

Session Two

Read the following sections on pages 7-9 of the Response Document:

- A. To seek a higher standard for public policy and political participation
- B. To be extremists for love, justice, and peace in Christ
- C. To act now

Biblical Reference

"Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey!" (Isaiah 10:1-2 NRSV).

A. *To seek a higher standard for public policy and political participation*

1. Discuss the two tests suggested here for deciding if a law is unjust. 1) "It distorts the soul and damages the personality." 2) It is imposed by a majority on a minority that does not have equal access to participation in the democratic process.

Do you agree with these criteria? Are there others?

2. Dr. King quotes St. Augustine, who says, "an unjust law is no law at all." This comes from a longer argument in which St. Augustine accepts as obvious that in some circumstances—such as self-defense and in military operations—even killing another human is not unjust. *"Surely we will not dream of calling these laws unjust – or rather, not to call them 'laws' at all, for a law that is not just does not seem to me to be a law."* (St. Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 1.5.11.33, ed. Peter King, Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

Are there laws today that you would not dream of calling unjust—but others do?

Are there laws today that you believe are just, but which others do not? (Discuss.)

3. In a democratic society, who has responsibility for making and unmaking "unjust laws" and "oppressive decrees"?

B. *To be extremists for love, justice and peace in Christ*

Biblical Reference

"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather

division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'" (Luke 12: 49-53 NRSV)

Extra-biblical quote

"Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, 'Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?' Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, 'If you will, you can become all flame.'" (Abba Joseph of Panephrisis 7, in The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection, trans. Benedicta Ward, New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975, 103.)

"Their duty of love towards the world imposes on Christ's disciples the responsibility to participate in its development and radical transformation. Their love can no longer remain on an individual level; it must show itself on the level of community action and historical change." (Orthodox Metropolitan George Khodre of Beirut, 1968).

1. Discuss this section of the CCT response in light of these three quotations.
2. Have you benefitted from the "comfort and safety of our social order"?
3. Has taking a stand on an issue of social justice ever taken you outside your comfort zone?

C. To act now

Biblical Reference

" 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!' " (Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV)

1. Are there issues of justice that you feel strongly about but haven't been sure how to speak about or act upon? What gets in the way? What keeps you from being a "co-worker with God"?