



FINDING A SOCIAL JUSTICE VOICE

“IN TRUTH ONLY IN RECENT YEARS HAS ‘SOCIAL JUSTICE’ BEEN INCORPORATED INTO THE STRUGGLE FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT, AS A MEANS TO PROMOTE BOTH THE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF ECOSYSTEMS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.”

--- Roy May and Carlos Tamez, page 63

Environmental concerns apply to all of humanity. Despite the amount of damage we personally are responsible for, our residence on the earth prevents us from escaping the problems and concerns at hand. On page 10, Roger Gottlieb comments, “Despite obvious differences the environmental crisis is in some ways a kind of holocaust inflicted on everyone.”

For this reason we can easily understand the ties between environmental concerns and social justice. Both look to the needs of all and recognize that when one has too much, another goes without. Both involve removing abuse and refusing to take advantage of the less fortunate. And most importantly, both recognize that God created all things for his purposes, and not for our own.

As people of faith, we must look to this shared crisis with a sense of responsibility. As Patriarch Bartholomew writes on page 56, “We have always considered it both inappropriate and escapist to blame one culture, religion or society for the damage wrought on the natural world... We are, all of us, in this predicament together; and we must assume responsibility collectively if we are to resolve this crisis favorably.”

SESSION OBJECTIVES: To understand how environmental concerns fit into the broader picture of concern for the poor and oppressed. To consider how using language of social justice can help identify some root problems of the environmental crisis at hand.

You may have noticed that several authors in *Reflections* refer to or quote Martin Luther King, Jr. Start your session by identifying how environmental issues fit into or are different from the legacy of MLK. How do you think it relates to equality?

Avoiding the Great Collision: “We Can Save What is Left”
James Gustave Speth

Speth references King’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech delivered April 4th, 1967, one year to the day before his death, in his article. Have someone in the group read King’s closing remarks aloud as printed below. As you listen, notice his use of the language of Amos 5:24.

“AND IF WE WILL ONLY MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE, WE WILL BE ABLE TO TRANSFORM THIS PENDING COSMIC ELEGY INTO A CREATIVE PSALM OF PEACE. IF WE WILL MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE, WE WILL BE ABLE TO TRANSFORM THE

JANGLING DISCORDS OF OUR WORLD INTO A BEAUTIFUL SYMPHONY OF BROTHERHOOD. IF WE WILL BUT MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE, WE WILL BE ABLE TO SPEED UP THE DAY, ALL OVER AMERICA AND ALL OVER THE WORLD, WHEN JUSTICE WILL ROLL DOWN LIKE WATERS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM.”

1. Read **ISAIAH 55:1-11**.

Identify similarities in Isaiah and Amos. How is running water important in both these passages?

2. Now consider Speth’s report on page 37:

“THE FOLLOWING RIVERS NO LONGER REACH THE OCEANS IN THE DRY SEASON: THE COLORADO, YELLOW, GANGES, AND NILE, AMONG OTHERS.”

Name ways that our abuse of the world interferes with God’s work. By preventing rivers from running because of our mistreatment of the earth, how could one say we make it harder for others to understand God’s character?

- a. Picture a physical stream of running water. List things that help a river and hurt a river. (You don’t have to be a biologist!)
- b. Do you agree with Martin Luther King, Jr. that we can speed God’s justice?

3. What can you, your family, your work place and/or your faith community do that will help God’s justice and love flow?

Environmental Justice and a New American Dream

Jerome Ringo

1. On page 43 Ringo refers to the way in which Martin Luther King Jr. brought together people from all walks of life. “He convinced labor, environmental groups, the faith community, educators, both private and public sectors to come together.” Identify the different ways diverse people can relate to environmental issues. Which are important to you personally?
2. Imagine you live in a 3rd World Country. Which environmental issues would be important to you. Why?

Something extra: Repeat the exercise, imagining yourself as someone else in your town (the mayor, school teacher, or door to door salesman). Which environmental issues are important to you?

3. Read **1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26**.

How does the idea of a church with one body and many parts relate to this topic?

What can certain groups of people bring to the discussion that others can’t? *What can you offer?*



Green Discipleship

-Larry Rasmussen

Rasmussen brings up Ricardo Navvaro's idea of "ecological debt" in which those who are rich, white, and/or men are in debt to the poor, the indigenous, and/or women.

1. Write your name and location in the center of a piece of paper. Above your name write individuals and people groups who have less ecological debt than you. Below write those who have more ecological debt. Compare your charts with each other and against Rasmussen's Champagne Glass model. Who are you not aware of?

Contrast this with Ringo's observation that the ecological movement lacks minority voices. Who should be involved in restoring the environment? Why? When?

3. Read **MATTHEW 5:23-24**. How does having a debt to your brothers and sisters affect your worship life? How should it?
2. On page 71 Rasmussen discusses Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of "World House," an idea from his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture.
 - a. Paraphrase the idea of the "World House."
 - b. List ways you include others in your home. Now list ecological choices that can ensure people everywhere are more at home.
 - c. Identify how "World House" relates to Eucharist. What does sharing our bread with all men mean?

Extra Challenge: Where does the bread and wine your church uses for Eucharist come from? For your potlucks and other events? Name choices you can make so that what you eat and drink does not harm others.

How Green Was Our Valley: The Garrison Institute

Jonathan F. P. Rose

"THE GOAL IS NOT TO FIND A MIDDLE GROUND, BUT RATHER THROUGH DEEP SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT, FIND A NEW VIEW THAT UNDERLIES BOTH [RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES]."

1. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On one side write or draw what you consider the important elements of religion. On the other, right or draw important elements of environmental concern. Share your list with others. *What makes both lists?* Circle or star those things that reappear. Make one list that can apply to both.
2. Identify why Rose thinks silence is important. How is silence important in your life? What role does it play in your personal life? In your church's life?

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: During the civil rights movement, several churches became abolition churches as they understood God's work to be concerned with the poor and oppressed. Identify your church's position. Is this an important legacy for you to follow

Help us, O Lord to love you as you loved us to long for your justice to touch every individual in the entire world. Help us to see the places where our actions and our lives interfere with your plan to love others. Give us wisdom and bravery to find ways our community can become agents of your love. Help us to learn about the water of the world and what part we can play in ensuring others have access to its refreshing and healing gift.