



February 2007

HARVEST TIME is rooted in the Biblical vision of economic justice which calls us to harvest God's abundant creation in such a way that everyone has enough.

Through a variety of avenues, Harvest Time supports Christians of unusual wealth as they move into deeper freedom so that their personal resources become instruments of God's love and justice.

Harvest Time is partnered with over 25 grassroots ministries in political and economic "war zones" in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Washington, DC. Wealthy Christians in the Harvest Time network are invited to invest their lives and resources in these partnerships. Harvest Time's primary mission, however, is to encourage wealthy Christians to freely and joyfully respond with their lives and money according to the leading of God's Spirit—within or beyond Harvest Time's own efforts to stand in economic solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

Justice: A Conversation

INTRODUCTION
BY ROSEMARY FEERICK

The other night I was at a restaurant with a friend and five young children. In the course of our meal, two of the children began fighting, resulting in spilled hot chocolate, ruined kids' menu-art, and loud crying. My friend and I – and a very gracious waiter - rushed to clean things up.

A moment later, the two children began arguing again – this time about who was to blame for the spill. A second hot chocolate turned over, the children started screaming again, and my friend, tired from a week of single parenting and from dealing with issues in her extended family, snapped. She angrily reached for the "culprit." I intervened, sending my friend outside for a walk and picking up the child who had spilled the drink. In the moments that followed, I held the distraught child to my chest and told the others to stop yelling at her. I handed each of the children a napkin and told them that this was one of those times when we needed to stop fighting and bond together and help each other out. We began cleaning. As we did so, I chatted away about the time my son spilled his milk twice in a row. We all laughed as my hand came dangerously close to spilling my beer. Eventually, we relaxed and the conversation returned to basket-

ball. We finished our meal as the sun set.

This kind of incident is not unfamiliar to this parent of young children – though often it's me (or one of my kids) who is losing it and needing a "time out." What struck me about this particular incident – what was new in me in other words - was my lack of judgment and my clarity in the moment about what to do. Perhaps it was the result of knowing what it is to be too tired to parent well. Perhaps it was the result of having made many of my own messes. Maybe it was the result of having been with friends who have acted with wisdom and compassion when I have been at my wits' end. Maybe it was grace. But the other night, as my friend and her daughter began to unravel, I knew immediately that what was needed was support.

In this newsletter, we are opening a conversation about justice. The "hot chocolate incident" occurred as I was putting together the final draft. On one level, it may seem ridiculous to talk about the crises that happen in upscale restaurants in a newsletter about justice. But as I reflected on what happened that night, I became aware that in a very ordinary way it captures some of the issues that are at the heart of the conversation. For instance, is justice about blame and punishment or is it about support? Is it about accountability or responding

*Nurturing a new breed of rich rulers not turning away sadly (Mark 10:22),
but turning to Jesus with rejoicing and hilarious generosity.*

to vulnerability? Is it about “doing it right” or a parent’s love?

What follows is a conversation. It began as an article that Bryan wrote shortly before Christmas. When he sent me the article to review, I found myself thinking about discussions I had been having with my father who has been launching a center on Social Justice at Fordham Law School in New York City. Several times last fall, my father called me to ask me to explain my understanding of “social justice.” Ultimately, he put together the ideas we had discussed into a speech he gave to a group of Catholic lawyers.

As Bryan and I talked about this newsletter, we realized that it might be wise to open up a broader conversation about the word justice – one that would reflect the depth of wisdom and variety of perspectives contained in the Harvest Time network. We invited several Harvest Time friends to read and comment on Bryan’s article. We also asked my father to share excerpts of his speech on social justice.

It is now time to share this conversation with you. But we are aware of some temptations here. It’s easy to think or even argue about justice and injustice. It’s also easy to imagine ourselves as the ones who have it to offer to others. Embodying the kind of justice that emerges from our broken open hearts is another matter and what our world needs. Our hope, therefore, is that as you listen to this conversation, you will resist the temptation to keep it at a safe distance, and instead allow it to descend into your heart.



