Ex Auditu

An International Journal for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Volume 22 2006

Ex Auditu is published annually by Wipf & Stock Publishers, 199 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, Oregon 97401, U.S.A.

Subscriptions

Individuals:
U.S.A. and all other countries (in U.S. funds) - $20.00
Students - $12.00

Institutions:
U.S.A. and all other countries (in U.S. funds) - $30.00

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, Email: atla@atla.com, WWW: http://www.atla.com/; *Internationale Zeitschriftenshau für Bibelwissenschaft*; *Religious and Theological Abstracts*; and *Old Testament Abstracts*.

Please address all subscription correspondence and change of address information to *Wipf & Stock Publishers.*

ISSN 0883-0053

Ex Auditu

An International Journal for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Editor*

North Park Theological Seminary
3225 West Foster Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625-4987
USA

Tel. (773) 244-6243
Fax: (773) 244-6244
email: ksnodgrass@northpark.edu
Website: http://www.northpark.edu/sem/exauditu

EX AUDITU

Volume 22 2006

CONTENTS

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE 2007 SYMPOSIUM

North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, is pleased to announce that the twenty-third Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture will take place September 27–29, 2007. The symposium will start at 7:00 p.m. on September 27 in Nyvall Hall and will extend through a Saturday afternoon worship service on September 29. The theme in 2007 will be Christianity's Engagement with Culture. The following persons have agreed to make presentations:

Sathianathan Clarke, Wesley Theological Seminary (Theology)
Ellen Davis, Duke Divinity School (Old Testament)
Paul Denui, North Park Theological Seminary (Missions)
Boaz Johnson, North Park University (Old Testament)
Rob Johnston, Fuller Theological Seminary (Theology and Culture)
Andrew Mbuvi, Shaw University Divinity School (New Testament)
Paul Metzger, Multnomah Biblical Seminary (Theology and Culture)
David Tiede, Augusta College (New Testament)

Persons interested in attending the sessions should write before September 1 to:

Ms. Guylla Brown
North Park Theological Seminary
3225 W. Foster Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625

Meals may be taken at North Park and assistance can be provided in finding nearby lodging.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
AnBib	Analecta biblica
A.R.	Gregory of Nyssa's *De Anima et Resurrectione* (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*)
ASV	American Standard Version
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
Bib	*Biblica*
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
C.E.	Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* (*Against Eunomius*)
C.O.	Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetica Oratio* (*Catechetical Orations*)
D.H.O.	Gregory of Nyssa's *de Hominis Opificio* (*On the Creation of the Human Being*)
DJG	*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*
FIOTL	Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature
G.N.O.	*Gregorii Nysseni Opera*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
H.E.	Gregory of Nyssa's "Homilies on Ecclesiastes"
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
H.P.	Gregory of Nyssa's *In Sanctum Pascha* (*Discourse on the Holy Pasch*)
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IBC	*Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JRT	*Journal of Religious Thought*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods: Supplement Series
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version

L.P.	Gregory of Nyssa's *The Lord's Prayer*
LXX	Septuagint
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTL	Old Testament Library
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus: series Graeca
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
ST	*Studia theologica*
SWJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLOT	*Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	*Word and World*
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

INTRODUCTION

It is fashionable for politicians and theologians to talk about justice, even if courts and lawyers are more interested in legal success than justice. Our society often wants justice separated both from morality and legality. Further, it is easy to talk about justice but more difficult to define it in ways that actually *do* justice to all the competing claims in society. Justice for one person usually means another person has to pay—or at least refrain from taking what he or she could. Still more difficult is the task of living justly, putting justice into practice in all aspects of one's being: in family relations, in conformity of word and act, in use of money, and in sexual relations, to name only the most obvious.

We often separate individual ethics from issues of social justice, but can they be so easily separated? Can we say we care about social justice in Africa, with regard to racism, or with regard to economic justice, and not care about justice to the social entity—the person—to whom we relate? Can we claim to be justified and not be just?

Justice is practiced within boundaries and communities. Is justice dispensed the same both inside and outside our communities? Should it be, or does community create different demands on justice? Within what boundaries does justice operate?

In Luke 12:13 a man addresses Jesus with a cry for justice, which says in effect, "Give me my rights." Jesus responds to such requests, in effect, by saying, "Look to yourself first." (Cf. Luke 13:1–3 and see Kenneth Ewing Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 60.) There is a standard of justice higher than our limited perceptions of justice, which should engender humility for both words and actions. As Lesslie Newbigin commented, "If I do not acknowledge a justice which judges the justice for which I fight, I am an agent, not of justice, but of lawless tyranny" (*The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 125).

