



HARVEST TIME

HARVESTING FOR JUSTICE - THAT ALL MAY HAVE ENOUGH

Sharing the Essence

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Harvest Time Exploratory Gathering

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What follows are notes from a conversation that took place at S.C.U.P.E. (Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education) in Chicago, Illinois, during the early days of this ministry when we were trying to discern and clarify Harvest Time's mission. The participants included John Haughey, SJ, Juanita and Lee Mangan-Van Ham, Don McClanen, Ched Myers, Joe Roos, and Bryan Sirchio. Many of the core issues of this ministry were discussed with such clarity and insight at this gathering that we have found ourselves coming back to the notes again and again. We want to share this conversation with you, in the hopes that it might be helpful for you as well. - Rose Feerick

The Discussion

Don began by sharing the Harvest Time mission statement and by stating that he feels called to bring people from philanthropy to a new level of discipleship and economic justice.

John indicated that he was interested in the "spiritual direction" aspect of the mission statement. Who is doing that and what is the level of their competence? How does this competence come about?

Don responded that he is the one who follows up most personally with Harvest Time's friends.

Bryan cautioned against getting too caught up in the words, "spiritual direction." It's more about personal relationship. It has happened informally with a small number of people and the redistribution of funds. We've not fully wrestled with the question yet and we need to.

John felt that was helpful but noted that terms like "redistribution" and "redistributive justice" are not explicitly stated. In addition, he asked how a millionaire "mentor" would become a mentor to others. By divesting wealth?

Juanita emphasized that she thought that relationship is key. The righting of relationships becomes part of this redistribution. It's something deeper than just getting to know each other.

John asked whether the mentors were looking at relationship with each other or relationship with the world.

He also asked whether competence to mentor mean divestment of resources.

Don replied, no, not necessarily. None of us have done that. Look at the Zacchaeus story. He only divested himself of half of his wealth.

John responded by saying if you feel there are only five people who have really become disciples out of all the Ministry of Money millionaire-class of people, what is the measure of these five: divestment or something else?

Bryan said that there is murkiness in a lot of this. We need to be able to more clearly explain what makes someone a mentor. Competency is not exactly what we're looking for, but a level of authenticity is closer. We want to create a safe, sacred space for where a person is on his or her journey. Perhaps by not telling people what to do with their money, we haven't been clear enough with them. In wrestling with the disparities of the world, how does someone respond? What do the scriptures really challenge us to? Perhaps it would be better to emphasize giving more radically and including specifically named projects that can benefit in the way of economic justice. What are the spiritual issues at stake for that person?

Lee added that a program was not what Don had in mind. Therefore, spiritual direction was one way to talk about what Harvest Time is trying to do. The competence question is very helpful. But there are other things, too. Prophetic presence and activism are also important. But most people with unusual wealth do not have an activist bent to them except in amassing more

wealth. Divestment is a good word, though not everyone has to divest. The “champagne glass” economy is evil and should be challenged. 50% divestment or something else might be a helpful goal to set. If we don’t, we are not accepting that it is the cultural reality that we are working with today.

John inserted that modeling is what is important to him. The person of great wealth modeling that kind of discipleship is critical. But, he added, so much of what is being said tonight is, he thought, what Ministry of Money has been about.

Don agreed to a point. But after all these years of pilgrimages and workshops and relationship through Ministry of Money, he knows that many of the people who have been active in Ministry of Money give very little compared to their wealth overall. He wants to concentrate on people of unusual wealth that are reached almost only by the conservative right.

Lee offered his perception that Don’s new call comes, in part, out of his frustration in working with people of wealth over the years. That means that Harvest Time has to have processes that differ from Ministry of Money’s.

Don agreed, but also stated that he felt pilgrimages and workshops do work well in bringing people into deeper discipleship.

Lee said that he wanted to press Don some on this. He said he is sure some of the old has worked, but it also has not worked. If you were not to take much solace in the old or defend it, how would you start doing this new thing differently?

