THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS ARE WRITTEN ON THE SUBWAY WALLS

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But the poets round here don't write nothin' at all, They just stand back and let it all be.
Category: Observations

The Guardian recently ran a piece discussing the fifty best Bob Dylan songs. It was an interesting article, and like all such discussions it was entirely wrong; you'll get the right answer when I draw up a list! Leaving the issue of individual songs on one side, the best Dylan album is definitely Desire; other opinions are available and they are. all wrong.

I remember being stunned when I saw him perform Hurricane from the Desire album on the Old Grey Whistle test; the power of the lyrics, Dylan's vocals and the haunting violin were incredible. In the ensuing 40 odd years, the song has lost none of its power. This isn't the performance that I watched all those years ago, but it is amazing, take the time and give it a watch.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm6xCwNKtnQ

The song concerns the wrongful arrest and conviction of Rubin Carter a middleweight boxer, who served twenty years in prison for a murder he did not commit. *To see him so obviously framed, couldn't help you feel ashamed to live in a land where justice is a game*. Dylan's anger is palpable.

Now, just in case you feel that I'm getting at the United States, take a listen to this song by English folk singer, Chris Wood.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVecC8oNJl8

In this song, Chris, quietly builds up the tension as he sings of a young Brazilian electrician who set out for work one morning in London only to be killed by the police in a tragic case of misidentification.

I like these two songs, they are both intensely powerful in their own way with arresting lyrics and melodies. However, I also think that they are important; they address issues of race and injustice which need to be addressed and we should be grateful for artists who bring these things to the fore so that we don't forget them.

However, I've got a question; where are the Christian voices addressing these same issues? Before you tell me that this is nothing to do with biblical Christianity, I would point you to the Old Testament prophets who had plenty to say about justice and the way that the rich oppressed the poor.

I've lived and worked outside of the "democratic West", I know that things are much worse in other

parts of the world, but that doesn't mean that we should ignore the systematic problems in our own society. Let me give one example which troubles me. From a number of accounts that I've read, the coronavirus outbreak is disproportionally affecting urban, ethnic-minority populations. This should disturb anyone who believes that God is concerned for all people. In particular, it should really concern evangelical Christians because the evangelical church in the UK is increasingly composed of urban people from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

I think we should be very grateful to Ben Lindsay for his excellent book We Need To Talk About Race, which raises some of these issues. But we need poets, singers and prophets who echo God's heart for the poor and dispossessed and who do so in the light of Calvary. We can't leave the field to the folk singers who can raise the issues, but who have no framework for a solution.

It may be that there are Christian artists out there, doing this sort of thing, but I'm not aware of them. Please feel free to leave some links in the comments. I'd love to be proved wrong.

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They just stand back and let it all be.

Having written this and hit "publish", I was somewhat embarrassed to discover that I wrote an almost identical post two years ago. Fifteen years of regular blogging will do that to you - apologies for the repetition.