No symposium can answer all the questions on justice, but the results in this journal are a step toward the goal. Nor can the journal ever do justice to the richness of the conversations at the symposia. Hopefully, however, these articles can be a starting point for the church's conversations on justice.

Thanks is expressed once again to all the presenters and respondents who made a significant investment in the life of North Park. The friendship of these

people is a privilege. Thanks are especially expressed to Dan Bell and Willard Swartley, who agreed to give papers late in the process because others found it necessary to pull out. James Bruckner's paper was not given at the symposium but is included because if offers foundational ideas in defining justice. The authors of papers were given a chance to edit their contributions after the symposium, but the responses are as they were presented. As is obvious, the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the journal or of North Park. We also thank all those in attendance for their interest and contribution to the discussions.

As has been the case in recent years, this journal was typeset using the word processor *NotaBene*, and gratitude is expressed to the good people at *NotaBene* for their continued, generous help. Special thanks is expressed to Rebekah Eklund, who proofread the journal, to Nathanael Putnam, who among other things prepared the bibliography, and to Guylla Brown from North Park's staff, without whom the symposium would not be possible.

Klyne Snodgrass
The Editor

JUSTICE IN SCRIPTURE

JAMES K. BRUCKNER

What is justice? In the postmodern world, as in every age, there are competing definitions for "justice." An international war crimes court, a disgruntled consumer, a victim of violent crime, and a civil rights advocate will likely disagree concerning the most important aspects of justice. The content of *justice* depends upon who is interested in gaining it and who has the power to define it. Almost everyone is *for* justice, but who has the prerogative to decide what justice *is*?

As a concept infused with cultural values, justice is often equated with *fairness*. Fairness-justice, however, is usually defined from one's own vantage point and is often skewed toward one's own advancement. As a result justice is returned to a court of competing claims. The Scripture also has claims to make, presenting God's perspectives on justice. This external perspective may bring comfort to some, but it may also challenge and reshape our categories.

God has a claim on justice. In Scripture justice is never abstracted or separated from God as its source. When one deifies the *idea* of justice and speaks without reference to God, this critical point is obscured. If one approaches the OT prophets with the erroneous assumption that they had an abstract idea of justice, one will be left simply with an agenda for social reform. Biblical justice is neither simply a *value* nor a *reform program*. It is the means by which God's kingdom is established and is described as the foundation of his throne (Pss 97:2; 99:4; 98:9). More than God's policy, it is the *pathos* behind every action of God in Scripture. In the book of Genesis, Abraham asked, "Will not the Judge of all the earth judge justly?" (Gen 18:25).

Two Hebrew words translated "justice" provide a window into the biblical concept. The first is *mišpāṭ* ("justice" or "judgment") and comes from the realm of law. It refers to *strict justice*, that is, giving each person his or her due.[1] It is grounded in a formal equilibrium of rewarding good behavior and judging law-breakers. God's goal in *justice-judgment* is not simply equilibrium, but *restoration*. To that end, it involves repentance. God's transforming grace, mercy, and blessing

are intended to flow from this kind of judging-justice: "Therefore the LORD is waiting to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice (*mišpāṭ*); blessed are all those who wait for him" (Isa 30:18).

The second word translated "justice" is *ṣĕdāqāh* ("justice" or "righteousness"). This kind of justice goes beyond strict justice, implying kindness and generosity as justice is done. It does not mean "soft justice." It means intelligent, loving reflection, and action that restores health and well-being to communities and individuals. It is often used with the words "rescue," "defend," "plead," and "deliver." The main argument in the OT is that since God in his justice has delivered his people, they ought also to act with justice toward others. For example, "Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this" (Deut 24:17–18).

While *justice-judgment* upholds standards of God's law through human decision making (usually in a courtroom), *justice-righteousness* is a personal quality that God seeks to develop in all people. In Sinaitic law a borrower may give a cloak as collateral for a small loan. This law protects the lender and makes loans possible. Part of the law, however, provides that if a man is poor, the cloak should be returned daily: "You shall return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a *righteous* (*ṣĕdāqāh*) act in the sight of the LORD your God" (Deut 24:13). The compassionate righteous act is also a necessary part of biblical justice and law.

