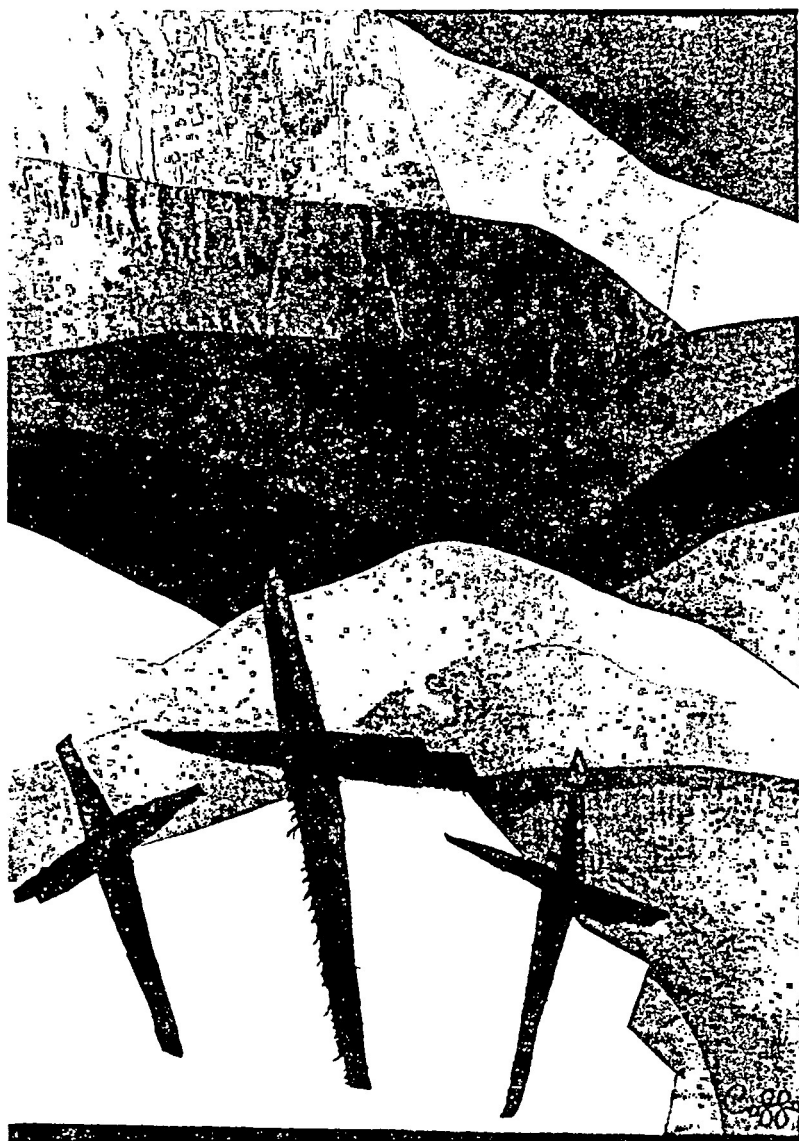


Reflections on Love and Justice

READINGS

The direction I chose to go in led me to programs which aided the poor and the blacks. This may have been a sort of "noblesse oblige," although I hope not. It may have been a channel for me to express a personal anger in the milieu of the justifiable anger of the oppressed. It may have been wanting to save the world instead of myself, or, most likely, wanting to be useful and helpful. In spite of the bad name "doing good" has gotten, I, like a lot of other people, want to do good—to do something that will make a difference. Whatever the motivation, the jobs gave me an education about some facts of life that money had sheltered me from. I do not, for example, romanticize or even like poverty, for myself or anyone else. People who have money often think that it is the fault of poor people that they are poor. I would say it is probably more our fault: "our" in this instance meaning the haves. I also found that people are people; money isn't everything, but that's easier to say when you have it.

I have felt a conflict when working with or talking to people who have much less money than I do, a reaction felt by any reasonably sensitive American travelling in a very poor area. I am aware of the huge difference between the way I spend a



Good Friday The crosses now stand empty, for Christ has conquered death. Fabric, by Marjorie Coffey, Washington, D.C.

dollar and the way some others have to scrape to earn it. I am also, of course, aware of the resentment I create. In fact, I can understand, although I don't condone, the isolation of richer people from much poorer people.

But the discomfort does not come merely from a fear of being disliked, nor just from a feeling of guilt about having more money, but from an unwillingness to part with much of it. The problem, obviously, would not exist if I were to give all my money away. I don't, because I know it wouldn't make any difference. I also don't because I don't want to.

—Michael Phillips, in *The Seven Laws of Money*, pp. 96-97¹

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Deep in the spirit
one must believe
deep in the silence
one must listen
deep in the pocket
one must reach
if wrongs are to be righted
and oppression annihilated
for eloquent words
and fearless statements
will not cure injustice
unless coupled with action

Lois Shank Hertzler²

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In 1967 doctors involved in a study of domestic hunger sponsored by the Field Foundation reported to Congress that children they had encountered in this country were “. . . suffering from hunger and disease, and directly or indirectly, they are dying from them—which is exactly what ‘starvation’ means.”