Juanita said that she heard in Bryan’s description of the Ministry of Money that it is important to meet people where they are. Thus, the harvesters already know about the discipleship piece, but who mentors the mentors and what’s the process for doing that?

Ched said that he thought this is a helpful turn of conversation and hoped Don was hearing it. We hear that the Ministry of Money accompanying model is necessary, but not sufficient for your vision. What is needed at this point is something that is more directive and can pick up on what Ministry of Money and others have done. Your restless spirit indicates not just dissatisfaction with the people, but with the model too.

Two thoughts, he said, come to his mind. First, it

is useful to be aware of the new sociology of wealth in the United States, as an article of today’s New York Times makes clear. There is a new super rich class out there. Not only are there many more millionaires than ever before, but there are 250 billionaires. What Michael Milken made in the 80’s is peanuts compared to what the new technocrats are now making. These realities need to impact the new model being developed. The culture of the millionaire has changed.

Second, he wanted to express his concern about the limitation of the accompaniment model. There are plenty of people working with rich folks to help them become responsible for their wealth. We don’t need another organization to do that. And he doesn’t hear that Harvest Time wants to do that either.

There is a moment of truth that happens when those of significant wealth are challenged: there’s a loss of heart – like the rich young ruler. It’s not how much to give away, but who controls the wealth. Who decides what should be given away? Letting people decide for themselves is not good enough. We need to change our relationship to our wealth. I can give 50% of my money away, but I still control it. It is by giving up control that we are challenged most deeply. Should we then encourage people to give it all away? For some, the answer is yes. Is it suggestions on how to give? Yes, but others can do that.

If we are talking about a community of accountability, then rich folks together need to be harvested. Maybe being harvested is to come to the table with \$3-5 million dollars each with the goal that everyone would commit to give up control of “x”% of their wealth to a common trust fund and they would collectively decide how to give that money away. They are now collectively responsible for how that money is distributed. Let’s say it’s \$10 million, for example. They then decide collectively what they do with the money this month and how: trusts, capital investment funds, etc..

This concept gets at one of our culture realities: my entitlement to decide where my money goes. This could be a middle step between Ministry of Money and divestment: a form of community you have to earn your way into. You give a certain percentage (personally decide or a specific amount, which Ched prefers). To not be directive in our counsel is not the way, we need to be more directive. The biblical model is not divestment, but giving the wealth back to the community. That’s a step away from personal

entitlement.

John said that he thought what Ched said was a very good line of thought. The logic is appealing. The weakest part is this: Why would I want to give my money into this pot of twelve people, for example? How does the bond of those twelve grow? The twelve would probably be from different parts of the country. Therefore the bonding needs some kind of “gooser.” Perhaps that would be something that grabs the twelve spiritually and is done together. Perhaps a trip to Haiti would do that, but afterward the bonding could be thin. The first twelve (disciples) felt they had a “master.” Perhaps these twelve would need that, too.

Ched agreed and said that this needs to be different from a new charismatic cult. Perhaps a covenantal theme like a twelve steps program or like monastic rules would be best. Wealth is a problem, and it’s a problem for me. I need a community of accountability, a process. Also, this group needs to come together, perhaps twice a year, for inspiration and challenge. It has to be an ongoing building of community, not based on one experience. But part of the commitment is to sign away part of your power within a community of people doing the same thing. It still needs to be safe space, but it’s together with specific commitments. Relationships do need to be built and it may very well be rocky. This is better than Don individually pulling people where they probably don’t want to go.

Juanita asked Don if these key wealthy “disciples” he knows feel open to this change of entitlement.

Don replied that he thinks some are ready.

Lee cautioned against going through a roster of which people may want to be a part of this new thing, who might respond to this kind of invitation. We can not be sure who would or would not respond.