It is critical to refer to *God* in interpreting these texts, since even strict legal justice is accompanied by God's righteousness, his mercy, his loving-kindness, and loyalty to his covenant promises. God's intent is nothing less than the restoration of the wholeness of his good creation. This justice is not a disembodied *idea* in Scripture, but the *pathos* and *righteousness* of the living *God*.

> *Pathos* is not a passion or an unreasoned emotion, but an act formed with intention, rooted in decision and determination; [it is] an attitude . . . charged with *ethos* [just action]. . . . *Pathos* means: God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is always partial to justice. . . . *Pathos* is not something absolute, but a form of relation. . . . It is the real basis of relation between . . . Creator and creation.[2]

Biblical justice is not relative. The foundation of biblical justice is the 613 commands given to the people of God at Sinai. The narrative context is the creation of a new sociality for a people delivered from oppression in Egypt. The new relationships established in Sinaitic law provided the newly-released Hebrew slaves an opportunity to live the life of justice and blessing that God had originally intended for them. God's intent in giving the law was to *create this new sociality*.

The prophets similarly relied on God's commands as the heart of their message of judgment (Jer 7:5–10; Hos 4:1–2). Jesus also affirmed the Ten Commandments as central to living justly. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do, he responded, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother" (Matt 19:18, 19). Jesus also insisted, in conversation with the Pharisees, that the primary purpose of the Sinai law was justice, mercy, and faith (Matt 23:23).

Justice prevails in communities where God's law is kept: no coveting, no stealing, no adultery, no lying, and no false gods. But these are not the only laws given at Sinai. Many of the hundreds of remaining laws function to protect the most vulnerable in society. Laws include extensive instruction on how to keep a just court by rule of law, rather than by power (Deut 16:18). They also establish health for the whole community by including commands for a healthy diet in a hot climate with no refrigeration: no shellfish, no pork, no animal fat, and no leftovers after three days.

Biblical justice, based in the Sinai law, also includes many laws concerning medical care, including sanitation instructions, washing requirements for bacteria control, quarantine for contagious diseases, and limits on risky sexual practices. The law also requires *rest* as a necessary component of justice and righteousness. The commandment is simple, but unique: *You shall rest on the seventh day, for the LORD your God rested and blessed the seventh day*. Related to it are commands to allow fields to lay fallow, for the release of debt slaves every seventh year, and for the return of land every forty-nine years to those who have lost it. The grandchildren were to receive back what their parents and grandparents had lost. Biblical justice issues are congruent with the law of Sinai.

The justice of the Sinai laws is community based and integrates the public and private spheres. God's new sociality does not separate issues of the well-being of the community from individual happiness. Safety, economics, health, and personal morality are all woven into the same cloth.

The upshot is that God's justice is not amorphous or relative. It addresses specific relationships to protect and nourish life. It blesses and protects families and communities so that children and the weak may thrive. Jesus upheld the sociality of the laws given at Sinai when he called for living in the justice-righteousness of the kingdom of God (Matt 5–7). The law is a light and easy yoke compared to the heaviness of faithlessness and mistrust.

Biblical justice is related to faith. Jesus warned against separating the pursuit of justice from faith and prayer (Luke 18:1–8). We have, unfortunately, inherited the ancient Greek abstract notion of *dikaiosunē*, sometimes represented as Lady Justice, blindfolded, and holding scales. Biblical justice, however, is never abstract. When the NT uses the Greek word (which may be translated either *justice* or *righteousness*), it is always in the context of the work of God in Christ.

One of Jesus' titles is *The Righteousness* (or *Justice*) *of God* (1 John 2:1; see Rom 3:21–26; 1 Pet 3:18; Rom 8:10; 10:3–4). Jesus is the demonstration of the justice and righteousness of God. In the NT justice and righteousness are understood through the cross of Christ, requiring more radical obedience and sacrifice of self than the OT ever did. In Christ one is set free from the burden of becoming righteous and just. One is *made* righteous in order that one may *do* justice and righteousness.

R. Nysse has written that biblical justice is fundamentally different from your garden variety ethics or morals. It moves beyond them in one consistent manner: "It is centered on God—it is directly theological."[3] Abraham Heschel concurs.

