

Disrupting the Status Quo

Father Richard describes how the prophet's truth, message, and authority come from an experience of the heart of God:

One of the gifts of the prophets is that they evoke a crisis where one did not appear to exist before their truth-telling. In the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. was blamed for creating violence—but those who had eyes to see and were ready to hear recognized, “My God, the violence was already there!” Structural violence was inherent in the system, but it was denied and disguised. No one was willing to talk about it. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and others said, “We’re going to talk about it.”

Prophets always talk about the untalkable and open a huge new area of “talkability.” For those who are willing to go there, it helps us see what we didn’t know how to see until they helped us to see it. That’s how we begin to recognize a prophet—there is this widening of seeing, this deepening of a truth that was always there.

Prophets generate a crisis, so it’s almost understandable why they’re usually called troublemakers and so often killed. They generate the crisis because while everybody else is saying the emperor is beautifully clothed, they are willing to say, “No, he’s naked.” We’re not supposed to say that the emperor has no clothes!

It’s the nature of culture to have its agreed-upon lies. Culture holds itself together by projecting its shadow side elsewhere. That’s called the “scapegoat mechanism.” René Girard, Gil Bailie, and others have pointed out that the scapegoat mechanism is the subtext of the entire biblical revelation. It’s the tendency to export our evil elsewhere and to hate it there, and therefore to remain in splendid delusion. If there isn’t a willingness to be critical of our country, our institution, and ourselves, we certainly can’t be prophets. [1]

When the prophet is missing from the story, the shadow side of things is always out of control.

It seems the prophet’s job is first to deconstruct current illusions, which is the status quo, and then reconstruct on a new and honest foundation. That is why the prophet is never popular with the comfortable or with those in power. Only a holy few have any patience with the deconstruction of egos and institutions.

The prophets are “radical” teachers in the truest sense of the word. The Latin *radix* means root, and the prophets go to the root causes and root vices and “root” them out! Their educational method is to expose and accuse with no holds barred. Ministers and religion in general tend to concentrate on effects and symptoms, usually a mopping up exercise after the fact. As someone once put it, we throw life preservers to people drowning in the swollen stream, which is all well and good—but prophets work far upstream to find out why the stream is swollen in the first place. [2]

[1] Adapted from Joan Chittister and Richard Rohr, *Prophets Then, Prophets Now* (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2006).

[2] Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Soul Brothers: Men in the Bible Speak to Men Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 31, 39, 40.



IF

*If you want others to be more loving,
choose to love first.*

*If you want a reconciled outer world,
reconcile your own inner world.*

*If you are working for peace out there,
create it inside as well.*

*If you notice other people's irritability,
let it go of your own.*

*If you wish to find some other outer stillness,
find it within yourself.*

*If you are working for justice,
treat yourselves justly.*

*If you find yourself resenting the faults of others,
stop resenting your own.*

*If the world seems desperate,
let go of your own despair.*

*If you want a just world,
start being just in small ways yourself.*

*If your situation feels hopeless,
honor the one spot of hope inside you.*

*If you want to find God, then honor God within you
and you will always see God beyond you.*

For it is only God in you who knows where and how to look for God.

Richard Rohr