



BLUEPRINT

for Social Justice

Founded in 1948 by
Louis J. Twomey, S.J.

BLUEPRINT is published
monthly from September through May
by the Twomey Center

for Peace Through Justice,
Loyola University, New Orleans
7214 St. Charles Avenue
Campus Box 907
New Orleans Louisiana

(504) 861-5736

FAX (504) 861-5414

Email • bluprint@loyno.edu

Web • <http://www.loyno.edu/twomey>

Publisher • Ted Quant

Editor • Bill Quigley

Printer • Joe Forte

PLEASE SEND CHANGE OF ADDRESS

NOTICE, INCLUDING OLD ADDRESS,

TO ADDRESS GIVEN ABOVE

ISSN#0895-5786

Opinions expressed in *Blueprint*

are the author's and not necessarily representative of
Loyola University. There is no charge for *Blueprint*,
but tax-deductible donations are gratefully accepted.
Make checks payable to Loyola Twomey Center.



© 2004, Loyola University New Orleans

BLUEPRINT

For Social Justice

Volume LVIII, No. 1

September 2004

Social Justice Spirituality: A Meditation on Micah 6:8

Bill Quigley

*What does the lord require of you
but to act justly, love tenderly,
and walk humbly with your god?
Micah 6:8*

I pulled the Gideon bible out of the bedside drawer of the motel in central Illinois and turned the pages to find the prophet Micah. I scheduled an early morning visit with two convicts in the sprawling razor-wire topped federal penitentiary a couple of miles away. The two prisoners were sixty-nine-year-old Cynthia Brinkman, a religious of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness. ([Www.vitw.org](http://www.vitw.org)) Both were serving time for the federal crime of trespass for prayerfully walking onto the grounds of Fort Benning GA to protest the School of the Americas. (www.soaw.org)

I pulled out Micah to help me think about a spirituality of social justice.

Micah was a social justice prophet. He was from a poor family and lived in eighth century BC. Micah was disgusted by the way the powerful mistreated the powerless. The Jerome Biblical Commentary says he was "a fearless champion of the cause of the oppressed."

Micah attacked the social, economic and religious leaders of his time in the toughest language possible. He said the landowners were cheats, the merchants were greedy, the priests were hypocrites, and the prophets were false. He said those in charge "eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from them, and break their bones. They chop them in pieces like flesh in a kettle." (3:2-3).

Micah calls us to social justice spirituality. We are called to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our god. Not justice alone. Not love alone. Not walking humbly with god alone. None stand alone. Justice, love, and spirituality are to be intertwined in our lives. In order to act justly, we must love tenderly and walk humbly with god. In order to love tenderly, we must act justly and walk humbly with god. And in order to walk humbly with god, we must act justly and love tenderly.

Act justly

Micah told the people of his day and ours that action for justice is required. Not justice talk, but just action.

Social justice spirituality insists that true spirituality cannot be found on its own, but must be sought in the effort to act justly and love tenderly. In fact, only then is true spirituality even possible. As one theologian says, "one knows that his or her life is positively united with God in the exact measure that one responds to the needs of other people."¹

It does little good to be religious or spiritual if we do not act justly. As Gutierrez says, "when justice does not exist, god is not known; [god] is absent."²

Because we are individual and social beings, our actions for justice must be both person-

al and political. What we do, how we live, and what we consume are all personal justice issues. Our working lives are what we spend the bulk of our time on and so we are called to choose work that builds a more just world. If our job does not build justice and love, then we are called to transform it to make it an opportunity for justice and love. If our work is ultimately in opposition to justice and love, then we must find other work. Likewise, our family lives must reflect the values of Micah. But despite the challenges of incorporating justice and love into our personal lives, there is more, much more.

Justice challenges us to confront our unjust structures and institutions. We are to proclaim the truth, like Micah, and denounce injustice. That is prophetic social justice.

Unfortunately, we start from a peculiarly uncomfortable global social justice position. We North Americans sit comfortably at the very top of the world economic mountain. Over three billion of our sisters and brothers live beneath us on \$2 a day. They are subjected to needless and manmade economic, political, religious and military injustices, many of which directly support our position atop the mountain. Because of this, we have a responsibility to help transform the unjust structures and institutions that create or contribute to their suffering. We must support those who are working for justice locally and globally. We must join with others in social justice movements that are working to challenge these global practices of injustice. We must also help create new simpler ways of living that are not built on the foundations of injustice.

Justice is built on the essential human dignity of each person in this world, a cornerstone of Catholic social thought.

