

GUEST EDITORIAL

Justice in a global age: Becoming counselors to the world¹

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Prologue

I wish to begin with remarks that could best be described as a *prologue*. The invitation to deliver a keynote address to an audience of activists, scholars, and professionals committed to social justice challenged my imagination. My initial inclination was to discuss the meaning and nature of social justice. But, as I continued thinking about the task before me, I understood that I could not speak in the abstract about justice; that I could not merely discuss the many definitions of justice and their origins nor the consequences of their assumptions, admirable as this task might be.

Rather, I knew that given the many global challenges before us, I would need to contextualize and frame my remarks within the context of our times – times that are confronting us with an endless stream of abuses to human dignity and welfare, and times that are presenting serious threats to the source, distribution, and restoration of justice! Times, also, that require a remembrance of those heroes of social justice who have come before us, and whose sacrifices paved the way for the justice we do have today, and times that require reflection on the roots of justice that reside in our human nature.

I have no hesitation in telling you that I, like many of you, am deeply troubled and saddened by the abuses of privilege and power that are now occurring in our government, business, and religious sectors. Indeed the strategic convergence of shared interests and agendas among these three sectors of our society, in combination with a media failing to meet its responsibilities to accurately report news and to conduct investigative journalism, now constitutes, in my opinion,

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a serious threat to the foundations of our society, and ultimately, to global peace and harmony.

We are witnessing daily abuses that contribute to the fracturing of our national heritage as a people dedicated to justice. In the hands of self-serving leaders, justice is becoming a commodity to be distributed at the whim and fancy of selected members of the executive, legislative, and judicial sectors. And all of this is occurring under the guise of a theocratic agenda that stands in direct contradiction to our constitution. Make no mistake about it, though devious and unprincipled, the cunning intelligence of these individuals makes them dangerous. In the words of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), the Italian medieval poet and author: “Where the instrument of intelligence is added to brute power and evil will, mankind is powerless in its own defense.”

As I began preparing talk, I was demoralized. The forces in power were so vast, so secure in their power, and so determined to seize control for their personal benefit. I felt powerless. There were days, I am not ashamed to say, that I was saddened to the point of tears. “A New American Century” was now in motion, but it was not the “American Century” I had hoped for in my idealism. It was not the American Century in which we, as a nation, modeled justice and human dignity. No, instead, with unbelievable insensitivity, arrogance, and ignorance, we had joined that list of oppressor nations who asserted their illegal and immoral actions were necessary to protect freedom and democracy. We had joined the list of nations who justified their decision to invade, conquer, and exploit under a delusional divine mandate. With these actions, we had written the epitaph for our nation:

‘My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!
.....
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
(Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792–1822 – Ozymandias, 1819)

“What could I do?” “What could anyone do?” A new age had dawned for the world – a global age, but in the United States, the world’s most powerful country, there was a widespread failure to understand the changes occurring, and the requirements this new age imposed upon our role, responsibilities, and actions. A new mentality, a new identity, and new morality were demanded, but all these were ignored or denied in favor of a 19th century imperialistic mindset designed to give our leaders a grandiose position in history. Justice for our own nation, and for the world, had yielded to delusional hubris. The old ways, rooted in violence and war, in superpower politics, would be as inept and inadequate as they were centuries ago.

In our new global age, the people of the world asked for justice, dignity, and recognition, but, in return, we gave them war, suffering, and neglect. The world had changed. While other nations and billions of people had understood this, the leaders of the United States had not. Or if they had understood the world

had changed, it was now clear that they were intent on restoring a past age and ethic.

As I searched my mind for the needed counter to the tragic situation before us, I could not help but turn to my own profession – psychology – for some insights. What do we do in times of crisis to heal, to cure, and to support those in need? It was here that I found the answer that I share with you today. The answer is before me – it is you as counselors, who are the answer. You are, by virtue of your decision to become counselors, committed to serving humanity, to improving the human condition, to intervening in lives filled with suffering and pain, to providing hope and opportunity – especially to those who have been denied them by virtue of race, ethnicity, or gender. You understand, often at intuitive levels, the destructive complexities and consequences of injustice for both victims and perpetrators. You are dedicated to healing with all that the term encompasses.

