

Quotes from Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann

The prophet is called to be a child of the tradition, one who has taken it seriously in the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language, who is so at home in that memory that the points of contact and incongruity with the situation of the church in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency.

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

Every act of a minister who would be prophetic is part of a way of evoking, forming and reforming an alternative community.

The task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticising and energising.

The urging I make to those who would be prophets is that we not neglect to do our work about who God is...

The evocation of an alternative reality consists at least in part in the battle for language and the legitimisation of a new rhetoric. The language of empire is surely the language of managed reality, of production and schedule and market. But that language will never permit or cause freedom because there is no newness in it. Doxology is the ultimate challenge to the language of managed reality and it alone is the universe of discourse in which energy is possible.

The possibility of passion is a primary prophetic agenda... Passion as the capacity and readiness to care, to suffer, to die and to feel is the enemy of imperial reality.

We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable. We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought.

Imagination is a danger thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.

The characteristic way of the prophet is that of poetry and lyric.

The proper idiom of the prophet in cutting through royal numbness is language of grief.

The prophet is engaged in a battle for language in an effort to create a different epistemology out of which another community might emerge.

It is the task of prophetic imagination and ministry to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God.

What a commission it is to speak a future that none think imaginable! Of course that cannot be done by inventing new symbols for that is wishful thinking. Rather it means

to move back into the deepest memories of this community and activate those very symbols that have always been the very basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness. Therefore the symbols of hope cannot be general and universal but must be those that have been known concretely in this particular history. And when the prophet returns with the community to those deep symbols they will discern that hope is not a late tacked on hypothesis to serve a crisis but rather the primal dimension of every memory of this community. The memory of this community begins in God's promissory address to the darkness of chaos, to barren Sarah, and to oppressed Egyptian slaves. The speech of God is first about an alternative future.

The hope filled language of prophecy in cutting through the royal despair and hopelessness is the language of amazement... the language of amazement is the ultimate energiser.

The poet is not changing external politics but is reclaiming imagination... We ought not underestimate the power of the poet.

The only serious energising needed or offered is the discernment of God in all his freedom, the dismantling of structures of weariness and the dethronement of the powers of fatigue.

Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment and quintessence of the prophetic tradition. He brought to public expression the newness given by God.

A newness has begun and it is a newness to the victimised ones. Invited to join are all those who have groaned under the ways of the old kings.

The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate energising for the new future.

The prophet lives in tension with the tradition. While the prophet is indeed shaped by the tradition, breaking free from the tradition to assert the new freedom of God is also characteristic of the prophet.

Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet, and more than a prophet, practiced in most radical form the main elements of prophetic ministry and imagination. On the one hand he practiced criticism of the deathly world around him. The dismantling was fully wrought in his crucifixion, in which he himself embodied the thing dismantled. On the other hand he practiced the energising of the new future given by God. This energising was fully wrought in his resurrection, in which he embodied the new future given by God.

Quotes from Refounding the Church by Gerald Arbuckle

There can be no constructive change at all, even in church, unless there is some form of dissent. By dissent I mean simply the proposing of alternatives, and a system that is not continuously examining alternatives is not likely to evolve creatively.

Organisations the church included, are built to administer, maintain and protect from harm that which already exists; in contrast creative or dissenting people are designed to give birth to that which has never been in existence before. The dissenters threaten the well oiled structures of an organisation's process. The alternatives they propose are seen as chaotic, something to be vigorously avoided by those taking comfort in the predictable and safe ways of tradition.

Dissenters need to propose and pursue their options for action with respect patience and tolerance, gifts of course so brilliantly exemplified in the prophets of old. Jesus Christ was such a principled dissenter.

We require leaders giddied with charismatically inspired creative imaginations (Rahner)... For them the general formula for any innovation: a willingness to question the status quo, pragmatic imagination, an idea, initiative, courage, and a few friends to help the project off the ground.

There are two categories of dissenters required - authority dissenters and pathfinding dissenters... The primary task of the authority dissenters demands that they discover and use the gifts of the pathfinding dissenters for the benefit of the church... Pathfinding dissenters devise pastorally appropriate ways of bridging the gap between the gospel and cultures. Not only do they dream up pastorally appropriate strategies, but they actually move to implement them. **They are dreamers who do!**

As the history of religious life illustrates, the more religious are doing their job correctly, the greater the tension and conflicts will be with the hierarchical church. The fear of suffering must not dissuade them from their primary task of being martyrs of prophecy within society and the church.

Jesus Christ himself and all the prophets throughout history have acted as dissenters.

