

## REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTARY FROM FAITH LEADERS

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### REFLECTION - REV. BILL BARNES

I was a founding partner of Edgehill United Methodist Church in 1966, just as a massive urban renewal program entered its implementation stage in the Edgehill area. In the ensuing few years, **fifteen groceries were torn down**, giving way to plans for development. **Today there is no grocery store in the community which offers fresh fruits and vegetables** (so crucial for the nutritional needs of pregnant women and children).

No government agencies or resources have provided needed stores in this community, with heavy concentrations of elderly, low income families, and households without vehicles. Residents in the community have tried, without success, to attract a store. **Hope springs eternal. We continue the efforts!**

### THE CHURCH'S GREAT SIN - GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY? REV. LOUISE MCCELLAN

Taking a brief look at Isaiah 1, one of the issues one finds is the indictment against the people God for their abandonment of worship of God and their obsession with idolatry. The writer of the chapter goes on to suggest in verse 14 that this abandonment and obsession had left God "satiated and bored with the abundance of empty religious observances."

To remedy this problem the people of God are counseled to turn from their evil ways. They are told to **Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes! Cease to do evil, Learn to do right! Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, and correct the oppressor. Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.** (Isaiah 1:16, 17)

**If the church is not speaking out on issues of injustice how can it live up to and achieve its true purpose?** Can the church truly worship if it is not intentional about relieving the oppressed, etc? Is the church guilty of the same indictment of abandonment of worship in Isaiah 1? Charles Darwin says **"If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin."**

# A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTICE - A REFLECTION

## LINDA ZRALEK

Food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition in a country as wealthy as ours are indicators that we **lack an adequate understanding of the meaning of justice.**

Typically, we think of justice in legal terms: fair, unfair; lawful, unlawful; innocent, guilty; debt and repayment. These are just some of the words we use to define and to apply justice. We envision the statue of Lady Justice, blindfolded and holding evenly balanced scales. We are convinced that we live justly when we abide by the laws of our land.



However, biblical justice is radically different. While it doesn't negate the importance legal justice, it does provide a much broader context, and it does expand our **personal and communal responsibilities.**

Community, covenant, relationship, freeing the oppressed, caring for the poor and feeding the hungry are some of the terms that describe biblical justice. The God of Scripture expects us to ask the following questions if we expect to truly live justly:

**“What is it my brother or sister needs in order to be healthy, in order to be fully human?” and “How**

**do my choices, my life style, my decisions affect the well being of my larger community?”** These are tough questions, and there certainly aren't simple answers, but we at least have to start with these important questions, and we have to seek honest responses.

When we begin to understand this biblical form of justice, we will thank the God of compassion who insists on caring for the poor and the oppressed; we will share the joy of the prodigal son's father as he welcomes his wayward, undeserving son home; and we will try to imitate the Jesus who deplored and challenged the legal systems of his day, systems which produced shameful oppression, poverty and hunger. **And then, we will look around, and we will begin to ask why so many of our sisters and brothers today are hungry, why there are so few quality grocery stores in poor neighborhoods, why there are such high taxes on food products, why we think soup kitchens and food pantries should solve these massive problems?** What are the laws, policies and practices that make it easier for some to live so well while making it so difficult for so many to just survive? Whose voices are heard, whose are silent? If we listen closely to the prophets, including the prophet Jesus, we will hear the voice of the Compassionate One who cries out on behalf of our poor, our hungry, our oppressed sisters and brothers.

**As we begin to heed that voice, we will begin to live justly.**

## REFLECTION- RYAN FASANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ENCM

*East Nashville Cooperative Ministry: East Nashville Cooperative Ministry is a Christian, ecumenical organization created and maintained for the purpose of improving the East Nashville community. ENCM envisions an East Nashville where citizen's needs—spiritual, educational, economic, mental, physical, and emotional— are holistically met, and upon the development of relationships, individuals and neighborhoods are enabled to thrive.*

### SANCTIFIED SOCIAL BODIES:

#### WHY NAZARENES SHOULD CARE ABOUT FOOD

Ryan Fasani

East Nashville Cooperative Ministry

As Nazarenes, we are descendents of both the Wesleyan-Revivalist movement of the 18th century and the American Holiness movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. Our theology is predominantly informed by John Wesley, which is to say that **the radicality of grace—not the worth or doing of creatures—is what justifies humanity, making a life of faith possible.**

But further, forgiveness and acceptance is not enough; God wants more (e.g. Matt. 5:1-7:29)—a relationship from which that reality is lived out.