Ched explained that what’s different here is a community of covenant and that’s what has been missing in the accompaniment model. It’s not that we’re going to inform their consciousness. It is to say, “Here’s the right thing to do.” He told Don he felt he has two alternatives before him. The first is to find a new model (and maybe fail), build it, and they will come. The other option is being a “glorified investment house.” Nothing wrong with that, but that’s

what it is. So far, I don’t hear you offering them anything in addition to what they could get elsewhere.

John cautioned that this isn’t going to work unless God calls them to this. What is the discipline that they would commit themselves to? Whatever is devised, God has to be the caller. That’s the trick, otherwise it’s just a human plan that will sometime bite the dust somewhere along the line. Assuming God is working in this room and our aspirations are similar, then how does a person go through a process of being called to this?

Bryan said he liked this conversation a lot. One of our big questions is how this differs from the Ministry of Money. He sees it as a next step. Wealth isolates people tremendously. This type of community may be just what people need.

John pointed out that teaching is not the issue, but creating a situation where people can hear God’s call. People followed Benedict because they were drawn to a way of life, not a rule. Can I hear the call to follow Jesus? We need to walk through his passion and death, and then into resurrection. It’s not spiritual exercises. The problem is not that money is getting in the way of your faith, but what is your relationship with this Jesus and his call upon your life. The commonality comes out of that. It’s between God and the person. And the proof of the call is that God calls people into community. That’s the test.

Don reminded everyone of the frustrating response he is gets when he talks about moving from philanthropy to discipleship. Many say, “I’m already Christian and giving much. How can you question my Christian commitment?”

John responded by saying that the question is, “What do you think about your relationship with Christ?”

Lee asked, if people come together, would commitment happen in a weekend.

John said probably not because you need to go to the desert and wrestle with the devil.

Juanita asked whether we are asking people to redefine who they are. How do we help people define themselves not by their money, but by their relation-

“The biblical model is not divestment, but giving the wealth back to the community...”

ship with Jesus? To ask someone to redefine themselves is hard.

Ched responded that people do this kind of thing all the time. We're simply asking them to take a step-by-step invitation into deeper discipleship. Say we only want to talk with people after they've gone through a Ministry of Money type of awareness building. Maybe there will only be four or five people who want to go all the way. Life formation processes happen like this all the time. People get master's degrees, for example. We can ask them to make commitments, too. We need to develop what it is we are asking them to do. It may be a five-year formation time, or whatever. You can develop something like this with a small staff of folks, put the program together, have a pilot and see what happens. It may fail and, if so, okay, but we might also be very surprised.

If we're only about how to help people give money away, let's not do it. Others can do it better. But if the goal is this different way, let's give it a try. He added that he can get excited about that.

Lee offered that it may be best to take a step at a time. It may be a Zacchaeus-type situation down the line, but not necessarily up front.

John added that the call is to holiness, and money is the problematic issue with many people. But if we posed the question as, "It is your money," then that's the wrong place to begin.

Juanita said that we need to get reconnected to our humanness.

Ched added that he liked the Zacchaeus story, but for a non-obvious reason. Jesus only says, "Hey let's have a party at your house." Then Zacchaeus says, "OK, I know, I know, I've done it wrong and I'll give away half my possessions." Then Jesus asks, "Is that all?" Zacchaeus responds, "OK and also four times to anyone I've defrauded."

John said that the demon cast out with Zacchaeus was not money, but isolation from the community.

Bryan restated that he's enthused about the model idea. One thing it doesn't respond to, however, is what is still left over after 50% given away, or whatever it is.

Ched said that one of the interesting things about that is the perception of scarcity. We feel we need to trust banks, insurance companies, etc.. But people have a right to be secure, that someone will be there for them if the need arises. Perhaps restructuring with a mutual aid group to help out. The Mennonites have a wonderful system of mutual aid called Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA). They tithe not to the church but to Mennonite Mutual Aid and that community decides how the money is allocated. So in giving my money away I'm not giving up my security, but increasing the security.

John exhorted us to believe in the efficacy of prayer.