“Human dignity...is not earned by achievements or bestowed by any authorities other than God. It is not dependent on race, creed, color, economic class, political power, social status, culture, personal abilities, gender, sexual orientation, or any other dimensions by which people discriminate social groupings. There is a unique and sacred worth that is present in each person simply because she or he exists.”³

Because of this shared human dignity we are not called to give some measure of charity to our sisters and brothers out of our excess, but we are called to an essential re-ordering and returning.

As Walter Brueggemann says: “Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them.”⁴

With billions in subhuman poverty, sorting out what belongs to whom and returning it to

them is real justice. It is also a real challenge for us atop the mountain.

Justice calls us to turn our world view upside down and look at its fairness from the perspective of those billions who live at the base of the mountain. Looked at from the bottom of the mountain, who would not question the inequality? Looked at from the bottom, we must see the racism, the militarism, and the excessive materialism of those who are perched comfortably at the top. A preferential option for the poor insists that, like Micah, we vigorously challenge these current social, economic, military and religious arrangements.

Since we live at the top of the mountain, we are not naturally in a position to know what the perspective is from the bottom. Therefore, we must continually re-educate ourselves about justice and injustice. The mainstream media is certainly not going to spend much time trying to educate us about injustice - their job is to push us to want beer and cars and be slimmer. The mainstream consensus from the top of the mountain is that “we are doing all we can,” “things are much better than they used to be,” and “don't worry about it someone else is working on this right now.” True re-education is our job. Seeking out the voices of the poor and listening to them is up to us.

Acting justly leads to conflict with the forces that are comfortable with the way things are now. Taking the side of the poor, denouncing injustices, calling for a re-ordering of the world's resources, demanding a much, much better world will result in disagreement, anger, and reprisal. But as the Boff brothers of Brazil remind us, people who are active for justice should still be recognized by their joyfulness:

“The clear option for the poor and their liberation raises conflicts. The efforts required to bring about the insurrection of the gospel in oneself, in the structures of society, and in the church, often produces tensions and painful separations. Accepting such situations joyfully as the price to be paid for integral liberation is a sign of maturity and characteristic of the spirit of the Beatitudes, as so many Christians committed to the poor have shown in so many ways.”⁵

Love tenderly

In addition to acting justly, Micah insists that we love tenderly.

In my experience, this is tougher for social justice folks. We can get so caught up in calling for justice and acting for justice that we can become demanding, self-righteous, and harsh. Can't you just imagine Micah's friends saying “Come on Micah, is everything so bleak? Do you have to be so tough on everyone all the time? Do you have to always look on

It does little good to be religious or spiritual if we do not act justly.

the bad side? Did you have to say that they chop people into pieces like flesh in a kettle? ”

So Micah says that with justice comes the command to love tenderly. How many of us temper our action for justice with tender love?

Those who think love or charity is in opposition to justice are flat wrong. If all we are about is politics or trying to change structures, we run the real risk of becoming love-less manipulators. If all we think about is individual personal charity or love, then we leave unjust institutions and structures in place that constantly de-humanize, oppress, and wound our sisters and brothers. We need both in our societies and in our lives.

This call to love tenderly is personal but not only personal. We all know we must love our neighbor, but social justice pushes us to constantly expand the definition of neighbor.

Remember, the parable of the Good Samaritan was given in response to the question “who is my neighbor?” In response Jesus turns the question inside out to show that our neighbor is anyone who needs us.

The Good Samaritan also reminds us of the need for solidarity in this journey. Solidarity means we are all on the road together. We are not to overlook people or their struggles because we are in a hurry to get somewhere else or because we are focused on some other project. If our sisters and brothers are struggling, that is our struggle and we must find a way to participate with them.

Our sisters and brothers are critical because no one walks the path of social justice alone and stays on it. Only with community is a life journey of justice and love possible. True love and true justice are profoundly prophetic, profoundly counter-cultural, even profoundly revolutionary. Those are not forces any of us can confront alone. We need a supportive community. I am willing to bet that Micah was part of a community that supported and challenged and comforted him. And it probably drove him crazy some times as well, like all our communities do. That is real life. But I remember Dan Berrigan being asked who were his heroes. His response? “I don't believe in heroes. I believe in community.”

Gutierrez points out that “it is not enough to say that love of god is inseparable from love of one's neighbor. It must be added love for god is unavoidably expressed through love of one's neighbor.” Our neighbor is not only viewed individually, but “in the fabric of social relationships...in his economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates...[and] the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few.”⁶

This is not Hallmark card tender love. This is real life and real love. Anyone who knows real life and real love knows love is both beautiful and the

most difficult challenge imaginable. Micah knows this and tells us to love tenderly anyway.

