

Career Discernment: A Christian Perspective (Part Two)

Focus on *Social Justice* as a Redemptive Passion: Discussion Groups

I'd like you to discuss how caring for the poor can be done in your major and career field. I'm going to break us up into four fields. In each of these fields, there is a systemic problem that hurts the poor.

So, as you break up into your groups and discuss this more with people who are learning the same things, please share things that you've learned in class or outside class that have inspired you. I know there are great stories that some of you have heard about, or organizations you've heard about. Let's benefit from each other's learning and help each other take a practical step. Maybe this will shape what summer internship you look for. And maybe that will shape your future.

As you talk, I'd like for you to keep in mind that we are growing into this. No matter who we are, Christian or not, we don't have all the practical answers. This is not a contest to see who cares the most. If you don't know that much, that's okay. You can say so. This is an opportunity to learn. I look forward to learning what you've learned. In fact, to some degree, any idealist is a hypocrite, and any Christian is a hypocrite in some way or another. But this is for our development. My hope is that as we talk, we will find that God grows our heart just a little bit more. May we desire to be *God's image-bearer* more and more.

So please break up into groups by industry, and we will give you a hand out. Read the handout on how there is a structural problem that affects the most poor and vulnerable people. Talk about any ideas you have that counteract the problems listed on the handout. And if you are aware of other structural problems against the poor and vulnerable in these industries, please mention those too and let that be part of the discussion.

Education and Educational Policy

1954: The Supreme Court (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*) reverses *Plessy* by ruling that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, arguing that separate *is* unequal.

1974: The Supreme Court (*Milliken v. Bradley*) rules that desegregation, ‘in the sense of dismantling a dual school system,’ did not require ‘any particular racial balance in each ‘school, grade or classroom.’’ The Court also emphasized the importance of local control over the operation of schools. Justice William Douglas dissented: ‘Today’s decision ... means that there is no violation of the Equal Protection Clause though the schools are segregated by race and though the black schools are not only separate but inferior... Michigan by one device or another has over the years created black school districts and white school districts, the task of equity is to provide a unitary system for the affected area where, as here, the State washes its hands of its own creations.’

2005: ‘Public school resegregation is a “national horror hidden in plain view,” writes former educator turned public education activist Kozol (*Savage Inequalities, Amazing Grace*). Kozol visited 60 schools in 11 states over a five-year period and finds, despite the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many schools serving black and Hispanic children are spiraling backward to the pre-*Brown* era. These schools lack the basics: clean classrooms, hallways and restrooms; up-to-date books in good condition; and appropriate laboratory supplies. Teachers and administrators eschew creative coursework for rote learning to meet testing and accountability mandates, thereby “embracing a pedagogy of direct command and absolute control” usually found in “penal institutions and drug rehabilitation programs.”¹

‘Like most states, New York funds schools with property taxes. Inevitably, this leads to inequities among poor and affluent jurisdictions: the higher the property values, the better the schools.’²

Separation of white and minority students has increased since 1988. Experienced, better-paid teachers cluster in schools with the most privileged students, a phenomenon that quietly channels public money away from schools in poverty-prone areas.³

‘Largely because of the persistence of residential segregation and so-called “white-flight” from the public school systems in many larger urban areas, minorities often attend comparatively under-funded (and thus lower quality) primary and secondary schools. Thus minority children are often less prepared to compete for slots in competitive universities and jobs. While efforts to dismantle segregation in our nation's schools have enjoyed some success, segregation remains a problem both in and among our schools, especially given rollbacks in affirmative action programs.’⁴

¹ From the Publishers Weekly review of Jonathan Kozol’s book *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, Crown Publishing: 2005

² PBS documentary *Beyond Brown*, http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/legacy/money_summary.html

³ summarized from Paul Hill and Kacey Guin, co-authors of the University of Washington study published in the journal *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, October 2003

⁴ Initial Report of the United States to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,” September 2000, p.18

Health Care and Health Policy

'Fructose is a poison...[yet] high fructose corn syrup has found its way into hamburger buns, pretzels, barbeque sauce, and ketchup, almost everything. We are being poisoned by this stuff...every processed food. We are up to 141 pounds of sugar per year per person... We weigh 25 pounds more today than we did 25 years ago...Chronic fructose exposure leads to: hypertension, myocardial infarction, dyslipidemia, pancreatitis, obesity, hepatic dysfunction, fetal insulin resistance, habituation if not addiction.'⁵

'Multinational pharmaceutical companies neglect the diseases of the tropics, not because the science is impossible but because there is, in the cold economics of the drugs companies, no market. There is, of course, a market in the sense that there is a need: millions of people die from preventable or curable diseases every week. But there is no market in the sense that, unlike Viagra, medicines for leishmaniasis are needed by poor people in poor countries. Pharmaceutical companies judge that they would not get sufficient return on research investment, so why, they ask, should we bother? Their obligation to shareholders, they say, demands that they put the effort into trying to find cures for the diseases of affluence and longevity—heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's. Of the thousands of new compounds drug companies have brought to the market in recent years, fewer than 1% are for tropical diseases...In the corporate headquarters of major drug companies, the public relations posters display the image they like to present: of caring companies that bring benefit to humanity, relieving the suffering of the sick. What they don't say, is that, so far, their humanity has not extended beyond the limits of the pockets of the sick.'⁶

'Throughout Africa, the privatization of health care has reduced access to necessary services. The introduction of market principles into health care delivery has transformed health care from a public service to a private commodity. The outcome has been the denial of access to the poor, who cannot afford to pay for private care.... For example ... user fees have actually succeeded in driving the poor away from health care [while] the promotion of insurance schemes as a means to defray the costs of private health care ... is inherently flawed in the African context. Less than 10% of Africa's labor force is employed in the formal job sector. The privatization of health care in Africa has created a two-tier system which reinforces economic and social inequalities.... Despite these devastating consequences, the World Bank and IMF have continued to push for the privatization of public health services.'⁷

