

❖ Other Voices ❖

The situation of a person immersed in the prophets' words is one of being exposed to a ceaseless shattering of indifference, and one needs a skull of stone to remain callous to such blows.

ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL, *The Prophets*

The prophetic word ... has its origins in an impassioned dialogue; yet the dialogue never tries to climb into the realm of general religious truth, but instead uses even the most suspect means to tie the listening partner down to his particular time and place in order to make him understand his own situation before God. In order to reach this partner ... the prophets use every possible rhetorical device—they are not afraid to use extremely radical forms of expression or even caricature. With certain exceptions, their concern is not the objective proof of what was generally believed, but rather to be highly critical of Israel's religious traditions.

GERHARD VON RAD, *The Message of the Prophets*

Israel believes that God will always forgive her and act favorably toward her. She has merely to go through the motions of worship and of return, and God will come gently and lovingly to her aid

We see how very closely our lives parallel Israel's, for in our time, many believe that God no longer judges anyone. God is only loving, God is peaceable, God is always forgiving. Like Judah in the time of Jeremiah, we think we can break all the Ten Commandments and then go into the house of the Lord and declare, "We are delivered!"—only to go on doing all of our abominations. We believe we can go on sinning, in order that grace may abound.

ELIZABETH ACHEMEIER, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets*

The prophet was an individual who said No to his society, condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, waywardness, and syncretism. He was often compelled to proclaim the very opposite of what his heart expected. His fundamental objective was to reconcile man and God. Why do the two need reconciliation? Perhaps it is due to man's false sense of sovereignty, to his abuse of freedom, to his aggressive, sprawling pride, resenting God's involvement in history.

ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL, *The Prophets*

In the face of economic exploitation, maladministration of the legal system, corrupt and self-serving leadership, and an inward turning cultus, the most vulnerable members of Israelite society (the poor, the needy, the

widow, the orphan, the weak) were in need of advocates. The prophets became those advocates, and in so doing suggested that these most vulnerable and their welfare are the most adequate measure of justice and righteousness in the community. It is the task of covenant community to secure value and place for full life to those most unable to secure it for themselves. That Israel had failed to do this is the subject of some of the prophets' harshest indictment and most energetic advocacy.

BRUCE C. BIRCH, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*

Jesus regarded his ministry as in continuity with, and bringing to a climax, the work of the great prophets of the Old Testament This is how his contemporaries must have seen him, and did in fact see him. Like Elijah or Jeremiah, Jesus was proclaiming a message from the covenant god, and living it out with symbolic actions. He was confronting the people with the folly of their ways, summoning them to a different way, and expecting to take the consequences of doing so.

N. T. WRIGHT, *Jesus and the Victory of God*

The Bible knows so well the source of our sin—in our evil hearts.... Thus the prophets call for repentance, turning, change in our hearts.... The presupposition is that heart-rending repentance will lead to new action, that out of the heart there will flow goodness, kindness, peace, love, justice, and righteousness. For “to repent” in biblical thought is to turn around, to go in the opposite direction, to change the direction of one’s life-walk. And if the change has not been made, there has been no true repentance.

ELIZABETH ACHEMEIER, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets*

[Jesus’] social goal is utterly traditional: It is that of the Mosaic corpus, with its bias toward the sojourner, the widow, and the orphan. It is that of Isaiah and Micah, the vision of a world taught the arts of peacemaking It is the ingathering of the nations in the age of the anointing. What differs about Jesus is not a different goal: It is that he sees, for both himself and his disciples, a different mode of implementation. It is not the path of the quietists or of the Essenes, who went to the desert to wait for god to act, or of the Pharisees, who kept themselves pure within society, disavowing the present world’s structures, but leaving it to a future divine intervention to set them straight. It is not the path of Zealot presumption, claiming to be the party of righteousness authorized by God to trigger the coming of the new age through a paroxysm of righteous insurrection. Each of those standard type responses to “the mess the world is in” is a different answer to the question, “How do *we* get from here to there?” Jesus’ alternative is not to answer that question in a new way, but to renew, as the prophets had always been trying to do, the insistence that the question is how to get from there to here. How can the lordship of Yahweh, affirmed in principle

from all eternity, be worthily confessed as grace through faith? How can the present world be rendered transparent to the reality already there, that the sick are to be healed and the prisoners freed? We are not called to love our enemies in order to make them our friends. We are called to act out love for them because at the cross it has been effectively proclaimed from all eternity they were our brothers and sisters.

J O H N H O W A R D Y O D E R, “The Prophetic Task of Pastoral Ministry: The Gospels” in *The Pastor as Prophet*

Paul says [in 1 Corinthians 14:1] that prophecy is the highest gift after love because it is to the benefit and advantage of the church, since by it everybody learns the principles of God’s law.

A M B R O S I A S T E R (4th Century), *Commentary on Paul’s Epistle*

The true prophet speaks with the heart of a pastor and with the passion of one who has seen and felt the pain and suffering of the dispossessed, the helpless, and the disenfranchised. The true prophet’s denunciation has the force of righteousness to the extent that it is born out of care—both for the oppressed and for the oppressors.

R O N A L D H. S U N D E R L A N D and **E A R L E. S H E L P**, “Prophetic Ministry: An Introduction,” in *The Pastor as Prophet*

The dichotomy of prophetic and pastoral is a misunderstanding of both. I can think of no one in our tradition who is more intensely engaged in pastoral care than Elijah. He practices it with the widow by being present in her need. He practices it with the false prophets by exposing their fraud and permitting a faithful confession. He practices it with the king by telling the truth. And in each case, as Yahweh’s sovereignty is celebrated, the power for life is present—even to Ahab. The unleashing of the power for life in this world bent on death depends on pastoral work that is rigorous and prophetic work that is passionate. But such pastoral-prophetic work requires being fed by ravens, not at the king’s table.

W A L T E R B R U E G G E M A N N, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*

Prophecy is no longer solely the role of specific individuals, although individual prophets will, I hope, still be present. It is the community itself that is now prophetic, for it is a community formed by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, which means that it cannot be what it is without understanding itself to be accountable to the great prophets of Israel.

S T A N L E Y H A U E R W A S, *Christian Existence Today*

The alternative community discharges a modeling mission. The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately.... The church is thus not chaplain or priest to the powers running the world.

J O H N H O W A R D Y O D E R, *The Priestly Kingdom*