You, as counselors, are accustomed to speaking out and to speaking on behalf of others. You give voice to the voiceless, hope to the hopeless, power to the powerless. The marginalized, the abused, and the forgotten are your constituencies. You offer advice, wisdom, and understanding. You see daily the contradictions that exist between the inspiring ideals of our society and their consequences for human lives. Increasingly, you recognize the differences between spirituality and religion, especially the risks of the movement toward a theocracy that has captured the minds of those consumed by power rather than caring. Decades ago, Carl Jung (1960), the famous psychoanalyst, spoke of the dangers that exist when state and religion join forces. His prescient words are still relevant today.

Now we behold the amazing spectacle of states taking over the age-old totalitarian claims of theocracy, which are inevitably accompanied by the suppression of free opinion. Once more we see people cutting each other's throats in support of childish theories of how to create paradise on earth. It is not very difficult to see that the powers of the underworld – not to say of hell – which in former times were more or less successfully chained up in a gigantic spiritual edifice where they could be of some use, are now creating, or trying to create, a State slavery and a State prison devoid of any mental or spiritual charm (Jung, 1960).

As counselors, I do not mean to idealize you inappropriately, to lionize inaccurately, or to valorize you incorrectly. But, the simple fact of the matter is that as counselors, you embody the very balm needed in these turbulent times when wounds to body, mind, and spirit have become so commonplace.

You are present throughout the world. You live in small towns and big cities; you work in schools and colleges, clinics, hospitals, agencies, and in dilapidated storefronts. By choice of your career, you are informed, concerned, and unwilling to tolerate or accept injustice. You are on the job everyday – 24/7 – your work and your person are the same. You have both the training and character to understand the abused and the vocabulary to explain and cure. Justice is your calling. Justice is your way of life.

That, for me, is the counselor's stance regardless of your persuasion or function. And that is why I now call upon you accept an even more pressing demand upon your time and energy, an even more pressing demand upon your identity and your purpose – to become counselors to the world, to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before, those who walked these very streets and whose vision, courage, and indomitable spirit brought justice to the world.

In my remarks today, I wish to give historical context to the urgency of bringing justice to our global age. I wish to defend the proposal that the call to justice that is demanded in our global age is not a vague and ambiguous goal to be pursued aimlessly. Rather it is an intentional affirmation that justice is a basic human quality rooted within our nature. I wish now to call attention to the specific role and mission that falls upon counselors and all human service professions dedicated to improving the human condition for individuals, societies, and nations.

Welcome to the Land . . .

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Atlanta, Georgia! Welcome to the Land of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). Welcome to the land where one man made the word “justice” a living reality. Welcome to the land where one’s man’s vision brought changes to a nation’s identity, conscience, and heritage. Welcome to the land where one man’s relentless pursuit of justice for his people – and for people everywhere – changed history through non-violence.

It was here, more than 40 years ago, that a voice refused to be silenced regardless of the threats, dangers, and risks to life. It was here in Atlanta, and then in a thousand other places across the land, from Alabama to Chicago, from Washington DC to California, that the deep, resonant, baritone voice of a Black man electrified the air with words of such magnitude, of such righteousness, of such eloquence that they crushed the very roots of bondage that had sustained injustice of centuries through fear, abuse, and pain.

It was here, and across the land, that hundreds of thousands harkened to King’s stirring words and joined in protests at great costs to their safety, health, and livelihood. The task for King, and the countless others who took up the cause of justice in those tumultuous years, was both to undo a history of injustice and oppression, and to build a future founded on the justice, freedom, and opportunity that our laws guaranteed but never fulfilled. It was to ensure that justice and the burdens of injustice would be distributed equally and that each person – regardless of race, creed or color – would assume personal responsibility for this task. This, then, is the challenge that remains, as life in a global age becomes our undeniable reality, and as our nation moves slowly away from the ideals that were promised and guaranteed by law and by the sacrifices of millions who came before.