When thinking of the church's primary task of preaching the kingdom within an ever changing world we need apostolic creativity of quantum leap proportions. In other words renewal of existing pastoral strategies is insufficient. Rather we require radically different and as yet unimagined ways to relate the good news to the pastoral challenges of the world... Thus prophetic people or 'apostolic quantum leap' persons are needed within the church to critique or dissent from the conventional and ineffective pastoral wisdom of the present. Without these courageous people the church simply cannot fulfil its mission.

The task of the transforming leader is primarily to foster a collaborative or participative atmosphere in which this trust and mutuality exist as the prerequisites for creative action or strategies for change.

Innovate or die. There are no exceptions

Both innovators and adaptors are creative persons and needed, especially the innovative or refounding type; both threaten the group because they dissent from the acceptable way of doing things, but it is the innovator that particularly endangers the group's security and is thus the least liked.

A word of warning..., Old testament prophets were covenant refounding persons... yet in their lifetime were others who claimed to be prophetic but who were dangerous agitators... Likewise in the church today there are agitators - they are not refounding persons because they lack the virtues indicative of authenticity - joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self control... The discernment of the authentic as opposed to the agitator is difficult.

Dissenters expand our imaginations. They are upside down thinkers, terribly annoying when we are too attached to the security of our ideas or habits, but very necessary if we want to know what God wills of us.

Obstacles within existing structures are often so considerable this protection and the encouragement to establish new structures are necessary if these refounding persons are to have the space in which to succeed. Instead of having to lose apostolic energy battling to explain insights to colleagues frightened of the new ideas, the creative pastoral agents protected by the authority dissenter can be left in peace to get on with the task of apostolic innovation.

The quality of a person's integrity is what determines authentic leadership, not whether or not he/she holds a position of authority.

To sit in the liminality or the darkness/chaos of not knowing without distractions or the escapism of busyness is the way to new insights.

The new belongs elsewhere - the axiom means that a refounding project should not normally be placed in the midst of existing works/structures, where prophetic people would be under constant critical assessment by members of the community and required to waste invaluable energy apologising for what they are doing.

Active religious communities die if they turn aside from their primary task of evangelising outwards. Once leaders cease to challenge by words and by personal example, their followers to follow Christ's missionary vision of faith/justice for the contemporary world they have sot their prophetic gift of leadership.

Quotes from From Chaos to Mission by Gerald Arbuckle

Signs of the ineffectiveness of traditional training methods are everywhere.

(We need to) build radically new formation structures and processes in harmony with Christ's mission to the church and world.

Staff members must be competent in their subject at the levels of theory and experience; they must be prepared to be flexible and adapt their approach to the current learner's experience.

Religious orders are a kind of shock therapy of the Holy Spirit for the church as a whole... They are the institutionalised form of a dangerous memory within the church. (Metz)

Monasteries trained candidates for a life of rigorous predictability; friars needed candidates who could adapt to rapid change.

If their ministry is to be among the poor then that is where they must be formed.

The role of the superior was to facilitate the interaction or dialogue of members in the community for the sake of this prophetic mission to the world.

For Ignatius it was the ministry to the world by individual Jesuits that was primary, not the community. This does not lessen the importance of community. On the contrary community was to be an essential support for the ministry of Jesuits to the world.... Community life had to be so flexible that it forged this diversity of ministries... He called his followers to seek God in all things, that is to be contemplatives in action. This meant that they did not have to withdraw into cloisters to find God, but had to develop the art of being open to God's presence wherever they found themselves.

If Jesuits were to serve the pastoral needs of lay people then they had to train with them.

There were dangers (19th 20th century) in priests from religious orders accepting parish duties. Priesthood as we have seen was not intended to be the identifying characteristic of their vocation but rather commitment to prophetic ministry was to be their distinguishing quality. For this ministry they had to be able to move quickly and creatively respond to the most urgent pastoral needs. In practice, parish ministry had become over time the arena for sacral/ritualistic not prophetic action by the priest, within very set geographical boundaries. Ignatius and founders who followed his apostolic model were most reluctant to permit their followers to assume an apostolate demanding long term commitment such as a parish simply because this would hinder or prevent them from living out their prophetic charisms. Once a congregational priest entered the parish structure most commonly he became

absorbed in maintaining the cultic status quo and an agent of the bishop supporting an institutionalised ghetto church.

The refounding of formation programmes may evoke tension with the institutional church but congregational leaders and formatters must prophetically persist in their efforts. If they wish to be true to the vision of their founders they have no alternative.

The purpose of formation: to foster the art of inculturation

Leaders must have the skills to be comfortable with chaos, that is with uncertainty and rapid change.

Religious are called to prophetic ministry. Hence candidates who enter a religious congregation must be clearly told that they join not to be priests as such but prophetic agents of the gospel. They are to exercise their priesthood as the service to the prophetic mission.