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Since then much progress has been made in the fight against domestic hunger as attested by the latest report by the Field Foundation. However, they indicate that "malnutrition has become a subtler problem," and in spite of these gains hunger is still a way of life for many in the United States. Much of this hunger is unseen by the general public. It is tucked away in the "quaint" rural sections of our nation; it is hidden in our dark-complexioned ghettos and reservations; and it is silently stalking our elderly.

Its ravages are clearly seen, though, when the layers of poverty are penetrated. Nutrition related diseases are still common among the poor, and malnutrition, though seldom listed as the cause of death, weakens the aged and lowers their resistance to fatal diseases. Hunger's legacy can also be seen in dull-eyed children. According to a study released by the University of California in 1975, 1.1 million infants and children under the age of five in the United States suffered from undernourishment severe enough to prevent normal brain development.

Part of the cowardice of hunger is its selection of victims. It is not a random menace. It attacks those whom society and circumstances have made the least capable of fighting back—children, women, American Indians, Alaskan natives, migrant workers, the elderly, blacks, and Hispanic Americans.

This tragic scenario continues despite the fact that in 1969 the White House convened a Conference on Hunger to "Put an End to Hunger and Malnutrition Due to Poverty in America." Testifying before the Senate Select Committee five years later, Ronald Pollack noted, "The sad and tragic truth is that over the past several years we have moved backwards in our struggle to end hunger, poverty and malnutrition." It is hard to comprehend the why of this when bumper crops have been harvested consistently, and where 137,000,000 tons of food capable of feeding 49,000,000 people is thrown away annually.

Clearly, the major problem is not too little food, but access to food. The hungry and malnourished of our country are the poor. They are hungry not because there is not enough food

for all, but because they do not possess the commodity which gains access to food or food production—money.

—Rod Medley, in “Domestic Poverty and Hunger”¹

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Remembering that affluence can be as dehumanizing as poverty, and that many poor as well as well-to-do are seriously impaired or unable to deal with money responsibly and creatively, I need to also realize that affluence allows a person to distance him/herself from others, thus making continuing illusions not only possible, but attractive. Poverty does not allow for this luxury quite as easily. I need to ask myself the following questions about the giving of money.

1. Will it be creative and helpful, or possibly harmful?
2. What amount is right for them to receive and me to give?
3. What other sources of income do they have, can they get, and should they get from others, such as constituent members, which may suggest I give elsewhere?
4. What is their overall budget? What percentage should I give to help them be aware of the importance of broadening the base of support so they do not become dependent on one or two major sources? At the same time, can I be wise and free enough to give at times where little expertise or experience in receiving money is evident?
5. What is their tax-exemption status, integrity, evidence of accountability? Hopefully I'm not locked into giving only for tax benefits. Occasionally many valuable gifts are given where no tax exemption is possible or needed.
6. What is the prospect of this being a one-time gift or an annual repeat gift if needed? If I know, it is helpful for the recipient to know which it is.
7. While it is important to look at the track record, there are cases where the great part of my gift will be in the risk I joyously take where there is no track record or a poor one.

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Give trust and love with money. Give *self* with money whenever possible.

8. In giving, do I feel free of manipulation, clutching, holding? Am I stretching, growing, enjoying, adventuring, risking with the recipient?

9. Am I really into making this gift for what the other needs, or for what I need? It's okay to benefit in some way from giving, but it's important to know and share your honest agenda, expectations with your recipient so he/she can decide whether to accept the gift on those terms: "Do you know what you're really being asked for and are you willing to give it freely?"

—Don McClanen¹

QUESTIONS

1. A church committee told a young minister they wanted him to leave because of the way he was trying to change their attitude toward certain social issues. Why is it so difficult for most of us to deal with this area of our lives? What part of our inner being is most threatened by the need to change?

2. Why is it often considered "unpatriotic" to suggest the need for changes in our economic system? How is this related to our need for security?

3. Do you approve of economic boycotts as a way of protesting against economic injustice? Explain your answer.

4. The religious leaders were angry at Jesus when he cleansed the temple because he threatened their economic security. In what ways is the anger directed at those working for the rights of blacks and women caused by economic factors?

5. In what ways can the church be supportive of those who are working for social justice in our society? In what ways should the church be *leading* in the area of social justice?

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MEDITATION

"He has showed you, O man, what is good; 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)

Ever-present Christ Spirit, I center my thoughts on you, visualizing you here and now. The activity that occupies my mind is slowly stilled, and it is filled with clear, vibrant life.

Quiet

I know that you will teach all who ask you. I humbly ask you to work in and through me to accomplish your purposes. Let me oppose injustice with courage, firmness and vision. Let the compassion I feel for those who suffer, and my anger at those who appear to be responsible, be channeled for good. Help me to know that I can make a difference to my friends, family and community. Work through all people to build your kingdom of love. I pray now for the victims and perpetrators of injustice, and for the structures of society that perpetuate destructive, dehumanizing practices. Lord, help us all to realize what we are doing to ourselves and others, and what we could be doing for them instead.

Personal prayer

Thank you for all those who have acted in great or small ways to correct oppression throughout the centuries. Thank you for the power of love which can grow within us, and enable us to know and do your will. Thank you for courage and justice and kindness and truth. May these qualities of spirit increase in my heart, and in all persons everywhere.



Plants. Drawing by Wu Guan Zhong. Shum Chun, China.