> God is at stake. . . . Righteousness is not just a value; it is . . . God's stake in human history. . . . It is in relations between men and men that God is at stake. . . . *He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, He who is kind to the needy honors Him* (Prov 14:31). . . . Justice is not . . . a value but a transcendent demand freighted with divine concern. It is not only a relationship between man and man, it is an *act* involving God. . . . It is not one of His ways, but in all His ways. . . . People think that to be just is a virtue, deserving honor and rewards; that in doing justice one confers a favor on society. *No one expects to receive a reward for the habit of breathing*. Justice is as much a necessity as breathing is, and a constant occupation.[4]

Justice is described as *God's personal passion* for those who lack the basic resources and dignity of life. God leans towards those who cry out to him for help. This preference of God extends to just acts expected by God of those called to be God's people. From early in Israel's history comes this text in the unequivocal words of God to Moses at Sinai.

> You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and you wives shall become widows and your children orphans. . . . If your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate. (Exod 22:21–24, 27)

Justice, then, is not an *idea* that works itself out in the ups and downs of this life or in the next life. In relation to God it is an immediate and active, not a passive, concern. Justice and righteousness are turned toward the person in anguish, the person who cries out for help. The Creator's concern for justice embraces even the nonhuman creation. God works toward its restoration when it is compromised by the pollution of human sin. According to the prophets, when justice-righteousness is absent in the *human* community, the fish, animals, water,

trees, and land are also adversely affected (Hos 4:1–3; 2:18–23; Deut 20:19; Jer 22:29; Joel 2:21–22).

Partnership with God in work for justice and righteousness comes with abundant promises. In Isaiah God promises his personal presence and the thriving of his people when his people share his passion for the restoration of his good and broken creation.

> Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of *injustice* and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your *righteousness* will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: "Here am I." If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. (Isa 58:6–11)

Jesus and justice-righteousness. When the NT is translated, the Greek word *dikaiosunē* is usually rendered "righteousness," a synonym for "justice." These two concepts are always related in the Bible and their purpose is the same: to restore people to God and to each other. "Justice" never means simply to give someone what they deserve, e.g., punishment for crime or reward for goodness. It means seeking the transformation of the person, good or bad, through the *justice-righteousness* of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that negative consequences have come to an end. Rather, biblical justice and righteousness transcend our common notions of justice. Through justice God seeks the restoration of the created person and the wholeness and goodness of the creation. Even in the context of justice as *judgment* (*krisis*), healing is in view. Matthew declared that Jesus' healing of the sick was a victory of *justice* (*krisis*; Matt 12:9–23; cf. Isa 42:1–4). Those who work in the healing arts are involved in justice ministry, whether they know it or not, because they seek to restore wholeness to God's good creation.

Jesus made the pursuit of justice a more radical concern when he defined the content of justice-righteousness more precisely.

> For I tell you that unless your righteousness [*dikaiosunē*] surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment

> [*krisis*].” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. . . . Anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matt 5:20–22)

Jesus insisted that *humility before God and others* was a necessary component in pursuing just and right actions. Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a man of strict justice, not a robber or adulterer, who fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of his income to charity. Jesus insisted, however, that the other man went home justified. The one *declared righteous* publicly acknowledged his need and said, *God have mercy on me, a sinner* (Luke 18:9–14).

God’s ferocious justice. The righteousness-justice of God in the OT does not distance God from humanity. It brings the Lord *closer*, a frightening experience for the oppressor or the arrogant. Consider what God did to the Egyptians who had enslaved his people. The Psalmist echoes the danger, “The LORD works *righteousness and justice* for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel” (Ps 103:6–7).

The common notion is that *the righteousness of God* refers to a distant holiness, a high, mighty, far off, and terrible god, a strict judge who cannot abide the low creation and would punish and destroy it. This notion has more to do with pagan images of God than the God found in Scripture. Wrath, or anger, is not *an attribute* of God in the Bible.

God’s anger is always a response or reaction to human death-dealing action that destroys the creation or relationships within God’s beloved creation. God’s anger is an act of ferocious love. Righteous wrath may be pictured as *God coming down to rescue his people*, like a mother bear defending her cubs (see Exod 22:22–24; Deut 4:3–4; Isa 57:17–18; Psa 30:5). Consider Jesus, who in fulfilling the prophesies of the righteous son of David overturned money-changing tables in the court of the Gentiles (Mark 11). That NT picture of God’s righteous wrath seeking restorative justice is concomitant with the OT.

