



THE WIDOW, THE FATHERLESS, AND THE SOJOURNER

Mark Giszczak

God is just and he wants us to reflect his justice in all we do. The way he looks for justice in us might be a little surprising. This quote from Jeremiah shows us how he looks for justice:

"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever." (Jeremiah 7:5-7 ESV-CE)

While the Lord expects his people to repent of their sins and participate in religious ceremonies, he judges them according to interior change: "If you truly amend your ways..." Real change comes from the heart. Ours is not a "fake-it-till-you-make-it" God. He longs for conversion. Notice that he does not throw the book at his people in this passage. He does not cite the Ten Commandments or Leviticus or religious regulations. Rather, he is interested in how his people respond to the poor. He is interested in results. The idea is that if his people are treating the poor with justice and kindness, that is evidence that their hearts have changed from within. They are putting their money where their mouth is, not just going through the motions of religion.

Jeremiah uses the three classic categories of the poor that first appear in Deuteronomy (10:18; 24:17-19): the widow, the

fatherless, and the sojourner. Why these three?

First, the widow: In biblical times, women were treated as second-class citizens. Typically, they could not own property, inherit, or conduct regular business. Women were thus dependent first on their fathers, then on their husbands, and lastly on their sons. We see cases where widows, like Orpah (Ruth 1:14-15), return to their father's households after the death of the husbands. But if her father has also died, a widow becomes a dependent of her son's household. However, if a widow does not have any sons to rely on, then no one was legally obligated to take her in. Widows, then, were desperate in Old Testament times. There were no pension plans, no retirement funds, no social security, and no "second careers." Widows typically became beggars. To care for their needs with almsgiving and community support was to "execute justice" and reflect the character of God.

Second, the fatherless: Orphans were even worse off than widows in biblical

times. While any child at any point in history that loses his or her parents is in grave need of support, no support systems existed in biblical times. Children who lost their parents would beg for their daily food. God looks for evidence of care for orphans among his people, to see if they are reflecting his justice, his mercy, his kindness. Sadly, when he looks, he often finds little. Jeremiah is calling for everyone to chip in to support the fatherless among the people, to make sure they have food to eat and a place to sleep.

Third, the sojourner: In ancient times, people tended to live in one place most of their lives, near family and friends who could provide support. However, people were sometimes displaced by war and economic hardship and ended up in a new community where they did not fit in. In Israel, these persons were referred to as "sojourners," people living in a land not of their birth. Typically, they too, like the widows and orphans, would be excluded from normal economic exchange. They would live on the outskirts of society and have difficulty finding work and a secure

place in society. The way that his people treated sojourners would show God whether compassion was in their hearts.

God loves us and he wants us to reflect his love in all our relationships. If he sees hardness and greed in our hearts, something is wrong. But if he sees compassion and kindness as we joyfully reach out to support those in our midst in the greatest need, he sees his own attributes in us! How we treat others shows evidence of our repentance, or not.

The beautiful thing about this passage is that it includes a promise. It is an "if... then" statement: if the people do justice for the widow, fatherless and sojourner, and remain faithful to worship of God alone, then they will get to enjoy the Promised Land in peace. If they neglect their poor neighbors and worship false gods, it will be "to your own harm." What often seems expedient is actually a form of self-sabotage. But when we are synced up with who God is and what he is doing, blessings abound. By participating in God's love for the widow, the fatherless and sojourner in our midst, we get to reflect the character of God and receive his blessings in the process. God is so very good and he longs for us to share his goodness with others.+

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HOW NECESSARY ARE OUR 'NECESSITIES'? IVAN ILLICH ON NEEDS

Tyler Hambley

In everyday language, to call something "a need" is to say we really can't do without it. It puts in the strongest possible terms how integral something is to our ability to negotiate life. In his book, *Toward a History of Needs*, the Catholic social critic, Ivan Illich, argues that throughout most of human history, this integration of life occurred personally and locally. The word "need" was a verb addressed from within one's capacities and immediate surroundings, not a name for commodities delivered from without. Need food? You'd grow it, hunt it, or raise it. Need shelter? You'd grab a saw and start cutting wood. Need to learn how to do something? You'd find someone nearby to teach you. In other words, you were an active participant in the local provision of your own needs. The name for this way of life was called *subsistence*.

As societies grew more complex, however, especially in the industrial age, the ability to personally and locally address your own needs got displaced. Alongside the rapid growth of urban jobs came a host of totally new "needs": the need for quick transportation to and from the job; the need for a "clean bill of health" to keep laborers on the job; the need for readily available food since there was little time or space to produce any—again because of the job; and finally, the need for a form of education that occupied children, conditioning them for the jobs their parents did. Moreover, in contrast with subsistence, such urban jobs only indirectly provided for one's needs through wages.