Dorothy Day had a favorite quote about the reality of love, from Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, which sums up the challenge of loving tenderly:

“...Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over, with all looking on and applauding as though on the stage. But active love is labor and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science. But I predict that just when you see with horror that in spite of all your efforts you are getting farther from your goal instead of nearer to it -- at that very moment I predict that you will reach it and behold clearly the miraculous power of the Lord who has been all the time loving and mysteriously guiding you.”

Walk humbly with your god

Micah reminds us that, in addition to acting justly and loving tenderly, we are also required to “walk humbly with your god.” That is a key to social justice spirituality.

This is not a spirituality in competition with a life of action for justice. A spirituality that is devoted only to trying to develop a personal relationship with god which ignores or de-emphasizes the demand to create a more just world with our neighbors is not real spirituality. A spirituality that does not insist that we act justly and loving toward the poor and oppressed in our world is an incomplete spirituality. But likewise, a life that tries only to be concerned about justice and love, without an interior life, is incomplete.

No one can accuse Micah of a personal private spirituality detached from the concerns of the poor and oppressed. Advocating for justice for the poor was his daily bread.

Social justice advocates often identify with the prophets in their uncompromising denunciation of the status quo. But the prophets also have a desert side to them, a prolonged reflective period. The prophets are constantly creating quiet time to listen to god.

To walk humbly with god is spirituality. So how might social justice advocates interpret and apply Micah's instruction to “walk humbly with your god?” Think about each word.

Walking is not the usual way we are taught to think of developing a social justice spirituality. But I like it. Not running, not rushing, but walking.

The Buddhist social justice activist and

Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.

Action without contemplation is a recipe for burnout.

contemplative Thich Nhat Hanh writes frequently about “mindful walking.” He describes his approach to walking meditation: “We walk slowly, alone or with friends, if possible in some beautiful place. Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking - walking not in order to arrive, just for walking”⁸

This suggests we approach the spirit in the way we would walk with a friend - taking our time, enjoying the walk.

Another thought about walking with the spirit is found in the Emmaus story. Luke 24:13-35. The narrative tells the story about followers of Jesus walking miles from Emmaus to Jerusalem with a stranger after the death of Jesus. Only later do they recognize that they have been walking with their god. The story is clearly one of confusion, where the fact that the followers are walking with the spirit is not really recognized.

Many times we may think the spirit is absent from our lives, but it is possible, like in the Emmaus story, that when we walk humbly trying to find god, god may already be there.

The story ends with Jesus revealing himself after he, a stranger, has been invited in to share a meal with the disciples. Though this is often translated into an invitation into a formal liturgical event, that is not what it actually says. It says that the disciples recognized Jesus only after walking with a stranger, listening to that stranger, and then inviting the stranger, “who appeared to be going further” in to share a meal with them. The disciples acted justly and loved tenderly by inviting a stranger in and making him a part of their lives - only then was the spirit revealed by their new relationship with the stranger. In the stranger they literally found god.

We must create the time to take that walk. There are times when all of us have felt that we are too busy to spend time meditating. But developing the mindfulness that Thich Nhat Hanh talks about gives purpose to our action. Which do you think is better for the justice person and the ones who she interacts with? Nine hours of driven action for justice, or one hour of meditation and eight hours of justice work? Action without contemplation is a recipe for burnout.

Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, was one of the great social justice advocates of the last century. Friends were struck by her constant faithfulness to justice, but also by her deep commitment to meditation, spiritual reading and prayer. Dorothy blended a life of activism with a rich interior life. Rosalie Riegle has written a great book collecting people's stories about Dorothy Day and in reading it you are struck both by her deep prophetic life of justice and by her constant dedication to a strong spiritual life. One friend recalls:

“I think her spirituality is the key... If she had just totally lost herself in the Worker, it wouldn't have been Dorothy Day at all. She obviously resisted being overwhelmed by the work and took her time to be private and to read and pray. This was a woman of silences as well as intense activity, and you felt it when you were with her.”⁹

Micah also stresses the idea of walking humbly. Humility is not the usual word we think of when you think of social justice advocates is it? Self-righteousness is the opposite of humility. All of us have many, many reasons to be humble. But we must remember to be humble because we do not really know for sure what we are supposed to be doing or if what we are doing is really the right thing. We are trying, but we are not certain.

A part of walking humbly with god is to realize we are not god, nor are we called to play god. Life is not all about us, nor our social justice work. Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously and act like it is two out, bottom of the ninth, all the time. In the history of time and in the full universal view, we are but one spirit each. An important spirit, certainly, but only one of billions of important spirits.

This is not “Oh, I do not know exactly what to do, so I cannot really do anything” humility. Not the false humility which is used as an excuse for inaction. Walking humbly with our god is going forward in justice humility. When the lights go out, some sit there and wait for someone else to find the door and backup lights. The going forward in humility person gets up and starts walking slowly and with her arms and hands out trying to find the door. We know we do not have all the answers, and it is not all up to us, but that is no reason not to try.