DOES “JUSTICE” DO THE WORD JUSTICE? ¹

BY BRYAN SIRCHIO

A fascinating conversation took place toward the end of a recent Harvest Time gathering outside Atlanta, GA. It began at the breakfast table on our final morning together when one of the participants asked me the following question: “If I wanted to make a contribution to an organization or two that does a good job of working for social justice, which organizations would you suggest?”

I said something like, “Well, first I would need to understand what you mean by ‘social justice,’ and then I could make some suggestions.” We then opened this question up to our entire group.

Just what do we mean by “social justice?” One of the things that became clear that Sunday morning is that the word “justice” means different things to different people. In fact, the word evokes so many different feelings and nuances that we found ourselves wondering if it is still a helpful word for us to use at all. The man who began our conversation with his question is a businessman from the South. He suggested that in most of the circles he travels in, including his church, the word “justice” is more about punishment for a crime (as in “bringing a criminal to justice”) than working for fairness and equality for the poor and marginalized and against the forces of oppression and exploitation. He said that if we came to his church and told folks that our organization is trying to help Christians use money and resources to “work for justice,” most of his friends would not understand what we meant, let alone be moved or inspired to join us.

His remarks reminded me of conversations I have had with another close friend in our Harvest Time network who is also a businessman from a southern state. He has suggested that our focus on the word “justice” would probably raise suspicions among many of his friends in the business world who would think that we are “leftist” or “anti-business.” He felt strongly that if we were to approach his friends and begin to talk about social justice that we would probably turn them off, if not lose them altogether, and they would most likely question just how Christ-centered or biblically grounded we were. I recall him saying, “Look, I know justice is important, but if you want to reach the guys I run with, don’t start the conversation there.”

Over breakfast at the gathering in Atlanta, those of us gathered agreed that the call to “do justice” is at the heart of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (Micah 6:8; Matthew 23 for example). We noted that there are other profoundly important biblical words such as “evangelical” which have also become difficult to use in our culture because of the unhelpful connotations they have taken on. Do we stop using these terms altogether because of these unhelpful and confusing connotations? Do we try to reclaim them and use them as we also clarify what we mean by them in order to communicate the heart of the biblical message more effectively?

Toward the end of our conversation we attempted to come up with other ways to define what we mean by “justice.” Someone mentioned Walter Bruggemann’s phrase, “justice is determining what belongs to whom and returning it.” Someone suggested that justice is about “asking why people suffer and what can be done

about it,” and shared the often quoted remark by Dom Helder Camara, a priest among the poor in Brazil – “When I fed hungry people they called me a saint. When I asked why they were hungry, they called me a communist.” Another definition offered was a quote that came either from Oswald Chambers or Tony Campolo – “justice is the righteousness and love of God in action.” The southern businessman who began our conversation particularly liked that definition and said that if we simply added those words when we used the term “justice – the righteousness and love of God in action,” then he would “get it,” and the people in his church would probably be open and interested in hearing more about what we were trying to say. Perhaps that is a good place to start.

As this conversation about the meaning of social justice drew to a close, we also noted that as wealthy persons from the so-called “first world,” the simple truth is that whether it is deliberate on our part or not, we often have a vested interest in not quite understanding what the biblical concept of justice is all about. We need to honestly ask ourselves if there might be some shadow laden reasons why we tend not to hear about justice in many of our churches, or why many of us often have a negative reaction when the word is mentioned.

At the same time, there are some good reasons why many Christians with access to substantial material wealth just do not want to talk about social justice. Maybe it’s the way in which the word has been used. Maybe we’re tired of being beaten over the head by it or taken on joyless and heavy guilt trips that simply shut us down. Maybe it is be-

“...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

- Micah 6:8

cause Christians who focus on social justice often seem to care very little about nurturing an intimate and personal relationship with Christ, and therefore seem to have more in common with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party than with the Church of Jesus Christ. Perhaps people with access to wealth or who “create wealth” as they live out their ministries in the market place are tired of being regarded with suspicion (if not flat out judged) by “progressive Christians” in the non-profit world who focus on justice for the poor – even as they keep coming back (often with all kinds of flattery and calculated finesse) to wealthy donors for support.