This complete reconfiguration of needs, Illich says, led to ever more complex institutions. Learning found its home in schools and colleges aimed at building up the labor force. Suffering and healing fell under the provision of hospital networks and mental health services. Food got

packaged and processed by large corporations, grocery store chains, and the FDA.

Amid these radical changes, the social encyclicals of the Popes appeared, re-emphasizing the personal and local horizon for defining and addressing one's needs. They called this localist principle, *subsidiarity*, which discouraged higher-

who, increasingly, not only provided for our needs, but now *created* them and assumed their management. Take, for example, the building of a new house—shelter being a basic necessity of the human condition. To do so, one cannot merely head out into an open field and put hammer to nail. The heavy management of needs means that,

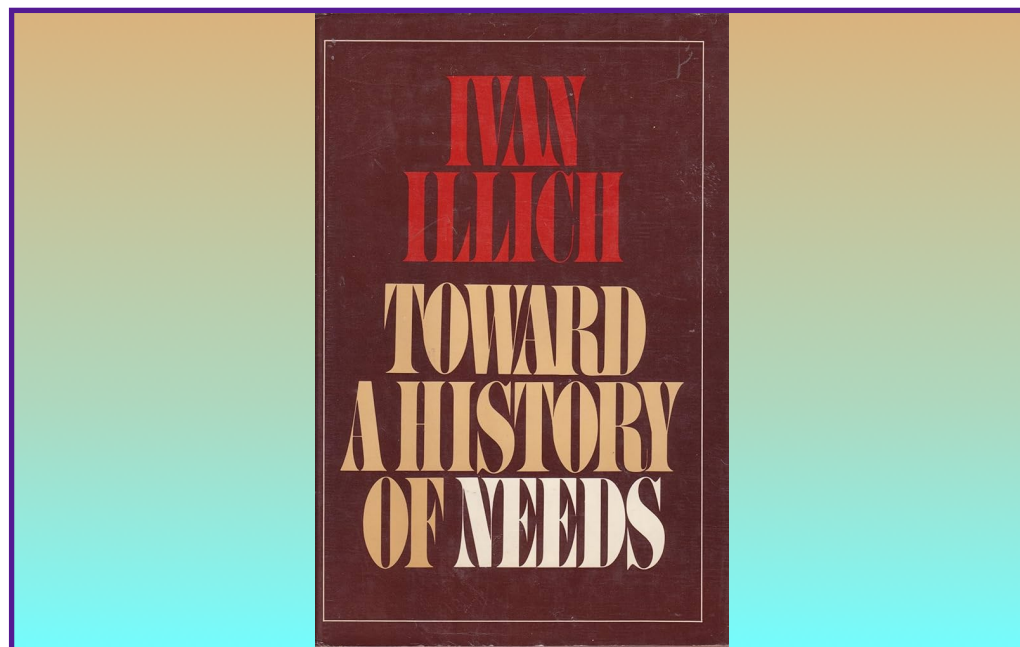
obtaining the requisite paper document (i.e. diploma or certificate) that grants permission to step through the doors of a narrowly defined "career path." On the social value scale, the time-tested know-how of an organic vegetable farmer, the artistic craftsmanship of a stone mason, or the executive functioning of a stay-at-home mom doesn't register. In institutionalized society, they are almost invisible.

Or take the experience of giving birth. Receiving medical accompaniment seems prudent in any age, but today's professional creation and management of ever-new needs means the burden of proof rests squarely on any mother who wishes to forego an ultrasound, a hospital setting, or any other intervention deemed "necessary." Illich relays this story regarding a mother and the birth of her third child:

Having borne two children, she felt both competent and experienced. She was in the hospital and felt the child coming. She called the nurse, who, instead of helping, rushed for a sterile towel to press the baby's head back into the womb and ordered the mother to stop pushing because "Dr. Levy has not yet arrived."

Such an anecdote may seem a bit overwrought, but dependence on the expertise of a professional elite is increasingly coextensive with society. Such expert knowledge, by definition, cannot be shared and cannot be refused. Not even car mechanics—those classic possessors of specialized knowledge—can elucidate the inner workings of a modern drivetrain without ever-new certifications in computing and robotics from engineers at the companies that sell the cars.

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level institutional intervention unless necessary. If you and your neighbor can work out a solution for rain drainage, then the local municipality shouldn't have to step in. If a small town can set priorities for educating its young, then state or federal intervention is less optimal due to the distance from the issues at hand.

Despite this papal effort, however, Illich shows that as the institutions providing for and (thus) regulating our needs grew, the possibility for putting localist limits on them became steadily more difficult. Institutional "professionals" emerged,

today, to build a house one must first obtain building codes, pull permits, and hire properly certified professionals to handle everything from land surveys, to electricity, to plumbing and HVAC systems. As a result, the skills and know-how to build a dwelling were long ago ceded away. Most of us would need a YouTube DIY video just to figure out how to install a cupboard.