Though we are best known for (and know ourselves for) our unwavering commitment to the doctrine of entire sanctification (Article X in our “Articles of Faith” ). In brief, our stance carries the Christian doctrine of sanctification, this side of death, to its logical conclusion: experience of complete restoration. **But what does sanctification have anything to do with food?**

There is very little correlation if we lose touch with our Wesleyan heritage. So long as sanctification is only the experience of a “crisis experience” that launches a regenerated believer to heightened levels of spiritual communion with God, Nazarenes will never—nor should—be concerned about food and its physical ramifications. But Wesley firmly believed that entire sanctification was the renewal of the image of God—body and all! If our bodies are incorporated into our understanding (and experience) of sanctification, then the “perfection” of our bodies and the ongoing growth of our health become of considerable concern. This may be odd for Nazarenes, as we have a tendency to relegate the body to the physical, temporal realm and our doctrines and beliefs (and Articles) to the spiritual realm. If we stay Wesleyan, bodies and food matter!

Unfortunately for many Nazarenes Christian perfection only means the eradication of isolated acts of sin. This is but a part of the holistic image of the

understood as an experience in this life (made possible by the baptism of the Spirit) what is promised in the renewal of all creation. In this case, the promised renewal of our bodies (as witnessed in Jesus' healing narratives and promised for example in Rev. 21-22) provides guidance for what we should value and experience now: renewed bodies! The image of God can be, according to our heritage, experienced in a very real and physical way. Nazarenes need to keep in mind that **we live in a society that dies more often from the wounds inflicted by spoons and forks** (the greatest cause of death in America is diet-related disease: heart disease) **than any other cause**. The Spirit of God, then, bears witness not just to our spirit but also to our bodies, which is first and foremost realized through a proper relationship to God' s gift of healthy, whole foods. If we stay Wesleyan, healthy bodies and healthy food matters!

Further, our faith, according to Wesley, emerges from a social context and then becomes the mirror of God' s love back to society. Entire sanctification is profoundly social. Not an isolated experience of perfection; rather, to be sanctified is to reflect God' s perfect love to one' s neighbor—a love that is deeply concerned with their bodies. This is why for Nazarenes it should be disconcerting that so many of our neighbors suffer from diet-related disease. (Especially our poor neighbors, for there is a corollary relationship between income and food-related disease in America. **As income decreases, disease caused by diet increases**.) But it is a mistake and even a denial of the sufficiency and breadth of God' s grace for Nazarenes to only supplement our understanding of entire sanctification with a concern for our neighbors' health. Instead, taking on the disposition of Christ in sanctification makes no room for any other affection but that of God and our neighbors' wellness. In this case, our neighbors' bodies and what they eat are integral to sanctification!

In Nashville, those growing in grace and the entirely sanctified should be exemplars of healthy food consumption and vanguards ensuring the same for their neighbors. In every facet of the Nashville food system—**charitable relief, grocers, restaurants, school lunch programs, open-air markets, reclamation, agriculture**—there are food prophets advocating for a renewed emphasis on whole foods, ethical eating, and physiological wellbeing. The social and bodily nature of our deepest Wesleyan and Holiness conviction—entire sanctification—requires that we stand as and with these prophets.

## REFLECTION- CARL ROLLINS, CO-PRESIDENT OF DISTRICT OF COLOMBIA ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

*DCEEC's mission is to bolster a network of environmental and conservation educators, increasing their capacity to provide meaningful environmental education for the residents of the District of Columbia. Their vision is to be a model of cooperation increasing environmental literacy for youth and adults of the District of Columbia. DCEEC is an inclusive network of teachers, DC schools, environmental education providers, and supports from businesses, universities, and the political arena.*

**The importance of food in the Christian faith and in the Holy Bible cannot be overstated.** From the Old Testament and through to the end of the New Testament food, the symbolic rituals associated with food, and the power derived therefrom are manifest.