Don felt that we're dealing not with just the difference between philanthropy and discipleship, but something deeper.

John responded that it's both and we will find out if it is of God if people come to it.

Lee asked Don how he was feeling.

Don replied that he was feeling a mixture of gratitude and peace, but also discouragement and anguish over the utter impossibility of what we are trying to do.

Ched asked why he was feeling that.

Don responded that after 25 years he's seen very few people responding this way. Many now are distressed with what he's talking about.

Lee said that as he reflects upon our time together, each of us here has been bringing something to this circle and we have different calls and gifts. You, Don, have brought a deep sense of call. Some have gifts in teaching and conceiving how to move people along, which are not your gift, Don. It seems like we need people to continue to give this some shape, bringing different gifts. If it will go forward, you need people who have teaching, shaping gifts, to help you move this forward. You can't do that, but others can.

Ched said that he saw Don looking around with others and wondering what can be done here. He advised Don to take some time to how he feels about what has been said. Nothing's too small to do. Don may not feel this call and may want to be a mentor to a handful of folks, which is also needed. There's

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nothing wrong with that.

Bryan suggested that the model may take five years to put together.

Ched continued by saying that Don's role may be to turn over some soil in the process of moving things forward, saying I don't know where is going, but I know something more needs to happen.

He added that the biggest obstacle to launching alternatives is lack of available venture capital. People like us don't have the time and space to do the hard thinking and bringing people together because we just can't afford to do it. Maybe we need to raise money to make think tanks on this issue come together.

Bryan asked how we might distribute money.

Lee felt that is more of an end product, a good question, but more down the road. If people are fleeing from what Don is saying, then we need to be focusing on these earlier questions. Perhaps you need to continue the fundraising in addition to these deeper questions.

Don said that he intimately knows of fundraising needs and can let go.

Lee said it's not an either/or, but a both/and.

Don asked the group if he should continue raising the question of philanthropy and discipleship.

Ched said if he is calling people to go beyond philanthropy, he also needs to give direction on how to do that.

Lee wondered whether maybe this new model would be the thing to point them to.

Ched asked at what point does philanthropic giving become disciple giving.

Don said it is when people understand.

Bryan said discipleship is when I am living in a way that, no matter how much I make, my resources are at the service of the poor. There's no magical number. He also questions whether this should be

just for unusually wealthy people. We all need it, no matter what.

Ched advised that developing a new model may or may not be what the Spirit is inviting you to do. He advised taking whatever time was needed to discern.

A brief addendum from Joe who was recording the conversation.

“...discipleship is when I am living in a way that, no matter how much I make, my resources are at the service of the poor.”

I deeply appreciated the spirit and content of what happened during the nearly four hours we were together. The conversation involved both a critical probing of what Harvest Time is doing now and needed challenges for what Harvest Time may be able to do in the future. Helping Harvest Time sharpen its present focus and probe the possibilities of the distinctive role it might play was an enormously valuable outcome of our gathering. Among all of the valuable input from everyone, two things that Ched said stood out most to me.

First, he advised us that the culture of wealth today is different from what it has been in the past. Many people, especially in technology industries, are becoming rich nearly overnight. Harvest Time needs to be conscious of this change and shape its goals accordingly.

Second, Ched's proposal of the communitarian model of giving for the wealthy was eye opening because it would allow the challenge of discipleship to the wealthy to go deeper than the challenge at this point does. And somewhere along the way, I remember someone saying that the giving up of economic decision making power is something we all should be dealing with, not just the unusually wealthy. I couldn't agree more.

I very much look forward to our future discernment of these questions and know our time together was extremely helpful in moving us forward. Time and prayerful discernment is all we need.



If you would like to discuss this article further, or have comments or questions, please feel free to contact Rosemary Feerick at 408-264-3039 or by e-mail at rfeerick2002@yahoo.com. Bryan Sirchio can also be contacted at 608-251-0869 or by e-mail at bsirch@sirchio.com.