affinities to Second Isaiah, as "a later expansion of the text"), or they are proof of how difficult it is to fully transcend one's cultural framework (Gelston 1965, 316). A second group of scholars argue that Second Isaiah is for all intents and purposes a nationalist, not a universalist. In this reading, many of the universalistic passages are challenged as misinterpretations or qualified by placing them into a larger contextual framework that is heavily nationalistic in tenor (de Boer, 80-110; Orlinsky, 36–51; Snaith, 154–65).

It should be noted that not only are scholars arguing over how to make sense of the existence of tensions within a biblical book but their assessment of whether certain passages are more or less particularistic is greatly affected by their scholarly framework. Thus there is no real agreement on the exact meaning of phrases such as "a light to the nations" found in 42:6 and 49:6 and its close analogue, "a light to the peoples" in 51:4 (perhaps hinted at in the light imagery in 60:2), and "a covenant to the people" in 42:6 and 49:8. Do these phrases indicate Israel's mission to the gentile nations, or are they describing God's relationship with Israel or the servant that may be witnessed by the nations but is for the benefit of Israel alone? Or, do we have yet a third possibility that envisages God's doing something for Israel's benefit that could have a positive effect on at least some of the other nations?

Furthermore, the same problems are raised by other images found throughout Second and Third Isaiah as well. When one hears of God's calling to the far parts of the earth, is he calling those nations to him or only indicating that those nations will acknowledge Israel's God and even assist in bringing the exiled Israelites back home (49:1; 51:5; 60:9; 66:19)? When God speaks of his justice or Torah going out to the world (41:1; 42:1, 4; 51:4) is this a positive thing for the nations, or a proclamation of negative judgment upon them? Unfortunately, it is difficult to escape the circularity of all such argumentation. Generally, if one assumes the thrust of Second Isaiah is universalistic then all such terms seem to vindicate this position. On the other hand, others beginning from a more nationalistic perspective feel that if one scrutinizes these terms and reads them in their larger textual units, they are not nearly so universalistic as first imagined. At present, it seems most unlikely that any consensus will be reached on the exact meaning of the contested expressions, thus insuring that neither position will ever achieve a decisive victory.

The recognition that neither of the two classical arguments about the true nature of Second Isaiah's prophecies is likely to achieve a consensus has led to the recent emergence of a third line of argumentation seeking to move beyond the current impasse. Generally thinkers pursuing this line of reasoning qualify the notion of universalism. Thus Gelston argues that there are three strands in this concept.

> The first is an affirmation that YHWH is the only true God, sovereign over all creation, and therefore over all mankind. The second is that this truth will be recognized by the Gentile nations no less than by Israel, with the corollary that they will submit to him and acknowledge his universal rule . . . [and the] third strand, consisting of the universal offer of the experience of salvation [Gelston 1992: 396].

In such a view one may be able to give full due to both the more nationalistic and universalistic images, as Van Winkle does in the following passage:

> The tension between universalism and nationalism may be resolved by recognizing that for Deutero-Isaiah the salvation of the nations does not preclude their submission to Israel. The prophet does not envisage the co-equality of Jews and gentiles. He expects that Israel will be exalted, and that she will become YHWH's agent who will rule the nations in such a way that justice is established and mercy shown. This rule is both that for which the nations wait expectantly and that to which they must submit [Van Winkle: 457].

While Van Winkle is only interested in clarifying exactly what the text says, scholars pursuing this third line of reasoning who have contemporary theological interests commonly endorse an evolutionary model that rates texts like Second Isaiah against a standard that it is assumed all agree upon. Thus Gelston approvingly cites his earlier article from 1965 and proclaims that Second Isaiah "discerned in moments of high vision that glorious fact that YHWH's salvation was for all the world, while at others times he sank back to a more traditional and superior attitude towards the Gentiles" (Gelston 1997: 397 citing Gelston 1965: 316).

In fact, it seems relatively clear that regardless of the particular line of argument taken by a given scholar, almost all modern scholarship on Second Isaiah assumes that being nationalistic is bad and being universalistic is good. As Urbach has noted, "in studies of Jewish history and religion terms such as 'particularism and universalism' . . . are frequently used. This terminology also serves ideological purposes, and accordingly acquires a different weighting, depending on whether it is used by the opponents of Judaism or its defenders, while both fervently uphold the ideal of universalism" (Urbach, 269). Thus one simply needs to figure out where Second Isaiah falls on this scale. Few have stopped to ask whether a universalistic stance is in no instance problematic. Or better yet, whether the attempt to fit ancient Israelite texts into modern conceptual categories might do violence to the true nature of these texts. One of the problems with the very use of these categories is that they do not easily fit the ancient Israelite context (Brett).