**The main themes are sacrifice, purity and community.**

From the beginning of scripture the importance of food for our very survival is evident in the Book of Genesis. The first man, Adam, is instructed in this way by the Lord: "I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food" (Genesis 1:29)(New King James Version, as are all other citations).

Thus, it is clear that from the bible standpoint--in the beginning man was commanded to be vegetarian. Only after the fall of man is the notion of man's eating "clean" and "unclean" meat mentioned in the story of Noah. Later, in the gospels (and the writings of the Apostle Paul also) Jesus pronounced all food clean (Mark 7:19; Luke 11:41).

In Old Testament times, the importance of what we now call healthy foods is reinforced in the Book of Daniel when the prophet and his companions abstained from meat during their fast that preceded Daniel's fateful interpretation of the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king (Daniel 1:8-17). Because of this service, Daniel was appointed the most powerful official in the kingdom; second only to the king himself. **The connection between his diet and what he accomplished is clear but rarely discussed.**

The primary focus of food in the Old Testament is the temple rituals of the ancient Israelites. Moses anointed his brother Aaron as the chief priest using olive oil (Exodus 29:7). After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the anointing became one of the Holy Spirit. **The Hebrews' use of mere olive oil in such a sacred role gives a hint of its importance.**

To the ancient priestly class, the Levites, **praise and worship of God was essentially synonymous with the sacrifice of food.** To be sure, some of the rules in the Book of Leviticus are geared toward sanitation and health. Even this is noteworthy.

But on the surface, the main point of the ritual was to underscore the importance of faith in, and obedience to, our Creator above all material and fleshly needs, wants and desires. The message was clearly: the Lord is all one needs. Therefore, all were required to give not only ten-percent of what they earned (tithing) but there were many other mandatory rituals and sacrifices.

The religious class, unlike the other tribes of Israel, was not given a significant portion of the land that God promised them—so in a sense they had taken a vow of poverty (Deuteronomy 18:1-20). As part of the ritual of sacrifice, some food was discarded, another part was burned on the fire thereby “giving it” to God, some was returned to the person making the offering after it was blessed by the priest; and finally, some was kept for the sustenance of the priests.

An often overlooked requirement that served as the foundation for the Jewish faith was the rule that firstfruits, **the first produce from the harvest and any newly born livestock, be given to God.** These offerings went to Levites, widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 26:12-13). By definition, due to the social hierarchy at the time, widows and orphans were poor because men were favored in work assignments because they were responsible for feeding their families. Widows and orphans would have found it very difficult to find work.

Similarly, God’s “social security plan” is made clear with the rules surrounding gleaning outlined in the Book of Ruth and in the Law of Moses. **When a farmer harvested his crops, he was required to leave some to pick for the poor who followed behind** (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). This practice is still kept alive today by groups such as the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network (MAGNET).

Therefore, when taken as a whole we see that the obedient Israelite gave a significant portion of what we would call his “income” to the poor, and to the temple priests for them to survive. Because this was a key part of the temple ritual, the temple being the literal “House of God” where He visited the high priest annually, caring for the poor is essentially a Commandment of God.

**“WHEN A FARMER HARVESTED HIS CROPS, HE WAS REQUIRED TO LEAVE SOME TO PICK FOR THE POOR WHO FOLLOWED BEHIND.”**  
(DEUTERONOMY 24:19-21)

**The focus on the harvest, food, and God being the source of all life that in turn keeps mankind alive on earth is reinforced continually throughout the Old Testament.** Of note, the Patriarch Abraham shared bread and wine with Melchizedek to celebrate being victorious in a battle to rescue a group that had been kidnapped (Genesis 14:18-20). Some theologians believe that Melchizedek was an early spiritual manifestation of Christ. **This foreshadows the importance of communion to come after Jesus Christ's Last Supper with his disciples.**

The ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is recounted in the New Testament gospels, and the Lord describes Himself as the **“bread which came down from heaven”** (John 6:41). He says “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48). Hinting at the Lord's Supper that he will ordain later, and that Paul will validate in 1 Corinthians (11:17-33), Jesus states that:

**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man (referring to Himself) and drink His blood, you have no life in you.** (John 6:53 et. seq.)