And yet... it may also be possible that we often do not want to focus on biblical justice because we know deep down that conversations about justice will inevitably raise questions which might challenge everything – how we do business, how we invest money, whether or not a 10% tithe for a millionaire truly holds water biblically, whether or not Jesus might actually be inviting us to give up our access to substantial wealth altogether, and whether or not the ways in which we rationalize and justify our privileged lifestyles make any real sense at all in a

world of so much hunger and material need. Tough questions indeed, but questions that we at Harvest Time are committed to raising and working with – hopefully with grace, joy, integrity, playfulness – and in the extravagant love of Christ. I left that recent retreat grateful beyond words for the gentle miracle that a bunch of wealthy Christians had this conversation around the breakfast table, and actually drew closer to each other as a result.

“The righteousness and love of God in action.” I do like this definition, although my hunch is that many people would have at least as much baggage with the word “righteousness” as others do with “justice.” How about “the love of God in action?” That would probably work for me, because ultimately I think justice – biblical justice – is simply a fruit of God’s love. When we love people, especially those who are the victims of injustice and exploitation, then we can’t help but question why they are hurting. When we love people, we want to do what is ours to do to deal with the root causes of their suffering, and to stand with them when they are being victimized.

This past week, for example, Harvest Time learned that a small elementary school which we help to support in Haiti (St. Thomas School in Cite Soleil – a detailed description of our relationship with this school is available on our web site) was (allegedly) fired upon by U.N. troops stationed in Port au Prince. Fortunately this happened later in the afternoon and no students or teachers were in the building at the time. This is not the first time that we have heard very troubling things about what the U.N. troops are doing to the poorest of the poor in Haiti. So at the moment we are trying to

document this incident with human rights organizations and to figure out what we can do in response here in the United States, and how we can help our Haitian colleagues respond in their own context. Among other things, there is talk about helping human rights organizations in Haiti to organize more effectively in order to respond to injustice in their communities. There is talk about the possible formation of new coalitions of human rights groups and other grassroots organizations in Haitian communities which are suffering most severely. This kind of work of course needs funding to be done well, and so once again, seeing to it that God's love is translated into life-giving action leads us back to the simple fact that doing justice often requires the movement of monetary resources. What a joy, privilege, and adventure it is to be involved with a network of Christians who are trying to move money in just this way. May God's "justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24).

RESPONSES FROM HARVEST TIME FRIENDS

From Elisabeth Keller,
Cambridge, MA:

The term "social justice" does push a lot of buttons but I don't hate it. I don't like the "righteousness of God in action" because it reminds me of self-righteousness, in myself and others, when we think we are full of the righteousness of God but really we are not.

I like "the love of God in action." I have seen social justice in action without the love of God and sometimes it's kind of scary, not in a good way. But the love of

God in action, now that may be terrifying but it is good.

From Chuck Anderson,
Atlanta, GA:

I have difficulty connecting the word "justice" with service to the poor. It is so connected with the law that it's hard (for me, at least) to hear it as a synonym for mercy and grace which in Christian circles at least, it is often contrasted against. Justice is linked to God's strength and His promise to make all things right in the end (which generally involves the destruction and punishment of evil as God's vengeance) and usually has very little room for tenderness. On the other hand (and much to the Church's shame) compassion is all too often equated with tenderness that has no strength and that's not love, either.

From Ruth Redington,
Boston, MA:

I agree that the righteousness of God is hard to unpack quickly, and in a positive way. On the surface, it seems so close to "self-righteousness" and from there it's an easy link to an arrogant, triumphalist Christianity that is problematic. As someone who is always interested in reclaiming the original integrity of words, though, I looked it up and found that the righteousness of God has to do with God's nature as fair and just. When I look at it this way, the "fairness of God in action", just as the "love of God in action" seems right. In an age where so many speak of God, yet there is less agreement, or perhaps even less understanding about the richness and complexity of who God is, I like a definition that draws out these particular qualities of fairness and love.

This said, I'm not sure that "the love of God in action" quite captures the power of a biblical notion of justice on the social level. It is appealing, but a bit vague for me. "The love of God in action" could include personal acts of charity (not justice per se), or it could imply actions geared more specifically toward changing the power structures in society that guarantee fairness and justice with regard to human rights, equal access to resources, narrowing the gap between rich and poor, etc.. When I think of social justice in the prophetic tradition, my mind goes more toward these latter themes.