What about equality? The present American definition of justice has neither a historical nor a biblical view of reality at its heart. The founders’ eighteenth-century claim was not that everyone is equal in natural ability and opportunity, but that all are *created* equal. This means that each person is created equal in dignity and humanity in relation to the *Creator*. All are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–31). It is also true, however, that all are *equally fallen* in relation to God and each other (Gen 3:7–24). Human *equality* includes the need for redemption by God and reconciliation with each other. The present American versions of equality drop the biblical story and pound the table for equality of rights. It is the equality of one’s need of God and of the good hope of God’s image created within individuals that can actually level the playing field. If Scripture is right about humanity, the only hope for the restoration of equality of dignity and humanity

with each other is *in Christ*. That means justice begins with confession of one's need of God and of each other, an ironically difficult task for those who have been given much.

Is freedom the goal of justice? S. McKnight has pointed to another conflict between biblical justice and American culture. The modern and postmodern assumptions are that *civil freedom and happiness* are the goals of justice. This leans toward understanding justice as judgment for crime. Consequently, we often reduce *God's justice* to the punishment of evil people and the security of a free society. While these values are part of the biblical story, they are not the heart of the story.[5]

When God blinded Elisha's enemies and captured them, King Jehoram had every right under the law to punish them (2 Kgs 6). Rather, Elisha advised him to feed them, restore their sight, and send them home. Instead of escalating the conflict, the Aramean raids ended. Freedom and happiness returned through the transformation of the Arameans, who were forgiven, and through the Israelites, who gave up their right to retribution. We often forget that even the Apostle Paul was a murderer, transformed by the love of Christ. Security in society is necessary, but God's transforming love, which also kills and makes alive, is the ultimate goal of God's justice. When one is satisfied with freedom and happiness as the goal of life, one is divorced from the goal of God's justice. The *freedom of God's love*, not freedom itself, is the goal of biblical justice. God's intention is to bring blessing to all the cultures of the world.

Justice for whom? God's justice is *for* the thriving of his beloved creation. Within the rhetorical framework of the canon, it is *for you*, especially if you are lacking the basic resources to thrive. Scholars of the last generation rightly demonstrated that biblical justice-righteousness leans toward caring for the weak and vulnerable in society. God's concern has been described as a *preference for the poor*.[6] Such attention to the poor is seen, for example, in God's command not to harvest fields, vineyards, or olive groves every seventh year, thereby leaving the produce for those who needed it (Exod 23:10, Lev 25:3). Since this was done in rotation, every community could have plenty for their poor to eat. God's insistence is especially established in the laws concerning widows, the fatherless, and immigrants ("aliens" in the NIV). God's love for them is mentioned more than 300 times in the law and prophets: e.g., "The great God, mighty and awesome . . . defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the immigrant, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are immigrants, for you yourselves were immigrants in Egypt" (Deut 10:17).

This aspect of biblical justice could be easily misunderstood. Its purpose is not simply to insure the basic needs of the neediest communities, though that would be the result. God's command to give attention and resources to the poor is an insistence that *communities that love* are made whole while participating in

God's life and concern (cf. Deut 26:12–19). Working toward health, wholeness, and strength for weaker communities is a necessary and constitutive part of participating in God's kingdom. One may ignore the Lord's call, but to one's own peril and sickness. On the other hand, when the Lord's commands are reduced to an idea or even to an ideal agenda, the power of God's justice-righteousness is misunderstood. The Apostle Paul helps us with a biblical theology of justice when he connects righteousness, justice, our sin, and justification by faith in Christ Jesus: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate *his justice*" (Rom 3:23–25a).

Recognizing the shortfall of personal justice and Christ's gift of *justification* builds humility and gratitude before God. It sets one free from seeking to justify oneself. It establishes a common humility with other Christians to do the work of justice. It also establishes a common humanity with all before the Creator, who intends that justice be done in all the earth (Gen 18:18–19). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declared the same: "Let not the wise man rejoice in his wisdom, let not the mighty man rejoice in his might, let not the rich man rejoice in his riches; but let him who rejoices, rejoice in this; that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, *who does kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth*; for in these things I delight, says the LORD" (Jer 9:24). The purpose of God's command to seek justice is *rejoicing and delight* in the Lord.