Today, as we gather to share ideas, to seek wisdom, to pursue inspiration, to bond in common purpose, let me be clear in my message: I do not come to tell you that the profound changes inspired by King and the countless others who

participated in the pursuit of justice in the 1960s are sufficient. Nor do I come to tell you that we must be content with the barriers that have been broken, proud of the advances that have been made, and patient with the remaining challenges that are so slow to change.

I come here to day to tell you that King's words are enshrined in stone to remind us that the struggle for justice will always continue. I come here today to tell you that the fierce and exhausting struggle that began in the Land of King forty years ago has not ended, and will continue for generations to come because the roots of hate, ignorance, and evil endure, nurtured by the protective veils of corruption, bias, and greed.

King's call to justice – though now more than 40 years old – echoes throughout our global age. Listen! Can you hear the cries of the masses around the world leading lives of desperation – lives devoid of hope, lives existing from moment to moment, each breathe lacking even the reflexive assurance that the next will occur. The struggle for justice is global in proportion and consequence. There are victims of war, oppression, and natural disasters. There are victims of poverty, famine, and disease. There are victims of labor, gender, and child exploitation. They yearn for recognition, support, and justice.

But answering King's call, and the call of the thousands of others who have responded to injustice in our time will not be easy! It will add burdens to your conscience, responsibilities to your daily rounds, and threats to your safety. In answering the call, your life will not be the same. You may be required to face the harsh reality of being singled out for abuse from reactionary forces whose very ignorance and inhumanity keeps them locked in hate. Your comfort, safety, security, and reputation will all be at risk. But what will not be at risk is your personal integrity, your dignity, and your position of gratitude, respect, and admiration in the heart and minds of those you help. The pursuit of justice is not free of costs, but its rewards are more than gold or silver – it is knowing that in our brief time on earth, we have done something to advance the cause of life itself.

Justice . . .

Justice is a sacred word. A word filled with “inspirational power”. The word “justice” is derived from the Latin word “justicia” which refers to “fairness,” “equality,” “righteousness”. It carries the connotation of virtue, goodness, and decency. The Justinian Code of Ancient Rome, developed in 535 CE at the behest of the Roman Emperor Justinian, and the foundation of much of Western law, begins with the statement: “Justice is the constant and perpetual wish to render every one his due”. Justice is the distribution of both the benefits and the burdens of society. Justice has been recognized as the hallmark of a civilized society through the ages. Cicero (106-43 BCE – Marcus Tullus), the ancient Roman Orator and philosopher said: “Justice is the crowning glory of the virtues”.

But what is the wellspring of justice, of this “crowning glory of virtue?”. Why is it that both learned and desperate voices across the centuries have sought it,

spoken of it, and died for it? In my opinion, justice has evolved as a human imperative from the earliest days of our existence. Justice, for me, is a biological and social imperative inscribed, I believe, anatomically and physiologically within the human brain and mind. It is the wellspring of our human social glue and bonding. It is that special impulse that awakens in each of us a sense of alarm, indignation and resistance when justice is denied, when we, or others, are not given our due.

I recognize that the “popularized” evolutionary position – survival of the fittest – runs counter to what I am saying, and I do not deny that history is replete with examples that seem to support the survival-of-the-fittest position. Yet, there are also countless examples of humanitarian and selfless acts, some at the cost of life itself, that argue there is something more at our core that supports a human disposition and inclination to seek and nurture justice. *Homo Lupo Est* – Man is a wolf! But we are also creators of cultures, institutions, societies that promote harmony, equality, and opportunity. This too cannot be denied.

Is this then our nature? Are we capable of both violence and destruction for selfish aims and also capable of creating governance ideas in support of justice like the Declaration of Independence, The Declaration of Human Rights, The Gettysburg Address, so beautiful in their prose, and so breathtaking in their intent and consequence, that they leave us inspired and filled with awe and wonder at our human capability.

At this point in our evolutionary stream, the answer seems to be that we are both – that as species we have the capability for enormous violence and destruction born of our own personal selfishness, but we have also the capability for caring, nurturing, and pursuing justice. There are genetic potentials for both. What is critical, is whether we create life contexts that nurture the positive potential of our human nature, while constraining or limiting the negative aspects.