Whatever the definition of social justice, I like thinking about how the character and nature of God, particularly with regard to God's fairness, might be incarnated through every social exchange: personal, political, social, economic, with creation, etc.. A really interesting meeting between the divine and human, heaven and earth, Emmanuel, God with us.

From Helen Daly,
Brattleboro, VT:

I have to admit some frustration with the question. I get the idea of helping people find an entry point for working with social justice, but I've been standing at the entry point/door for literally years now and am overdue to start practicing social justice, not defining or exploring the idea of it.

From Chris Roberts,
Philadelphia, PA:

I think we should stop using the word "justice," or at least contextualize it a lot more. If you want to work for justice, you can become a Democrat. But if you want to

integrate your money and your love of Jesus, then Harvest Time is the only game in town. I am reminded of something I once heard Walter Brueggemann say: the theme of the Old Testament is having an intense relationship with Yahweh. That's what it's really all about. Sometimes justice is one of the fruits of that, but we shouldn't take it for granted. "The first shall be last" is not about justice; it's about kenosis, a much richer concept.

From Randall Mullins,
Alameda, CA:

As I read, I found that I kept wanting to see the word mercy appear when we talk about justice. The spirit of Harvest Time reminds me that God's mercy falls on the just and unjust (parts of my own heart). I have some sense that the streams of mercy flow deeper within all of us than justice, although I believe all human DNA knows some common meanings of both. If I could visit the deeper streams of mercy more I could probably do more justice more naturally without needing to lapse into counterproductive self-righteousness or judging.

**REFLECTIONS ON
SOCIAL JUSTICE:
A CATHOLIC LAWYER'S
PERSPECTIVE ²
BY JOHN D. FEERICK**

What is social justice? I have grappled with the question for the past year since being asked to found and direct a Center on Social Justice and Dispute Resolution at Fordham Law School. I have discovered that responding specifically to the question is more difficult than I had imagined.

The Sun Never Says

Even after all this time

The Sun never says

to the earth

"You owe me."

Look what happens

with a love like that

It lights up the whole sky!

- Hafiz

The word "social" implies a relationship or interaction of people with each other and the word "justice" suggests something that is rightly due a person or group. Often, as lawyers we think of individualized justice. But, as we know, entire structures and segments of society may reflect an institutionalization of injustice such as the world of segregation.

John Locke spoke of the social nature of a person in nature and his or her need to achieve the fullness of life in a community infused with the moral value of peace. He rejected the idea of a solitary existence and foresaw the development of society where people joined together to promote human existence and the common good. Social Justice, of course, is also implicated and expressed in all of our institutions – in the family, community groups, our schools, our professions, and in other parts of our civil society, including our political society.

The mission of the Catholic Church, like America itself in a sense, is intimately associated with the fostering of conditions for the fullest development of every individual. How we treat

the poor is a particular measure of whether or not we are living the justice spoken of in the Gospels. In their inspiring 1986 letter, "Economic Justice For All," the United States Bishops said that "the way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice."³

The Gospels speak of the two greatest commandments, love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. The "whole law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments" said Jesus in Matthew.

The Catholic Church's social teaching is based on these commandments. In their message of 1986, the Bishops said that "as individuals and as a nation...we are called to make a fundamental option for the poor."⁴ They spoke of this option as one of speaking for the voiceless, defending the defenseless, and assessing policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. They suggested that we needed to confront attitudes and ways of acting which institutionalized injustice, urging Catholics to be active participants in society, asking how particular actions deal with the poor.

In that powerful statement, addressing hunger, homelessness and unemployment, the Bishops said that these areas "pose for our nation an urgent moral and human challenge: to fashion a society where no one goes without the basic necessities required for human dignity and growth."⁵ The Bishops said that everyone has obligations based on membership in the social community to "volunteer time, talent and money to work for greater justice... All who have more than they need must come to the aid of the poor.

People with professional skills need to embrace the lives of others and have a duty to share (their skills with) them." ⁶

Several years ago, I encountered poverty in a way greater than all of the other experiences of my life in the aggregate when I was asked to serve as a Special Master of Family Homelessness in New York City. At the time there were almost 10,000 families in the shelter system, with 15,000 children, making the system the largest of its kind in the United States, if not the world.