What shall we do? The need to work continually toward justice abounds. God's first call, however, concerns what one *may become* and is *free to do*, not what one *should do*. One is free to become the righteousness of God in Christ. If we are reconciled to God, we have become his righteousness and his ambassadors of God's message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17–21). Without this encounter with God's righteousness and justice, our effort to bring justice only leads to more rivalry over who decides what justice is. On the other hand, if we are in Christ, God's concerns become our concerns. "He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!" (Isa. 5:2). "Seek justice, undo oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa 1:17; see Deut 16:20; Jer 7:5; Jer 22:3; Zeph 2:3). "Let those who rejoice, rejoice in this; that they know the Lord who does kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:24). God expects the righteous to strive with him for God's justice.

ENDNOTES

1. Scholars have long noted the extreme difficulty in clarifying the semantic ranges of the word pair *mišpāṭ* and *ṣĕdāqāh*. The distinctions made here are acknowledged as oversimplifications of the data. I have done this, following Heschel, in order to be able to address the layers of meaning shared by this word pair without an endless litany of qualifying statements. The data is available in many Bible dictionaries.

2. A. Heschel, *The Prophets* (vol. 2; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 11.

3. R. Nysse, "Moral Discourse on Economic Justice: Considerations from the Old Testament," *WW* 12 (Fall 1992): 337–344.

4. A. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 198–199 (italics mine).

5. S. McKnight, "When Social Justice is Just," *Covenant Quarterly* (Feb 2007), forthcoming.

6. R. Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 92.

RECLAIMING PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP

BRUCE C. BIRCH

Leadership is a current topic of great interest. Bookstores have entire sections devoted to the topic. The selections reflect the many contexts where issues of effective leadership have become crucially important. Corporate, governmental, and academic concerns for leadership have now been followed by the development of an extensive literature on church leadership. All are concerned with the formation of leaders and a deeper understanding of the roles and practices of leadership that might make leaders more effective.

The church, of course, is concerned to develop and encourage leadership informed by perspectives from its own biblical and historical traditions and which is committed to the mission of the church. It cannot simply transfer corporate or governmental models of leadership to use in the church, although it can learn from these. The church requires the development of a theology of leadership.[1]

In the present world the need for justice is often seen as an area desperate for renewed and effective leadership, both in church and secular contexts. Justice often seems ignored or corrupted in our time, whether we look to the multiple contexts wracked by violence and hostility in our world, to the growing economic disparities and dislocations, to the moral failure of present leadership in government, corporation, and church, or to the continued dislocations created by our fear of the other. We long for voices of wisdom and passion to help us find just and equitable paths into the future.

For many biblically grounded Christians this makes us think of the prophet. Who and where are the prophets of our time? It is undeniably true that justice is a major part of the prophet's preaching and practice in ancient Israel. The books that collect the prophetic tradition are filled with references to justice and its centrality for God's people. Yet, in the contemporary setting the image of the prophet is stereotypically some kind of confrontational gadfly. People think of a prophet as a somewhat counter-cultural, anti-establishment figure who might play an important role as an advocate of justice but is not a model for what we seek in church leadership in general. Thinking about church leadership is more likely to draw on

the biblical roles of priest, king, or wise teacher to inform present day understandings of effective ministry. Since it is undeniably true that the prophets of ancient Israel spoke often and passionately about justice, the effect is to marginalize the biblical mandate for justice. It becomes the province of single-issue advocates or a narrow group of social activists in the denominational ranks.

The contention of this paper is that we need a larger context within which to understand both the biblical mandate for justice and the role of the prophet as a model for leadership in the community of faith. The role of the prophet and the place of justice within the prophetic message are not marginal matters for God's people but central to the life and leadership of the community. We must reclaim prophetic leadership if we are to shape an adequate theology of leadership. In so doing we will give the claims of justice a wider and more central context in the mission and ministry of the church.

JUSTICE AS A COVENANTAL MANDATE

The concept of justice finds its context in the OT in the testimony to God's initiative of a covenant relationship with Israel at Mt. Sinai. The God who delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt initiates a relationship with Israel embodied in the making of a covenant with moral obligations for both partners, God and God's people.

> I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exod 6:7)
>
> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possessions out of all the peoples. (Exod 19:4–5)

God does give the law (*tôrāh*), expressed in commandments and statutes as a way of defining Israel's obligation in covenant relationship, but covenant commitment is also expressed in a key vocabulary of theological and moral concepts that God models in the divine self and then expects of Israel. The nature of covenant claim is a kind of *imitatio dei*.[2] This terminology is rooted in the character of God but defines the entire covenant relationship. The most important of these terms descriptive of divine character are holiness, steadfast love, justice, righteousness, faithfulness, and compassion. These aspects of divine character are relational and define not only the identity and action of God but the expected character of Israel as covenant partner.

