Prophetic Religions and Transformative Philanthropy

In his book *A Public Faith* Miroslav Volf, founding Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture describes prophetic religion as beginning with an authentic religious experience that culminates in a vision for the transformation of the world. So, the prophet Muhammad in his fabled night journey ascended through the seven heavens into the presence of God then returned with a vision to change the world. Likewise, Moses ascended Mount Sinai and returned with the tables of law and a code of conduct for everyday living. Similarly, Jesus ascended the Mount of Transfiguration only to return and carry out his mission to mend a world plagued by evil.

This rhythm of ascent and return, Volf argues, is the essence of a valid religious faith. Encounters with the divine are intended to make a difference in the way people live and the use they make of the resources with which they have been blessed. Volf writes, "prophetic religions aim to transform the world in God's name rather than to flee from the world into God's arms as do mystical religions... prophetic religion is all about-being an instrument of God for the sake of human flourishing in this life and the next."

What is philanthropy? Literally, philanthropy has to do with how we as humans express our love for humanity. The Late Robert Payton described philanthropy as "voluntary action for the public good." As the three Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity, Islam - all teach; we humans live out our love for God by loving our neighbor and these two loves cannot be separated from each other. In Judaism the phrase tikkun olam reflects the conviction that we care for the world when we work to mend and repair what has become frayed or broken in a world where injustice is commonplace. When people of faith truly encounter the divine in their religious ascent, they then return to generously marshal their resources in such a way as to creatively nurture the flourishing of the world around them.

Insights of Dr. William Enright

"Debates rage today about the role of religions in public life. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, various religions come to inhabit the same space. But how do they live together, especially when each wants to shape the public realm according to the dictates of its own sacred texts and traditions?"