I contend that our felt sense of justice, our desire to pursue it, our commitment to it stems from an inborn impulse that supports and sustains our collective life. From this impulse, arise compassion, empathy, love, altruism, and selflessness – the positive human emotions. Perhaps we can say that the natural impulse is justice – equity and fairness for all – and that it is only when this impulse becomes frustrated or denied, that violence emerges.

Thus, in contrast to those who hold tightly to the “survival of the fittest” ethic, I now join thinkers like Mary E. Clark, Teilhard du Chardin, Arthur Koestler, Elena Mustakova-Possardt, Mihai Spariosu, Michael Christopher, and a host of others – who contend that in the course of human evolution, the perpetuation of our species is served by preserving life through nurturance, caring, and altruism, not by contesting it through war, violence, and abuse.

Let me share with you some thoughts from Arthur Koestler that have informed and inspired my thinking. Koestler, the famous writer, theorist, and social commentator, noted in his book *The Ghost in The Machine* (1967), that within all living things from cells to human beings, there are two basic impulses: a self-assertive impulse designed to support independent survival and an integrative impulse, designed to connect with others and in doing so to reveal another

emergent dimension of being. Koestler call this “The Janus Principle”, in honor of the Greek God, Janus, whose head faces two ways.

Consider this example from Koestler’s work. In its simplest form, a liver cell can exist separately in a Petrie dish forever, but when it is connected to others, it forms a liver – a new and emergent life form that was impossible to experience in its separateness. In other words, the cell now experiences a new dimension to its being that was absent in its individuality. And so it is with human beings. We can exist separately and unconnected to others, unconcerned about an expanded sense of our nature, but when we join with others, when we choose to serve the common cause, when we advance the collective, there is a new dimension to our being – we are part of something larger, this serves the cause of justice.

Justice exists when individual welfare and well-being is extended to the collective, thus, expanding our identity, consciousness, and potential for contributing to life. Hugh Crethar, a leader in the Counselors for Social Justice movement, states:

...social justice from a counselor’s perspective, is a dynamic virtue focused on common interest, which is taken to include the good of the individual as well as the good of humanity at large. This common good is dependent on a fair and ongoing distribution of benefits and responsibilities in society and is based on the integrative application of the principals of equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, 2005).

In counseling, as Crethar (2005) suggests, “...social justice refers to active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society, as well as empowering clientele and those in their systemic contexts to do the same” (Crethar, Bellamy, Bicknell-Hentges, & Giorgis, 2002).

Justice, then, is the root of our efforts to modulate and mediate individual assertiveness and power asymmetries in favor of collective well being. But the task of bringing justice to a world filled with injustice will not easy. Consider the words of Sir Isaac Newton (1561–1626), the philosopher and scientist, who wrote: “The momentous thing in human life is the art of winning the soul for good or evil.”

For me, justice is the recognition of the deeply felt truth – the intuitive awareness – that the human species can survive and fulfill its potential as the conscious expression of the cosmic life force. We are, as human beings, ultimately, part of the cosmos itself, and our ability to understand and accept our connections to it and the interdependencies that it engenders is the essence of justice. I choose to see separation and unity as the central principle of our cosmos – fission and fusion – separation for variation and convergence for unity. Of all the principles of physics that we hold, fission and fusion are at the heart of creation and are repeated in every aspect of life. Justice, as I now conceive it, is a representation of these principles in human life.

Consider here the words of the great theologian and biologist, Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote:

My starting point is the fundamental initial fact that each one of us is perforce linked by all the material organic and psychic strands of his being to all that surrounds him. Moreover, that

unity reaches back in time and continues into the future: If we look far enough back in the depths of time, the disordered anthill of living beings suddenly, for an informed observer, arranges itself in long files that make their way by various paths towards greater consciousness. (Quoted in Cunningham, 1997, p. 1).

I believe that we are as human beings more than mindless protoplasm seeking survival at any costs including the lives and well being of others. “Justice” represents the very life principle that in fact ensures that we will reach our full potential, both as individuals and as a species? I choose to think of justice in this way. Not as a word, not even as a value, but as a basic principle of life itself, an essential condition rooted within our genes and called to existence whenever and wherever that are threats to the existence of life. And now in this global age, in which our lives are so closely linked to one another, I ask you, is any other interpretation possible?