What an introduction it was for me to discover a place called the Emergency Assistance Unit, a point of entry into the shelter system for homeless families in the city. It was located at 150th Street and River Avenue, a few blocks below Yankee Stadium where I used to sleigh ride as a kid. It was teeming with families with young children. They were jammed together in appalling conditions. Their faces expressed anguish, frustration and anger.

I had many conversations with homeless families. I met homeless adults who had lost their jobs, some very good jobs, including government jobs, and others who had served in the Armed Forces of the United States or had been evicted from their homes. Still others said they were victims of domestic violence. I met during my two year assignment hundreds of children in homeless shelters. The experience of seeing these children was overwhelming. They appeared no different from my children and grandchildren, except they were growing up in an institutionalized setting. I came to realize the great opportunity gap between these homeless children and my own.

What disturbed me during my time working on issues of homelessness – my entry into the world of social justice – was the realization that hunger and homelessness had been all around me and I hadn't really appreciated that fact. I didn't notice it in a very real sense. I, of course, had seen homeless individuals in doorways, parks, subway stations, and elsewhere, and responded to financial appeals to help the poor, and encouraged the creation of public service programs, but I never had engaged in extended conversations with the poor and downtrodden until this point in my life.

In closing, I am reminded of the words of Father Jon Sobrino, whose colleagues were assassinated in El Salvador in 1989 that "the reality of the poor is no rhetorical question. It tends to conceal itself...to pass itself off as something secondary and provisional in the larger picture of human achievements. It is a reality that calls on men and women not only to recognize and acknowledge it, but to take a primary, basic position regarding it...men and women are being served notice here. They are being warned that the poor of this world are not the casual products of history. No, poverty results from the actions of other human beings."

FINALLY

The spilled hot chocolate "crisis" that opened this newsletter is not comparable to the kinds of crises that children face all over the world - in Haiti, in New York City, and even as close as a couple of miles from that restaurant where we sat. And yet that incident captured for me the vulnerability that we all experience as human beings – that is deeply connected to how we do or do not

care for each other – especially the most vulnerable among us.

At Harvest Time, we have learned that the shift from thinking to embodying "the love of God in action" often begins when injustice becomes a human reality, as it did for my dad when he began to have conversations with families who were homeless or as it does when Harvest Time takes people to Haiti – or when we experience the sting of injustice in our own lives. These are the experiences that let us see injustice and poverty in a personal way. These are the experiences that break our hearts open so that we lose the ability to avoid the urgency and fullness of the implications of phrases like "a preferential option for the poor."

In the Harvest Time network, we are blessed to have among us many individuals and a couple of communities who have had their hearts broken open in these ways and who are now seeking to embody the love of God in action by engaging in radical experiments with their wealth. We hope to share some of those stories with you in subsequent newsletters.



If you would like to continue this conversation or otherwise be in contact with us, please feel free to get in touch with Rose or Bryan. Contact information is provided on the back page.

Even Kindness

Naomi Shihab Nye



*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*

*You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters
and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.*



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Thanks to Bob Book for suggesting this title.
- ² Excerpts of a speech given to the Guild of Catholic Lawyers in New York City on November 3, 2006.
- ³ U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice For All, Catholic Social Thought*, ed David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 607.
- ⁴ Ibid., 599.
- ⁵ Ibid., 618.
- ⁶ Ibid., 607.

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First Class

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Often wealthy Christians who are asking questions about economic justice and who are trying to discern what God is calling them to do with their wealth lack spiritual community around these issues. Harvest Time gatherings provide opportunities for Christians of exceptional wealth to get to know each other and Harvest Time staff in order to nurture a growing network of support, encouragement, challenge, and inspiration as we strive to become more faithful disciples. Gatherings are also opportunities to ask the hard questions in an atmosphere of extravagant love.

“Creating Community Along the Narrow Path”

April, 2007
Philadelphia, PA
Specific date pending.

May 18-20, 2007
Atlanta, GA

For more information
about these retreats contact
Rose Feerick or Bryan Sirchio.



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“The one who had gathered a large amount did not have too much, and the one who had gathered a small amount did not have too little. They so gathered that everyone had enough to eat.” Exodus 16:18