Most of the passages within which this set of terms appear have their context in the relationship of covenant between God and God's people. The

prophets and other witnesses who draw on this set of covenant concepts do so over a long period of time with their own distinct emphases. Individual prophets may stress some terms over others, and some texts may reserve some terms more often for referencing divine activity (particularly *ḥesed*, "steadfast love") and others for the covenant people and their obligation.

Justice was understood in some of Israel's most ancient texts as a chief attribute of God's character and activity.

> The Rock, his work is perfect,
> and all his ways are just.
> A faithful God, without deceit,
> just and upright is he. (Song of Moses, Deut 32:4)

God does not act with justice out of some legal norm to be administered. The context is God's covenant commitment to care for the well-being of the covenant partner, to act with equity in the wider world over which God is sovereign, and to hold accountable those who break the wholeness (*šālôm*) God intends. God is the source of care for the claims of every person to equity, and God is the giver of the law that seeks to embody that equity in structures and processes of faithful community on the part of the covenant partner. "The Lord of Hosts is exalted by justice" (Isa 5:16).

For Israel, God's people, justice has something of a forensic meaning in many of its uses.[3] The noun *mišpāṭ* can be translated as "justice" or "judgment" and comes from a root meaning "judge, render judgment." The term can also refer to a law or statute, and its plural indicates a body or code of law. It can refer to judicial activity in the community at every level, but its meaning is not limited to this judicial context. The term encompasses activity which might precede or follow a judicial process. Particularly as used by the prophets the term indicates a moral claim on covenant people to live and behave with a regard to the claim of the neighbor to well-being as well as their own. Such a moral category gives the prophets a basis for upholding the claims of those exploited and denied well-being and for confronting those who violate the legitimate claims of others. Thus the term itself might be translated as "justice" or "judgment," depending on whom is addressed.

For the prophets justice is first and foremost a theological term. Human claims for justice are rooted in the character of God who is just and requires justice of God's covenant people. Psalm 82 enacts a drama whereby Israel's God is distinguished from other so-called gods by the demand and enactment of justice. It was not simply an abstract ideal but a demand for action and embodiment in moral behavior by individuals and communities. It chooses good over evil and life over death; thus, to some degree it becomes visible in moral outcomes.[4] "What does the

Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8).

However, it is in the common connection of the terms "justice" and "righteousness" that we more closely approximate the broad moral meanings associated with justice in ethical discourse today. It is clear that Israel understood justice (*mišpāṭ*) and righteousness (*ṣedeq,* masc.; *ṣĕdāqāh*, fem.) as closely associated; they appear together often throughout the canon. Both are aspects of the character of God. "But the Lord of Hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness" (Isa 5:16). "I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight" (Jer 9:24). Because God is just and righteous, Israel as covenant partner is to be just and righteous.

Righteousness, understood by much popular religious tradition as legalistic, is often characterized incorrectly as indicative of a kind of works righteousness. Elizabeth Achtemeier helpfully sweeps aside some misconceptions and points us in the direction of the most recent work on the concept of righteousness in the Old Testament.

> In the OT it is not behavior in accordance with an ethical, legal, psychological, religious, or spiritual norm. It is not conduct which is dictated by either human or divine nature, no matter how undefiled. It is not an action appropriate to the attainment of a specific goal. It is not an impartial ministry to one's fellow man. It is not equivalent to giving every man his just due. . . . Righteousness is in the OT the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship, whether that relationship be with men or with God.[5]

Righteousness does not have reference to an abstract norm but expresses the covenant obligation to measure behavior by fidelity to specific relationships in which one must prove true in seeking the well-being of the partner. For God righteousness points to God's faithfulness in seeking the well-being of Israel as covenant partner. God's righteousness seeks the well-being of all who make up Israel and is, therefore, active in seeking to restore those exploited or denied well-being in the community.