A religious tendency towards universalism and inclusion is not necessarily a tolerant attitude

For example, it is often assumed in such discussions that universalism is good because it is inclusive and therefore more tolerant of others. Alternatively, nationalism is conceived as bad because it is exclusive and thus by definition intolerant. However, in the Bible there are instances where this pattern doesn't work. Thus Deuteronomy 14:21, legislation which permits one to sell meat from an animal that dies by itself to resident aliens, is more exclusivistic than is Leviticus 17:15, which requires resident aliens to observe this purity rule. However, one could certainly argue that forcing resident aliens to observe Israelite laws is less tolerant than allowing them to follow their own customs. This point is germane to the larger issue of election inasmuch as one needs to be aware that a religious tendency towards universalism and inclusion is not necessarily a tolerant attitude (Chadwick). It can lead to a missionary zeal to make all outsiders insiders. And the inverse is also the case. Not every particularistic and exclusivistic image is inherently bad or simply a primitive holdover from the archaic past. One suspects that exclusivistic images so out of favor today may yet be redeemed and put to use more widely again at some future point, or may even be of use today in contexts where groups using the Bible as sacred scripture may be more marginalized or oppressed.

One further point is that even the propensity to pair universalism and inclusivism over against particularism and exclusivism is problematic when applied to the biblical period. When texts like Isaiah 56, generally attributed to Trito-Isaiah, speak for including foreigners and eunuchs, they are really merging inclusivism with nationalism and particularism. This text is not endorsing a multi-cultural approach to worship, but rather permitting a select few who wish to merge with the community to become insiders; yet doing so requires that they give up their former practices. Whether they also give up their former identities and become part of the chosen people or in fact remain distinct but benefit from being closely allied to the chosen people is not something which can be determined fully on the basis of the texts involved.

Thus one can see that the difficulty in using the categories of universalism and particularism in analyzing the biblical text is twofold. Firstly, because ancient Israelite thought never operated within these intellectual categories their use is often less than helpful in reaching a clear understanding of various biblical passages. Secondly, even while many scholars are constantly measuring Israel's success on how far its universalism reached, it remains unclear that universalism so conceived is either a widespread belief today or even a belief that is more defensible than all expressions of particularism. As Orlinsky noted over thirty years ago: "Apart from the fact that it is not the concern of scholarship to deal in judgment value and to mete out awards for backward- or forward- looking views, we tend to overlook all too readily that our own outlook in this area is still virtually identical with that of the Bible" (Orlinsky 1970: 236). While some might disagree with Orlinsky's view that scholarship should never make value judgments, his words are a good caution against the tendency simply to measure the biblical text against our current values. The text must be read in its context and its value system must be allowed to challenge our values even as we allow our values to challenge the biblical text.

The realization that not only are the dichotomous categories of universalism/particularistic nationalism troubling because they are alien to the biblical text, but also because even from a modern perspective such ideas may be quite problematic, has begun to inspire a few scholars to analyze the biblical text in its own terms and allow its conceptual framework to challenge contemporary values. Here one thinks of Joseph Blenkinsopp cited above and most prominently of Jon Levenson's work, specifically his article, *The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism* (Levenson 1996). Firstly Levenson must be complimented for clarifying the problem with the use of the term universalism in discussions of religion.

> Although some religious traditions may on occasion conceive of themselves as representing or answering to a universal human condition, as a matter of historical fact all religious traditions are particular, since none includes everyone. . . . To be sure while no religion is universal some aspire to be. In this sense a 'universal religion' may mean simply one that accepts proselytes, that is, one that is willing or eager to extend its particularity indefinitely. Or it may signify one that is found in a large number of different cultures. In this case, the term "universal' is misleading since it has not transformed a highly diverse humanity into one universal body. Instead, it has formed symbiotic relationships with various enduring particularisms [Levenson 1996: 144–45; see Blenkinsopp: 361 for a similar argument].