Therefore, the taking of communion is equated with life itself. Most Christians, mind you, completely ignore this. So, far from being just symbolic, this eating ritual is central to Christian faith. Most Americans are familiar with this—the bread symbolizing the flesh of Jesus; and the wine, His blood. Many believers accept that it is much more than just symbolic.

The focus on food continues throughout. Not only are meals often a theme of major teachings, but Jesus mentions them in many of His lesser-known sermons and parables. **Food is center stage in the multiplication of the loaves, the Parable of the Sower, etc.**

When the Apostle Peter first has a vision and realizes that Gentiles are to be included in the salvation promised with the new faith his dream is focused on food (Acts chapter 10). Indeed, many believe the reason all foods were made clean was to make it easier to convert non-Jews.

In the midst of the early conflicts between groups of Jews (led by Peter) and Gentiles (led by Paul) who all accepted the new faith and believed that Christ was the Messiah food played a central role once again. Of, the initial requirements for being a Christian (which were few) many still centered on food: how animals are butchered and the inappropriateness of consuming blood (Acts 15:20, 29). Note, that the latter had been a rule since the flood in Noah's time (Genesis 9:4).

More broadly, Jesus' apostles take His teaching on **not neglecting to care for the poor and suffering** in our midst to its logical and compassionate

conclusion after His death and resurrection. Jesus did not merely associate Himself with those in pain, He is saying that He is embodied in them when He states: “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40)

The early church would have Agape Feasts (agape means “love” in ancient Greek) to fellowship together as “families” to share food in communal meals. The taking of communion was an important part of this. These early believers were only following the teachings of those who witnessed the resurrection and its aftermath in the Book of Acts: Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, **they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart**, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.  
(Acts 2:44-46)

The virtual same language is repeated just a couple of chapters later: Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; **and they distributed to each as anyone had need**. (Acts 4:32-35)

**The faith of these people resulted in an authentic community.** The whole became greater than the sum of its parts. Anyone of Christian faith who doubts a believer’s obligation to give to the poor by sacrificing until it hurts is completely contradicted by these two passages. Indeed, Jesus’ half-brother says it best in the second chapter of the Book of James as he stresses the importance of humility: “faith without (good) works is dead” (2:14-26).

**The value of growing food in an urban setting through volunteer manual labor to provide for the community, to give back to the community, to build community and to teach the young through service learning naturally flows from these biblical passages.** People of faith are called upon to use Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul as models (1 Peter 2:21; 1 Corinthians 11:1). They both lived humble, simple lives in agrarian communities. Paul has instructed us to work with our hands (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 4:12).

They made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives so that the principles

of love, peace, righteousness and justice could prevail. What is the greater sacrifice? Giving money from your pocket or your blood, sweat and tears in growing food for the least in our midst?

The clear connection between a faithful and obedient Christian's personal sacrifice, the symbolism of sharing food, and the real life-giving power that derives from it is beyond doubt for those who believe—as even these few examples make clear. **For the believer, creating the kingdom of heaven here on earth is impossible without all of these things working in concert.**

## **REFLECTION- KEITH MCHENRY, CO-FOUNDER FOOD NOT BOMBS**

Access to healthy food is often difficult for low-income people to buy in their neighborhoods. Many neighborhoods are considered “Food Deserts.” I helped start the all-volunteer movement Food Not Bombs and we saw that many areas around Boston were already “Food Deserts” in 1980. **We collect food that can't be sold from groceries and bakeries that we deliver to people in low-income neighborhoods.** The stores that donate their surplus are often across town from the people we distribute the food to.

When Food Not Bombs started we collected organic food, produce and bread in Harvard and Central Square in Cambridge and at shops along Harvard Avenue in Brookline and drove it to housing projects in Somerville, Roxbury and Dorchester. The fact that our produce was mostly organic and the breads were whole grain was appreciated by the people who depended on our distribution.