Taken together, justice and righteousness define a comprehensive moral claim on God's people to seek the same restoration of wholeness that God desires when some in the community are denied that wholeness. The prophets often single out justice and righteousness as especially defining of covenant claims on Israel in light of the oppression and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

THE PRACTICES OF PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP

Justice and righteousness did not affect the moral life of ancient Israel merely as abstract concepts or covenant ideals. Community requires leaders who promote and embody the foundational concepts. Although justice and righteousness appear widely in the texts of ancient Israel, I would claim that the prophets most embody the leadership in Israel which is committed to these concepts as a part of a larger commitment to the claims of covenant partnership with God. If we are interested in recovering foundational biblical understandings of justice and righteousness for the life of the church today, then we must reclaim the role of prophet as a more central part of our own theology of church leadership. We must reclaim the centrality of the prophetic role in the life of the community and seek to understand more fully the nature of prophetic identity and practice.

It is my contention that, of all the leadership roles in ancient Israel, the role of prophet is most unique and distinctive of Israel as God's covenant people. All other ancient cultures have priests, kings, and sages, and much of the practice of these roles in Israel reflects common ancient Near Eastern practice, even if stamped with Israel's unique theological understandings. But, the ancient parallels adduced for the prophetic role are pale, remote, and unconvincing. They focus on some elements of ecstatic behavior and speaking for others in authority. Yet, none of these parallels suggests a role of authority alongside those of priest, king, and sage like the Israelite prophets, and there is no parallel to the extensive and varied themes of prophetic message that are now embodied in an entire segment of the Hebrew canon.

Since Jesus also appeals to prophetic roles and themes for his own authority,[6] it seems necessary for the church to give prophetic role more than a gadfly part in its own theologies of leadership and ministry. Our intent in the balance of this paper is to highlight some elements of prophetic identity, practice, and message that could play a role in reclaiming prophetic leadership.

Call and vocation. "The prophets are clear that they come to their task not out of personal initiative or by virtue of institutional office. They have been called by God, indeed, often compelled by God into the vocation of speaking God's word."[7] The prophets show a passionate commitment to something outside of themselves, a vocation that has seized them. They have not simply made a carefully considered career choice. "The Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (Amos 7:15). This does not always fit easily into today's tendency to speak of job descriptions, professional tracks, and career choices even when speaking of the church's ministries. Many recent voices have suggested that the church has let the culture of the call wane and failed to encourage the voicing and hearing of God's call.

Far from being a comfortable fit, the call to prophetic vocation pushed persons into risk and vulnerability. In many instances the prophet's first response in the biblical narratives of God's call was to refuse it.[8] Isaiah felt unworthy (Isa 6), Jeremiah thought himself too young (Jer 1), Ezekiel claimed he had no adequate words (Ezek 2), and the prophet of the exile had nothing to cry out because he saw nothing enduring (Isa 40:6–8). But, in every instance the prophet is reminded that this vocation is initiated by God and not dependent on inner resources alone. The visionary experiences that accompany many narratives of prophetic call serve to underline the divine origins of role and message. Such revelatory experience is never an end in itself or a proof of authority apart from the speaking and enacting of God's word. "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' . . . Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully" (Jer 24:25, 28).

Representatives of God. The prophets understood that their call focused, not on their own self-fulfillment or their own urgent analysis of their context, but on what God was doing in Israel and the wider world. The demand upon them was to become a part of God's project in the ongoing drama stretching from creation to redemption.

It has been widely recognized that the prophets considered themselves to be representatives of God and the divine mission in the world. This, of course, entailed the speaking of God's Word. Many prophetic oracles begin with the formula "Thus says the Lord" and proceed to speak in the first person as if God is directly addressing the people through the prophet as mouthpiece. This has been properly identified as the style of a messenger in the ancient Near East[9] and "Thus says the Lord" has been christened the messenger formula.

Although the prophets sometimes spoke in their own voice, the message they proclaimed was understood as the Word of God. The role of prophet was not a self-centered exercise in analysis and commentary. The prophet's speaking was rooted in discernment and speaking of a word whose authority rests in God and not in the prophet himself. The prophet's proclamation is often made against the backdrop of an acute recognition that human resources alone provide no basis for a meaningful word. In the midst of the Babylonian exile the prophet we call Deutero-Isaiah answers the summons to "Cry out!" with the helpless response "What shall I cry?" He sees nothing around him that endures any more than the withering grass and flowers. But, he is reminded that "the Word of our God will stand forever" (Isa 40:6–8) and God's Word that "goes out from my mouth . . . shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). Look only to our own human resources and there is little enough reason to proclaim God's possibilities for the future of Israel or our own future today. But, look at what God's Word has done and yet can do, and there is reason enough for prophetic proclamation.