⁵ Dr. Robert Lustig, Professor of Pediatrics at UCSF, *Sugar: The Bitter Truth*, July 2009, video lecture on youtube

⁶ Isabel Hilton, *A Bitter Pill For The World's Poor*, The Guardian, January 5, 2000

⁷ Ann-Louise Colgan, *Hazardous to Health: The World Bank and IMF in Africa*, Africa Action, April 18, 2002

Business, Finance, and Corporate Policy

'Economists refer to shareholders' tendency to ignore the costs of corporate behavior – pollution is the usual example – that doesn't harm the shareholders themselves (or harms them much less than the benefit the shareholders receive) as an 'externality' problem.'⁸

The Internet has fueled the explosion of child pornography. It was almost completely eradicated before the Internet. It is now becoming more brutal and graphic, and is growing.⁹

'The United Nations tells us that by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population – more than five billion of us – will lack access to water. The World Bank has predicted that the wars of tomorrow will be fought over water. How is it possible that the water crisis could explode within a single generation? There are many causes: growing use and abuse of water by water-intensive industries such as mining, paper and power generation; growing populations and a growing need for irrigation; a spread of industrial pollution fouling lakes and rivers, especially in developing countries; and spreading droughts induced by climate change.'¹⁰

'In *Race Against the Machine*, MIT's Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee present a very different explanation. Drawing on research by their team at the Center for Digital Business, they show that there's been no stagnation in technology -- in fact, the digital revolution is accelerating. Recent advances are the stuff of science fiction: computers now drive cars in traffic, translate between human languages effectively, and beat the best human Jeopardy! players. As these examples show, digital technologies are rapidly encroaching on skills that used to belong to humans alone. This phenomenon is both broad and deep, and has profound economic implications. Many of these implications are positive; digital innovation increases productivity, reduces prices (sometimes to zero), and grows the overall economic pie. But digital innovation has also changed how the economic pie is distributed, and here the news is not good for the median worker. As technology races ahead, it can leave many people behind. Workers whose skills have been mastered by computers have less to offer the job market, and see their wages and prospects shrink. Entrepreneurial business models, new organizational structures and different institutions are needed to ensure that the average worker is not left behind by cutting-edge machines.'¹¹

⁸ David Skeel, *Icarus in the Boardroom*, p.203

⁹ Human Rights Watch, antichildporn.org, familysafemedia.com, British Internet Watch Foundation, U.S. Dept. of Justice

¹⁰ www.stopcorporateabuse.org/cms/page1353.cfm

¹¹ Erik Brynjolfsson, professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, Director of the MIT Center for Digital Business, and Andrew McAfee, principal research scientist at the Center for Digital Business in the MIT Sloan School of Management. They are co-authors of *Race Against the Machine: How the Digital Revolution is Accelerating Innovation, Driving Productivity, and Irreversibly Transforming Employment and the Economy*, October 2011; see also Tom Ashbrook, WBUR, <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2011/11/02/when-machines-do-the-work>

Law Pertaining to Civil Rights and Human Rights, International and Domestic

After World War II, the U.S. set out to control much of the world's wealth. George Kennan, one of the chief architects of this order said, '[The U.S. has] about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that will permit us to maintain this position of disparity.'¹² This began a long string of CIA operations, often overthrowing democratically elected leaders, in: Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, The Congo 1960, Iraq 1963, Brazil 1964, Indonesia 1965, Ghana 1966, Cambodia 1970, Chile 1973, Nicaragua 1981.

'Those [U.S. agricultural] subsidies make it possible to export millions of tons of food so cheaply that native farmers in places such as Jamaica can't possibly compete. By guaranteeing U.S. farmers a minimum payment for commodities such as corn, rice and soybeans, the government encourages overproduction. That drives down the market price, forcing even higher subsidies and creating surpluses that can be shipped to Jamaica and elsewhere... There is no doubt, by the way, that farm subsidies are corporate welfare par excellence. Although the program began as a way to aid poor family farmers in the 1930s, by last year nearly three-quarters of the money went to the richest 10 percent of American farmers. Recipients of five- and six-figure farm subsidy payments included John Hancock Life Insurance Co., Chevron, banker David Rockefeller, and basketball star Scottie Pippen. Even former Enron chairman Kenneth Lay collected a few bucks.'¹³

In 1989 the Supreme Court handed down a still-cited major decision, *City of Richmond, Virginia v. J.A. Croson Co.*, which knocked down a local Richmond program designed to remedy some past discrimination against black and other minority businesses with modest set-asides. The high Court ruled in favor of a white-run construction company, the plaintiff, which argued that the municipal government had unconstitutionally set aside some local contracts for small minority companies. The Court ruled that the Richmond government had not made a compelling case for remedying antiblack discrimination, even though the government defendant's statistics showed that in a city whose population was one-half black, less than 1 percent of city government business went to black-owned firms. Similar philosophical and legal arguments against significant remedial action for systemic racism have been reiterated by the plaintiffs and justices in other federal court cases since this important case. Several subsequent cases have built on this precedent to weaken even modest affirmative action programs.¹⁴

¹² George Kennan, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948. Report by the Policy Planning Staff, Washington, DC: General Printing Office, 1976, pp 524 – 525

¹³ Andrew Cassel, *Why U.S. Farm Subsidies Are Bad for the World*, Philadelphia Inquirer Monday, May 6, 2002. <http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0506-09.htm>

¹⁴ Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.83