More importantly Levenson has made a strong case that "the universalistic thrust of modern democratic, capitalistic societies undermines all particularisms, especially those based on the claim of historical revelation" (Levenson 1996: 160). Thus both Jews and Christians "to the extent that they are true to their foundational literatures, must continue to affirm the essential dichotomy between insiders and outsiders" (Levenson 1996: 166). Of course, by doing so they inevitably pose a challenge to those who think that all belief systems that fail to subscribe to a democratic egalitarian universalism are in fact deficient.

In Levenson's approach, biblical particularism contains a universal horizon, but this universal horizon is not a new superior stage of religious faith. Rather, this universal horizon is rooted in and draws its nourishment from the soil of biblical particularism. A model such as this one not only explains, but gives positive theological value to the existence of expressions in texts like Second Isaiah that seem to be double edged, containing both a universalistic thrust but always maintaining a deep particularism about Israel's elect status.

Assuming Levenson's critique is on the mark, one may ask two further questions: 1) How might one give a sound biblical reading of a text like Second Isaiah, particularly of its ideas concerning the concept of Israel's election? 2) What possible meaning can the notion of Israel's special election that is espoused by texts like Second Isaiah have for biblical readers today? To answer these questions it will be helpful first to place Second Isaiah's ideas into a broader canonical framework. Here a comparison with the biblical story of Joseph is especially apt, for there are a number of striking resemblances between these two texts. In both Second Isaiah and the Joseph narrative there are three basic categories of people: the elect of the elect who are the ultimate focus of each text, those belonging to the larger elect group but not specially chosen, and the other nations of the world. In the Joseph story the elect of the elect is of course Joseph himself, while in Second Isaiah it is the Israelite person or group associated with the servant language. In both the Joseph story and Second Isaiah the specially elect brings about a reconciliation between the specially elected one and the larger elect group as a whole. Thus the bulk of the Joseph story focuses on how the divided sons of Israel are reunited again in a way that overcomes many of the family troubles that led to the original rift. Furthermore, Joseph's suffering is given theological meaning (Gen 45:5–8). And while the image of the servant is notoriously difficult to pin down firmly, I think it is fair to say that there are indeed places in Second Isaiah in which the servant person or group (see diagram in Anderson: 492 for a precise picture of this fluctuation) functions as the specially elect who brings about renewed national unity (Isa 49:5) in a way that gives theological meaning to the suffering of the elect. (While Hollenberg has overstated the matter by arguing that in all of Second Isaiah the servant is one part of Israel who is addressing the larger people who have fallen away, there are passages in Second Isaiah in which this explanation is highly probable). Certainly the suffering of this elect person or group brings about a national rejuvenation. Finally, in the Joseph story, while the focus is more immediately on Jacob's extended family, the result is that Joseph, working under a benign Pharaoh, preserves the whole world and thus brings God's blessing to the nations of the world at large (Gen 41:57 in fulfillment of Gen 12:3). And similarly in Second Isaiah, while the restoration of Israel as a people is the prime focus of the text, the specially elect working under the benign Cyrus foresee that the ultimate goal will be the recognition of God's sovereignty throughout the world, which will result in a renewed cosmos in which God's blessing will become fully manifest to the benefit of all.

By now one will have noticed that in certain ways my reading of the notion of election in both Second Isaiah and the Joseph narrative affirms Rowley's insight that election is for service. However, I disagree with his particular Christian understanding of the nature of such service. In the Hebrew Bible, the service is not primarily about a mission to bring about the conversion of the nations into the elect, but rather it is about the specially elect being a mediator of God's blessing both to the more general elect group, as well as to the non-elect nations of the world, who remain non-elect even while benefiting from this divine plan. Although such a theology might be labeled as hierarchical and possibly imperialistic by today's standards, one can argue that the Christian notion of mission is even more imperialistic inasmuch as it claims that there is only one path to salvation. But more importantly, measuring

Israelite theology against the standards of modern democracy is not only ridiculously anachronistic inasmuch as all forms of governance in antiquity were hierarchical, but it leads one to miss the fact that the biblical text's use of hierarchical images is primarily an attempt to express God's transcendence over all humans. While some biblical texts like Psalm 2 express this through the idea of the nations submitting to God's anointed, other like Second Isaiah conceive of it by the nations submitting to the people of Israel as a whole. These images are based on the belief that Israel has already submitted to God by accepting the covenant at Sinai.