Think, further, of education. It is no longer about the creative search for truth, beauty, and goodness, nor the practical cultivation of ingenuity, but rather about

ATTACHMENT AND DETACHMENT IN CHRIST

Malcolm Schluenderfritz

Christians are called to be detached; without the freedom that detachment brings, even our natural loves can become spiritual hazards. The Gospel, for example, particularly warns against putting family ties and social loyalty ahead of following Christ. But what exactly is meant by this Christian detachment? In a certain sense, we could say that our modern lives are extremely detached. The average American moves frequently, leaving behind family, friends, and neighborhood to start fresh in a new location. We've become much less likely to make long term commitments of any sort.

This, obviously, is not the kind of detachment to which Christ calls us. To the contrary, such rootlessness undermines the possibility of authentic community, which in turn makes a fully Christian life impossible, since the life of the Church is fundamentally communal. This leads to a seeming contradiction. The rootedness of community is a direct challenge to the rootless detachment of the modern world—and yet detachment is essential to the Christian life. Should Christians value the ties to particular people and places that are formed in community? If so, how are such ties compatible with Christian detachment?

Thinking about the nature of love can help us to answer these questions. Jesus did not come to destroy our loves; rather, he came to purify them by removing from them all possessiveness. We intuitively know that love entails suffering—which is why we are tempted to avoid it! Giving our hearts to another is dangerous! And so our human loves are often mere selfishness in disguise: possessive, guarded, and consumptive, rather than authentic love, which is an imitation and participation in the reckless and creative love of God.

Detachment isn't opposed to love; rather, it frees us from this possessive counterfeit of love, which sees other things only in relation to ourselves. We often think of detachment as freeing us to love God. Without detachment, however, we are unable to truly love anyone or anything. Detachment allows us to give love freely, without counting the cost or demanding a return. St. Francis of Assisi gave away everything he had, so that he could freely follow Christ. For that very reason, he was able to love everything around him with a boundless exuberance. He was able to rejoice in things simply being themselves, without plotting ways to achieve dominance and mastery over them.

This explains the difference between modern rootlessness and Christian detachment. Modern detachment is actually an attachment to the power and freedom of the self. The modern world tells us to carefully avoid anything that would hamper our individual freedom of choice. The modern world opposes commitments and roots in favor of self-seeking and so-called "self-realization." For this reason, our society promotes "freedom" from connections to family and community, and even from religious and marital ties, to protect the free choice of the individual from any exterior constraints. Christian detachment, by contrast, is all about giving oneself to others. We're called to be detached from our possessions so that we can give them to the poor. We're called to be detached from our own will for the good of others. Both in religious life and in



Christian matrimony, detachment is paradoxically expressed by binding oneself.

By contrast, the modern kind of "detachment" leads to a breakdown both of the family and of monastic life. It creates a mass of isolated and disconnected individuals, each pursuing their own goals and personal satisfaction. The kind of commitments necessary to sustain family life become less and less imaginable, even subtly discouraged. A lack of care and love for the gifts God has given ends up covering the landscape with landfills. Local communities wither away and can no longer support individuals through times of crisis and need.

At the same time, true Christian love also rules out forms of patriotism or localism which would set the claims of local community above those of the Gospel. While modern rootlessness is a form of possessive self love, such patriotism is a possessive love of the community seen as an extension of the self. The self fears the loss of the community in which it finds its identity, and so comes to hate those beyond the community's borders, seeing them as threats and enemies. In fact, such hatred can quickly become the animating spirit of the community, deflecting any honest self-criticism by projecting all evil onto "the other": the foreigner, the marginalized, the scapegoat. By contrast, the love of Christ calls us to have a special care for the stranger, and a love, not only for our friends, but even for our enemies. Christians find their true identity in Christ, and

so are freed from selfish fear and made able to love generously.

We are called to die with Christ, and with us all our merely natural loves must die. If they refuse, they will become corrupted, turning into hatred or selfishness. But if they submit to this death, they will rise glorious and transformed, finding their proper place within the great community of love which is the Church that Jesus founded.

And it is in the Church that the positive, constructive aspect of Christian detachment is fully revealed. In the Gospels, Jesus uses the analogies of a vine with branches and a head with members to portray this community. We're supposed to be as tightly joined to Christ and to one another as the members of a living organism are bound together. Obviously, we wouldn't want the members of our bodies to be "detached"! Rather, we want the members of our bodies to work together for the good of the whole. The New Testament also uses the analogy of a building to describe our unity with one another. If the elements of a building are detached from one another, the structure falls into ruin. In the concrete reality of a local Christian community, we practice detachment from our own egos so that, like living stones, we can become attached to one another in the spiritual temple of God. (Cf. 1 Peter 2:5)+

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HOW NECESSARY OUR 'NECESSITIES'? IVAN ILLICH ON NEEDS (cont.)