It is essential that the novices be in contact with a spiritual guide, that is a man or woman of God whose primary concern is not theory or book learning, but one whose life and learning have been integrated, and who has come to know the ways of God by experience.

Prophetic Dialogue By Bevans and Schroeder

God is a movement, an embrace, a flow - more personal than we can ever imagine - who is always and everywhere present in God's creation... working for its wholeness and healing and calling creation to its fullness.

God is mission . This is what God is in God's deepest self: self diffusive love, freely creating, redeeming, healing, challenging that creation.

The church is missionary by its very nature... the church does not have a mission but the mission has a church... the church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning

When we speak of mission as dialogue we are about as far away from imagining mission as 'conquering the world for Christ' as we probably can get. There has indeed been a radical shift, both in the world in which the church does mission and within the church's own consciousness of the goodness and even holiness of that world...

... But the deepest reason for mission as dialogue is because of the nature of God as such, and because mission is participation in that divine dialogical nature.

Prophecy might be the best single word to describe the reality of mission in today's world - Michael Amaladoss

The best way to understand Jesus and his ministry is to understand him as he understood himself: as a prophet (Ed Schillebeekx and Tom Wright).

If God is a God of prophecy and the church shares in God's mission, mission must be lived out as prophecy...

Conversion has to be understood not as a call to abandon one's culture and deepest values but to imagine the world differently, to begin to see its possibilities with God's eyes.

We might speak of the witness of the church community as prophetic... a contrast society... a sign and foretaste...

The central place of inculturation in today's understanding of mission is something that has emerged only as theology and spirituality began to recognise the essential role of experience in any kind of human living. Traditionally theology was seen as a reflection in faith on scripture and tradition. There was one theology, always and everywhere valid. As theology began to acknowledge the anthropological turn that has marked modern Western consciousness the role of experience in theology became more influential. It was not however that experience was just added to the traditional sources of scripture and tradition ; the anthropological turn revealed that scripture and tradition themselves were highly influenced by the experiences

of men and women in particular times, places, and cultural contexts. And so experience has taken on a normative value that it did not have in times past. The theology of the West we now recognise was itself a limited contextual product of a particular set of experiences. Every time and culture has to reflect on faith on its own terms and needs to use its own lens to interpret scripture...

Jesus total commitment to the reign of God rooted in the inclusive vision of the prophets propelled him beyond the cultural religious purity laws of table fellowship. This is most evident in Luke-Acts.

In the way Jesus practised table fellowship and the early community broke bread together especially after the breakthrough at Antioch, the dimension of prophecy was present in the call to conversion to the vision of God's reign breaking into the world.

Those who work for inculturation need a spirituality. It is not enough to know the values or key symbols of a particular culture or the nuances of a situation. Nor is it enough to have mastered the content of the Christian tradition. Like doing authentic theology inculturation is an art; it certainly demands skill and knowledge and accuracy, but it demands much more than that. What makes a process of inculturation more than a mechanical activity are the more elusive qualities of insight, depth, creativity, imagination, wisdom, openness to grace, courage in the face of risk and recognition of the unexpected. Not what we are able to do but who we are able to become is what is important.

When we speak of a spirituality of inculturation we mean a whole complex of ideas and practices that can open people up to the Spirit in such a way that there emerges an understanding and expression of Christianity that takes its form in a loving, creative, and sometimes critical dialogue with a particular social or cultural context.

Outsider - letting go (seeing, listening, kenosis) . Outsiders need to let go of their certainties regarding the content of the gospel. They need to let go of cherished practices and ideas that have nourished and sustained them in their own journeys towards christian maturity. They need to let go of the symbols that anchor them in their human and christian identity and let go of the order that makes them comfortable.... One of the hardest and yet spiritually enriching tasks of the outsider is 'taking leave of the gospel' so to speak for the sake of the gospel - so that the gospel can be understood in a radically new and meaningful way among new peoples and in new circumstances.

insider - speaking out. Need to trust in their culture and experience and result in a courage that gives energy insight and creativity to articulate how God is present in their lives.

Insiders need to focus on God's immanence, God's nearness, God's presence in normal everyday realities.. One needs to look for God in places where one might not look ordinarily. God is in the cracks, the corners, the neglected

places - the very warp and woof of a context...

... courage to risk, to experiment, to test new formulas, try new rituals, explore new symbols, be willing to come under suspicion from those in power...

... to have pride in their culture, and their self identity, to practice the difficult task of articulating that identity proudly, to risk going too far in terms of the resources their culture or social location can bring to christian identity...

'the positive discernment of the presence of grace'.