Still, one might ask, what possible value can Second Isaiah and other biblical texts that speak of the notion of Israel's election in stubbornly particularistic terms even when they address more universalistic concerns have for those living in the modern world? Here I think it best to answer such a question first from a Jewish theological perspective, then examine the possible implications of such a theology in reference to Christianity and finally turn to the issue of the usefulness of such ideas for the larger contemporary culture. While some may not be aware of it, it is precisely the loving language of Second Isaiah that can be put to use in those contexts where the elect have lost their way and need to be reminded that they are God's elect. Thus in Judaism several lections from Second and Third Isaiah are traditionally read in synagogue on the sabbaths following the 9th of Av, the day that marks the destruction of both holy temples, until Rosh Hashanah, New Years Day, when the world and the community are liturgically renewed once again. And of course, not a few Jews have felt that texts from the latter part of Isaiah have deepened meaning in the wake of the Shoah, when the Jewish community draws strength from such texts as it attempts to reconstitute itself after perhaps the greatest disaster it has ever experienced. Certainly, these texts have played a role in the founding of the modern state of Israel, and more importantly, their universal horizon serves as a reminder that the revivification of the Jewish people has a higher purpose than merely continued Jewish survival.

Contemporary Christian theologians might also benefit from a strong reappropriation of the idea of election, particularly from a realization that it involves a union of universalistic and more particularistic ideas. For the failure to do so not only cuts off Christianity from its deepest scriptural roots but threatens it with a slow but ultimately fatal assimilation into the secularism that is widespread in the West. Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible's notion of election is useful in other ways. Thus, those more liberal Christians who are either troubled by the classical idea of mission or who subscribe to a two covenant theory will find texts like Second Isaiah an excellent resource as they theologically rethink their tradition. In fact Second Isaiah's view of mission is much closer to the one expressed by Jesus in Matt. 10:5ff in which the disciples are sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Such a mission might have benefits for the non-elect but its purpose is not to make the non-elect elect. For those who subscribe to the more traditional view of the church's missionary goals as does the Vatican's recently released *Dominus Iesus*, it is still useful to acknowledge that even while texts like Second Isaiah may be the fountainhead of what became the Christian ideal of mission, as indicated above, its conceptions of election and service are quite different from the later church's. Such an acknowledgement might help the church in its efforts to recover a fuller sense of the interconnected but rather distinct notions of service, vocation and mission and the ways in which these ideas are related to the concept of election. Certainly Second Isaiah could provide resources for those seeking to strengthen the resolve of the elect in the face of external cultural pressures and do so in a way that reminds believers that election ultimately is fulfilled in service to others. Greater attention to these texts might lead to a greater respect for Judaism as well. No longer will the debate between the two sister religions be characterized as one between an immature, parochial and intolerant Judaism and a universalistic Christianity. Rather, it will become clear that this is an argument between two equally particularistic faiths who have a genuine disagreement about who the elect are and what election implies.

In terms of the larger culture, it seems to me that the biblical concept of election, a concept that embodies the union of particularism and universalism, may indeed provide some guidance in the current rather confused cultural climate in which particularisms are given some modest level of respect, but are frowned upon when they make claims of universalistic import. The result is that rather than having a vigorous debate among a variety of compelling religious and cultural visions, one instead ends up with a rather boring relativism that demands each group refrain from making any universalistic claims. The current state of affairs likely grew out of the sense that this is the only way to create tolerance and prevent religious wars. While inter-religious warfare is indeed a great concern, this past century has taught us that the ability to commit atrocities is not contingent on subscribing to a traditional religious viewpoint. Rather, any human institution or ideology has the potential to be distorted and then used for nefarious purposes. Furthermore, it must be remembered that a reduction in religious intolerance can come about in two very different ways. One involves emptying religions of their particularity which will indeed lessen intolerance, but

will do so by creating a climate of total indifference for all things religious. The other is to work to create an environment in which individual religions engage each other and the world in their full particularity. Only in this latter way can religion play an active and positive role in shaping our contemporary world. For the power of each religious vision to motivate humans to transform the larger world is itself inextricably bound up with the particularistic ideas which gave birth to and continue to nourish such visions. It is precisely this insight that my final quote from Second Isaiah so eloquently affirms.

> But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand [Isa 41:8–10].

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