Tyler Hambley

Accordingly, Illich says, because we are now so entirely dependent on the expertise of others, we have become unable to act for ourselves. In our rush to institutionalize and professionally administer our needs we have undercut that one human need perhaps most important of all: our own agency. Outside of professional certification, who of us now can provide food, shelter, care of body or mind, or any number of other activities in which human ingenuity has so long been ubiquitous and collectively held? Now, however, I can't even bring my child back to school after three absences without a doctor's note—and that's with my spouse being herself a medical provider—her note being unacceptable for her own child.

Throughout his book, then, Illich says that beyond certain levels of intensity, the professionalizing and institutionalizing of our needs becomes not only counter-productive but crippling. As a result, he believes there's an even more insidious aspect to this newfound serfdom. The poor are not "helped" in this situation but more neatly harmed. Think of the "services" pouring into "developing" nations. Where a small village once subsisted by way of its own innovations, now modern power grids, roads, hospitals, and schools can obliterate local resourcefulness if great care is not taken. Thus, an unacknowledged aspect of the worldwide crises surrounding immigration is the upheaval caused by the very systems of dependence exported to other countries to "aide" them in "needs" they'd not previously felt. At issue here is not the overt intention—likely very noble—but rather the litany of impositions unintentionally foisted upon a populace once their (originally unfelt) need for professionally delivered "needs" gets accepted.

Modern poverty, then, is more than just material deprivation. Now, rich and poor

alike share in the impoverishment of their self-reliance. Here again, Illich elucidates:

Used as a noun, "need" is the individual offprint of a professional pattern; it is a plastic-foam replica of the mold in which professionals cast their staple; it is the advertised shape of the brood cells out of which consumers are produced. To be ignorant or unconvinced of one's own needs has become the unforgivable antisocial act. The good citizen is one who imputes standardized needs to himself with such conviction that he drowns out any desire for alternatives, much less for the renunciation of needs.

Illich is saying, in other words, that we have come to internalize, to really *feel*, the needs that only professionally certified packages of goods and services can meet. We now define what it is to be human as having certain bundles of needs. Once needs have been self-imputed in this way, a disabling of the citizenry through professional dominance ensues. According to Illich, this kind of dominion creates a "priesthood" of expertise that "interprets, protects, and supplies [...] the moral status of a lack."

In today's world, there are many things we can hardly imagine doing without. Think of the societal pressure we feel to obtain savings accounts for retirement, those ever-threatening "rainy days," or our children's college education. Think, too, of life insurance plans, graduate degrees, or prenatal screens. What about a high credit score or an endless supply of electricity to power our many devices and utilities? Such "needs" play a powerful role in the ordering of our lives. But here, Ivan Illich would have us ask: how necessary are our "necessities" as we currently arrange and package them? Has perhaps our imagination for more life-giving social arrangements been compromised by the very "needs" we spend our lives pursuing?

A step forward would be to shift away from the dominant paradigm of *needs* distribution to those activities and tools

that increase a person's ability to live holistically with as little professional or technical intervention as possible. Here, a fresh return to the social teachings of the Popes and their emphasis on *subsidiarity* can help us prioritize placing political *limits* not only on governmental interventions but on professional ones as well. That we should (or could) go back to a pre-professional Garden of Eden is not Illich's desire. Rather, he would have us seek ways to re-subordinate the priorities of institutions and professions to the building up of dignity and agency in the common person.

Catholics can aide this endeavor by prioritizing self-reliant modes of education, work, and leisure in their own lives. Garden, cook, ride a bike, carshare, sit and talk, bear your own and one another's burdens in solidarity with Christ. Oh, and DIY that cupboard install. In short, live simply, working to take back those pieces of life dispersed by modern "needs."

Ironically, by fostering self-reliance and *subsistence*, the close social bonds marking healthy communities might once again crop up. For when individuals whose lives have been segmented into a series of over-managed and packaged needs once again find integration and wholeness as active guides in their own well-being, then the chances of seeing one's neighbor not as a threat but as a source of vital support might slowly renew. Given this time and place in history, perhaps that's exactly what we *need* the most.+

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A MODERN PLAGUE

By Peter Maurin (1933)

1. Having separated the Church from the State, modern society has separated religion from education, politics and business.
2. "This separation of the spiritual from the material is at the base of the modern chaos," says Glenn Frank, President of Wisconsin University.
3. Pope Pius XI calls this separation of the spiritual from the material "a modern plague."
4. When Religion has nothing to do with education, education is only information.
5. When religion has nothing to do with politics, politics is only factionalism.
6. When religion has nothing to do with business, business is only commercialism.
7. And when religion has nothing to do with education, politics or business, people have little to do with religion.

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