In a recent exchange of ideas, Michael Christopher (2005a, 2005b), a biopsychosocial-evolutionary scholar, pointed out to me that neo-Darwinian notions of evolution are consistent with a biological basis for justice. He wrote:

... it turns out the human capacity for selflessness is a function of the “selfishness” of genes. As a result, human evolution is driven by a tension between selfishness and selflessness. Selfishness serves the short-term survival of individuals, but the long-term development of individuals and societies toward greater self-awareness, compassion and justice is a function of our basic selfless (interdependent) nature and “inclusive fitness.” It wasn’t until 1965 that Darwin’s idea of reproductive fitness (a limited form of fitness based on individual reproduction) was transformed into inclusive fitness (a fundamentally prosocial explanation of gene reproduction) to explain the universal capacity of life (not just human life) to behave altruistically (Christopher, 2005a, p. 1).

Thus, as I call upon you *to become counselors to the world*, I do so with the explicit intention of informing you that the counselor’s stance is the stance that fits evolution’s purpose itself. As you perform your duties and you live your lives, you can be assured you are in synchrony and harmony with human nature.

Justice in a global age

As we encounter the world in our daily headlines and TV news and in person through our contacts and travels, it is clear that the challenges before us are Brobdingnagian in proportion and consequence. My initial inclination was to elaborate upon the litany of these challenges – poverty, war, famine, human rights abuses, urban blight, overcrowding, disease, failed schools and states, environmental desecration, and scores of others. But there is no longer a need for this. We are all aware of what is happening. Now we need now to understand their sources and the pathways to their resolution. And what is especially interesting is that even as we speak of global problems, we need also to acknowledge their existence in our own nation.

The interdependency of our global age requires new knowledge, new morality, and new behaviors. The term “other” is no longer acceptable. Joan Halifax (1999), in her book on creating cultures of peace, wrote:

“We cannot turn our backs on the tendency to turn the world and its beings into objects which we call “other.” We are called more than ever to realize the obvious, that we are not, nor were we ever, living in a world of isolation. We are completely and inescapably interconnected and interdependent” (Joan Halifax, 1999).

There is no “other” in a global age. There is no “other” to be vilified in the simplistic bifurcations of “us and them”, “good and evil”, and “right and wrong” that seem to be limits of intellectual distinction favored by our government leaders. In what world are they living? Are they so blinded by wealth, power, and ignorance that they do not see the obvious before them? There is only humanity! People who share, amidst their individual and cultural differences, a common need for justice – a justice capable of sustaining the human right to food, water, shelter, safety, opportunity, freedom, and peace. But humanity is challenged by the insidious forces of a nationwide evil that hides behind the screen of righteousness and virtue. Confronting this evil requires bold and courageous people who refuse to embrace the illusions.

Carl Jung (1960), writing of a similar situation decades ago, wrote:

Nobody is immune to a nationwide evil unless he is unshakably convinced of the danger of his own character being tainted by the same evil [the awareness of our potential susceptibility to fall unconscious and hence unwittingly become an agent for evil acts as a psychic immunization against this happening]. But the immunity of the nation depends entirely upon the existence of a leading minority immune to the evil and capable of combating the powerful suggestive effect of seemingly possible wish fulfillments (Jung, 1960).

Becoming counselors to the World . . .

In the past, the physical distances between us, the extended time needed to communicate, and the time needed for travel deluded us into thinking we were separate from one another. For better or for worse, all this changed because of globalization, the interdependence of our lives, fortunes, and well-being brought on by transnational communications, financial operations, and transportation systems. We now live amidst a new frequency and immediacy of change with all the challenges and possibilities this presents.

