

WHEN RELIGION SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER

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Cry aloud, don't spare, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare to my people their disobedience, and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways… they delight to draw near to God. Why have we fasted, [say they], and you don't see? [Why] have we afflicted our soul, and you take no knowledge? Behold, you fast for strife and contention… you don't fast this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high…. Isn't this the fast that I have chosen: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Isn't it to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house? when you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh?... Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Yahweh shall be your rear guard.
Selected from Isa. 58:1-8 WEB

What could happen if religion minimized their attempts to reach God through traditional dogmas and other religious “forms” and began doing what the prophet Isaiah says by obediently lifting its voice in “speaking truth to power”?

In this example the prophet Isaiah urges the religious order of his day to “lift up your voice like a trumpet” to tell God’s people their sin. The religious order defends itself by asking “why have we fasted and you don’t see…and you take no knowledge.” God’s reply is that he doesn’t hear because you fast for the wrong reasons and in the wrong ways. As Jesus told the Pharisees, you go through your traditional religious behavior, including fasting, to be seen by men and to gain status within your synagogue.

Then God goes on to specify what kind of fast he does want from the religious establishment: He wants not only fasting, but all religious behavior to be aimed at the Jubilee goals of breaking “the bonds of wickedness…and the yoke of… oppression.” Religious behavior is to be aimed at “dealing your bread to the hungry, bringing the poor that are cast out to your house…clothing the

naked," and not avoiding your own flesh because it may not meet your standard of proper and pious religious behavior.

This active

behavior could be called "speaking truth to power." This happens when God's church develops spine enough to publicly address the issues of the day, especially those that cause great human suffering and privation. No, we don't become politicized by joining political institutions, or attempting to take over political parties. We are free to join such efforts privately, but we avoid becoming part of the political power structure because we need to maintain our freedom to speak sometimes rather forcefully to them. We stand alone on the side of God and his word, offering examples and commentary on what we learn as we compare the "what is" in our nation with the "what ought to be" of scripture.

If we acted

in this manner, Isaiah opines "then shall your light break forth as the morning," and "your healing shall spring forth speedily." All you have to do is watch TV for half an hour to know that our nation needs healing in the worst way. We continue to believe that better legislation and honest government will somehow deal effectively with our national problems like racism, gender issues, poverty, terrorism, and what else have you, but we continue to ignore God's demands for universal justice and righteousness on a far larger scale than the mere palliatives we have now. Should we begin to publicly address these demands from God we would then be truly speaking truth to power.