Low-income communities are facing even more difficulty today and large supermarket chains close down in less profitable neighborhoods and open new stores in the suburbs. In these neighborhoods **people depend on food from gas stations, liquor stores, local fast food shops** or must travel across town to grocery stores. It can take several hours to travel by bus and train to shop so often people end up providing food they purchase from shops in their community.

**As a result of eating fast food and items from gas stations many people in these communities have grave health problems.** Diabetes, obesity and heart disease is much higher in communities that can not buy vegetables and fruit. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that 13.0 million of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2007 and that this had not improved from 2006. **There are indications with 10 percent unemployment that millions more Americans are seeking food.** The cost of food in these “Food Deserts “ is not only costly for people's health but also can cost more to provide for everyone in low-income families. Food Not

Bombs has whole food distribution programs all over the world. The crisis is more dire in America than many other countries. In the past few weeks, desperation has increased with people fighting over our deliveries in poor areas of Chicago.

Our volunteers on Long Island hand out 500 bags of groceries at each of their distribution sites. The story is similar at our programs all over the United States.

While our volunteers love delivering whole food to people in these hard hit communities we are supporting efforts to bring grocery stores and organic gardens to these neighborhoods. Our volunteers have been attending community meetings, **speaking out at city hall against the closing of local groceries** and providing support for the **creation of organic markets in low-income communities.**

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## RABBI SAUL STROSBURG - CONGREGATION SHERITH ISRAEL

In Jewish tradition, we are directed to bless both BEFORE and AFTER we eat. The blessing beforehand, is to thank God for the food we are about to consume. To that end, the blessing must be specific to the food type that we intend on eating. For example, the bread blessing is Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth Bread from the ground. **To begin eating without reciting a blessing, our tradition informs us, is like stealing from God.** First we thank God, then we eat.

But then, after we eat, we also bless, this blessing, usually a bit longer. This blessing, known as Grace after meals, ties our eating to humanity, ties our sustenance to the land that God gave, and ties the land, to our history. In a nutshell, **it brings everything together.**

Eating is about sustaining our own bodies, but it's also the holy act of continuing God's work. **Once we've fed our own families, it's our job to feed other families.** In our grace, we say Blessed are you Lord, who feeds all. How can we say this blessing knowing full well that there are those who are starving? The answer is obvious: God DOES provide enough food for the entire world. **It's our job to see that that food gets to those who are hungry and who are starving.**

Blessing BEFORE we eat is important. It's the first step. It's being thankful for what we have. But the next step is even more important –it's to connect us to the world, to our history, and to the ground from where our food comes. Thank God.

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## RABBI YITZCHOK TIECHTEL - CHABAD NASHVILLE

Appreciation brings joy. When someone gives you a present, the more **knowledge you have about the source of the gift, the more it can be appreciated and the more joy it will bring.**

And that is why, in Judaism, we take the time to say blessings. \*Baruch atah\* ... is the familiar start to the many blessings that we say. \*Baruch\* is Hebrew for "blessed," so it seems that we are continually blessing God. Does God really need our blessings?

Baruch is from the same root as \*bereichah\*, which means spring, where water comes from. Their connection is that they are both about “source.” When we say a bracha, a blessing, we are acknowledging that **everything has a source, and that source is God**. We thank Him as the source of everything.

When we recite Grace After Meals (also referred to as \*bentching\*, meaning “to bless”), we are appreciating that this food came from God -- and that gives the enjoyment of the meal a whole new meaning. **We recognize that we are truly blessed and give thanks**. This appreciation brings joy.

God does not need our blessings. **We need our blessings, for they get us back in touch with the root of it all. A good meal now becomes a connection to the Eternal.**

“Blessed are you, Lord our God, Sovereign of the world, who provides food for the entire world in His goodness, with grace, kindness and mercy. He supplies bread for all living beings, for His kindness is everlasting. **Because of His great goodness, we have never lacked food, nor will we ever lack it on account of His great name**. For He is God who nourishes and sustains all, and is good to all, and who supplies food for all His creatures which He created. Blessed are You, God, who provides food for all.”