

Class Outline for Jesus, Justice, and Spirituality

Introduction: Recovering Martin Luther King Jr's way of being Church: Toward the end of Dr. King's life he shifted his focus to economic justice in a movement he called "The Poor People's Campaign." His discernment of the spirit of the American economy led him to believe the Vietnam War was a war on the poor. He also understood that much of the global violence, especially in South America, was tied to American economic interests in the region. He said, "We in the West must bear in mind that the poor countries are poor primarily because we have exploited them through political or economic colonialism."

When he was shot he was on his way to his second mass demonstration in Washington to demand economic justice: a living wage, universal health care, housing, job training, and guaranteed income for those out of work—all economic issues. He died in Memphis supporting a union strike for garbage workers.

We must ask what happened to Martin Luther King Jr's faith based movement for economic security for all. Should we recover it? Did the Church turn toward meeting individual needs but away from the economic issues that profoundly impact those needs? Have we "neglected the weightier matters" because they are too complex and generate conflict; too much about money and too dangerous (Matthew 23:23) ?

If the power and economic focus of King's movement is to be recovered we must first re-discover the heart of "biblical justice," namely, a fair distribution of wealth (session one: Bible study). Then we must discern the spirit of our own economy so that we may know the critical points that must be addressed in missions of justice. (session two: social analysis). We conclude with an exploration of the actions, spirituality, and structures needed to reconstruct the kind of faith based coalition that made King's movement so powerful (session three: solutions).

I. What is at the heart of biblical justice?

A. Righteousness & justice (same Greek root word)

- 1) God's righteousness seen in deliverance of poor (Exodus)
- 2) Our righteousness evidenced by our treatment of poor
- 3) This is consistent throughout Bible, e.g., Job 24:13; 1st John 3:17, 25

B. The Exodus: God defines Himself/Herself in the Exodus as liberator.

C. The former slaves are called not to enslave others:

- 1) **The manna story:** take only what you need and don't "store it up."
- 2) **Sabbath economics:** the redistribution of wealth (Lev 25ff. Deut 15ff.):
 - a. Free the slaves every seven years and every fiftieth year
 - b. Forgive debts every seven years and every fifty years
 - c. Wealthy land owners must return the land to the poor.
 - d. They must also give them provisions to begin again
 - e. The land is not planted to rejuvenate the soil

D. The Prophets and the Sabbath Economics: Israel often abandoned Sabbath economics and without land redistribution the land naturally accumulated into the hands of a few land owners through inheritance, marriage, or foreclosure. The landless farmers become indentured servants or subsistence tenant farmers. The prophet's task was to relentlessly call these ancient corporations to redistribute the wealth through Sabbath Economics (e.g., Isa 3:14; 5:8; 62:1-2; Jeremiah 34:13-16).

E. Jesus' and Sabbath Economics: The preaching & teaching of Jesus & other NT writers.

F. The critical difference between justice and mercy: Mercy throws life preservers to drowning people; justice goes upstream to see who is throwing them in. Mercy addresses the symptoms of injustice and justice addresses the root causes of injustice.

II. Social Analysis: If biblical justice has to do with the distribution of wealth, then who has it, and how did it get there? The prophetic task of understanding what is really happening.

A. Who is to blame for poverty: Personal responsibility or political systems?

B. Where is the money: the distribution of wealth (globally and in the U.S.).

C. How did the money get there: Corporations as the primary distributor of wealth.

1) The Corporations' influence on the political, economic, judicial system.

2) The Corporations' influence on the work-place and lifestyles.

3) The Corporations' influence on the global economy.

4) Conversely, the influence of the people on Corporations.

5) The influence of Politicians on Corporations.

6) Globalization (the good, the bad, and the ugly).

III. What Can the Church do: proposed solutions and strategies?

A. Identifying your "calling"

B. Forming small justice oriented mission groups and networking them with other local, national, and international faith based justice organizations.

1) The spirituality and disciplines of these groups

a. Caring w/o going crazy

b. Contentment and conflict

c. Boundaries

2) Mutual accountability

3) The tactics and organizational structures of social change

a. Acting locally, on a state level, and nationally

b. Using stronger actions while affirming "letter writing"

C. Justice Education (social analysis and bible study: bibliography)

D. Alternative economic policies (see your websites).

E. The nature of social change: it's necessary, possible, and hard