Micah then counsels people to walk humbly with god. Not in front of, not behind, but with. That means we walk with god, but it also clearly says that god walks with us. The perspective that sees this world as evil and god as totally apart from the world would never have people walking with god. Walking with god rightly implies that we have an important and essential part to play in the transformation of this world, in partnership with god.

What does it mean that the prophet charges people to walk humbly with your god? After all, the god that Micah is talking about is Yahweh, not Jesus. I think this means that we are called to respect a much broader vision of god. Interfaith action for justice is essential. But our interfaith actions cannot be just temporary coalitions for an issue or action, but must be based on real appreciation of and respect for the god in the faith of others. Particularly now, this means pushing beyond the traditional work-in-progress drive for respect by Christians and Jews for each other, to include our Muslim sisters and brothers and well

beyond. Interfaith respect is impossible without the integration of the ideas of humility and love.

Where do we find this god we are to walk with? Jesuit theologian Roger Haight suggests:

“God, who is totally other than this world, cannot be experienced apart from the world but only through the world and in relation to the world. Thus the Christian ought to feel or experience absolutely no split or division between this world and the religious longing for final salvation, between religious commitment and secular life.”¹⁰

We should never forget that Jesus taught us exactly where god could be found:

“For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison and you did not care for me.” (Matthew 25:42)

Conclusion

When I was allowed into the brick and cement block prison to visit Sr. Cynthia Brinkman and Kathy Kelly, we embraced and sat at a table outside the warden's office. They wore prison uniform dark-green work shirts and pants. Their feet were in heavy work boots. I was struck by their peacefulness, their embrace of the forced simplicity of prison, their humor and their kindness to others in the prison and on the outside. They laughed frequently about their jobs in the kitchen washing dishes for several hundred prisoners. They asked about people on the outside and we talked about the news and their communities. What I remember most is that, despite their unjust imprisonment, they were constantly smiling.

Micah's call for us to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our god must be interwoven into our lives. Justice. Love. Spirituality. None are separate for those who believe in a social justice spirituality. None stand alone. In order to act justly, we must love tenderly and walk humbly with god. In order to love tenderly, we must act justly and walk humbly with god. And in order to walk humbly with god, we must act justly and love tenderly. All are essential.

Cynthia Brinkman and Kathy Kelly were smiling at me in federal prison because they took seriously the idea that the people of Latin America are our sisters and brothers. Their way of living out social justice is not the way for everyone. But they were there because they, in justice and in love and in a humble walk with their god, protested the use of the United States military to protect the unjust economic and military status quo. For their stand,

they have been criticized and imprisoned. They have been called naive, confused, and unpatriotic. I am sure Micah would understand.

I will never think of Micah's instruction to us to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our god, without thinking of Cynthia and Kathy, sitting in prison, smiling. I think Micah would smile too.

ENDNOTES

1. Roger Haight, S.J. AN ALTERNATIVE VISION: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology 253 (Paulist Press 1985).
2. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 195 (Orbis 1973).
3. Edward P. DeBerri, James E. Hug, et al, CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING; Our Best Kept Secret 20 (Orbis and Center of Concern, 2003).
4. Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, Thomas E. Groome, TO ACT JUSTLY, LOVE TENDERLY, WALK HUMBLY: An Agenda for Ministers 5 (Wipf and Stock 1997).
5. Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, INTRODUCING LIBERATION THEOLOGY 94 (Orbis 2001).
6. Gutierrez, Theology of Liberation (Orbis 1973) 200 and 202.
7. Fyodor Dostoevsky, THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, Chapter 9 (1880).
8. Thich Nhat Hanh, Essential Writings (Orbis 2001) 33.
9. Rosalie Riegle, DOROTHY DAY: Portraits by Those Who Knew Her 79 (Orbis, 2003).
10. Roger Haight, supra, at 246.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Quigley is the new editor of the Blueprint for Social Justice. Bill has been married for 30 years to Debra Dupre and they have two sons, Patrick and Joseph. Bill is a social justice lawyer and professor at Loyola University New Orleans School of Law where he heads up the Law Clinic and the Gillis Long Poverty Law Center.

Justice. Love.
Spirituality.
None stand
alone.



BLUEPRINT

for Social Justice

Twomey Center
Loyola University New Orleans, Box 907
7214 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

Non-profit Org. U.S. Postage PAID New Orleans, LA Permit No. 213

In This Issue

Social Justice Spirituality: A Meditation on Micah 6:8

By
Bill Quigley

Justice. Love. Spirituality. None stand alone. Bill Quigley, the new editor of the Blueprint for Social Justice, meditates on the mandate of Micah that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our god.