Because of this, we must as counselors, assume a new responsibility for justice – its availability, accessibility, and acceptability. *We must become counselors to the world. Why? Because we are positioned to do so, because the world needs our stance, and because we are mandated by human nature to act in this time of conscience.*

The challenges we face in this global age will test all our skills, talents, and values as counselors and as human beings. More than ever before, our personal and professional lives must be joined. I cite here the words of

Wink Franklin (1998) who called for "... full capacity global citizens". Franklin wrote:

For me these are heartwarming examples of people stepping into the role of what I call "full capacity global citizens" – people willing to take on the twin challenges of deepening their personal capacities (intuitive, spiritual, intellectual) as well as assuming responsibility for the planet and the whole of humanity . . . These examples, and those from countless other groups and individuals demonstrate that we are capable of a societal vision that transcends unbridled individualism and materialism – one that is more sustainable, equitable, and multifaceted, and includes spiritual and psychological, as well as economic growth . . . The shift in consciousness that seems to be required includes an accommodation of our interdependence and our need to find a basis for shared meaning and purpose (Franklin, 1998, p. 3).

In this global age, we must live our profession and we must teach our students to do. Our curriculum must be internationalized, and this means that from classroom courses to supervised training in the field, all activities and experiences must be geared to the global age in which we now live. We must teach justice across the curriculum to our students. Mustakova-Possardt (2003), in her discussion of "critical consciousness" writes:

Young people need to understand that in the current stage of historical unfolding of the collective human consciousness the greatest battle is for global justice and peace. As part of their educational development, they need to ask themselves what will be their individual roles in this grand historical process of learning to establish justice and peace on the planet . . . The ultimate testimony of their successful education would be the evolving of a world-embracing vision, an understanding of the historical processes convulsing different parts of the world, and a choice to commit to a specific field of human endeavor as a conscious localized contribution to the peaceful and sustainable globalization of the planet (Mustakova-Possardt, 2003, p. 163).

As counselors, our history, vocabulary, images, code of ethics, and professional ethos, our epistemology, or way of knowing, all position us to advance the cause of justice. These are our anchors amidst the storm and our moral compass. We can take comfort and courage that growing numbers of people throughout the world are joining us, that disparate and distant cultures share a common commitment to justice.

Mary E. Clark, a social and peace activist, called my attention to the cross-cultural concerns for justice by pointing out widespread use of similar terms (Clark, 2002). For example, there is the South African term "Ubuntu", which means "A quality of humaneness, embodying the supremacy of compassion and the rejection of anger, resentment, and envy". *Ubuntu* combines ideas of remorse and apology with forgiveness and is at the heart of the reconciliation movement led by Bishop Desmond Tutu. And there is also the Sanskrit term, "Ahimsa", meaning "The quality of humanness implying the absence of "himsa" or violence that allows one to resist injustice without fear on the one hand or hatred on the other". And lastly, of course, there is the term "Satyagraha", meaning "non-violence in being and practice". This was at the heart of Gandhi's mission. To these we can add "Agape" the Greek term meaning "and unconditional altruistic love for humanity", that is considered to be at the heart of Christianity when practiced properly.

As counselors to the world, we can and should begin by modeling justice in our daily lives, within our own limited family and interpersonal milieu, in our

child raising, in our marital and partner relationships, and in our places of employment. From here we can begin to assume the responsibilities for meeting the challenges of injustices in government, business, and religion at local, national, and global levels.

In 200 CE, Rabbi Tarphon, stated: “While the task is not upon thee to complete, neither art thou free to desist from doing your part”. From letters to protests, from bumper stickers to lectures, from disinvestment to memberships, there are scores of pathways available for us to promote and sustain justice. But the easiest and perhaps the best, is to model justice everyday in all we do. “We must be the person we wish others to be”, said Gandhi.

Because you are who you are, and because you chose to be so intentionally, because inherent in the counselor’s stance are the keys to justice, you have a special role. Because your work and your life, your daily rounds and your mission, your ideals and your actions, are inseparable, you represent a special resource for the world in our global age. Take up the responsibility for justice then; it is not a burden, it is a privilege.

And as you become counselors to the world, faced with choices of consequence, conscience, and conciliation, model the counselor’s stance so all around you can understand its virtues and its power in stemming injustice and in promoting equality. Show, by your actions, that you choose peace over war, freedom over oppression, voice over silence, service over self-interest, honor over advantage, cooperation over competition, action over passivity, diversity over uniformity, and justice over all.

Note

- [1] Invited Keynote Address, Counselors for Social Justice, American Counseling Association Annual Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, 8–10 April 2005.

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