

## Chapter Eleven

### **With Justice for All**

#### SQUATTER POLITICS

One day as I was walking down the road to my house, the leader of the women's group called out her greetings. I stopped, and we talked. She invited me in and began to tell me about an event that had taken place some years ago.

The landowner had ordered the squatters to be evicted many times. This time he brought both the court order and the local police chief. The squatters had been warned! Behind him came a bulldozer to push down the squatter homes.

The protest began. The people, screaming, lay down and kneeled in front of the bulldozer. Thugs hired by the landowner dragged them away.

A local priest arrived and tried to calm the people. He asked the bulldozer driver to be patient. The driver was angry, too, but quieted down. Police reinforcements arrived. The priest organized the people to lie down in front of the bulldozer. He spoke about non-violence. He talked with the police chief, informing him that the mayor had been called and would be arriving soon.

As a Christian called to work in the slums, what would you do when your people's homes are about to be destroyed? What would you do in response to violence, murder, oppression, and injustice? Does your heart burn with anger and reaction, with the desire to fight back and defend?

God feels the same way. He is a God of justice. He defends the poor and needy. In this case, the mayor defended the squatters' rights. Years later, they obtained legal rights to the land.

## Just lifestyles

I stumbled across a small passage in Jeremiah 22:13–17. For years I had taught that the knowledge of God comes through Bible reading and prayer. These activities are certainly basic to all else. However, the logical outcome of such a doctrine was to spend more and more time in prayer and Bible reading and less and less in the activities of life. Ultimately, one becomes a hermit.

The verses in Jeremiah challenged me: “to know God” is “to do justice and righteousness . . . [to judge] the cause of the poor and needy.”

A hunger for God throws us not into pietism, but into the thick of injustice on this earth.<sup>1</sup>

“Justice and righteousness” is a phrase similar to our concept of social justice. Perhaps, since the phrase “social justice” may have radical overtones, we might talk about living “just lifestyles.” In whatever work or area of social responsibility we are involved, a just lifestyle requires bringing just dealings, creating just programs, reforming unjust practices, and standing against unjust actions.

## A call for missionary servants

God is a God of justice. From these devastated masses of destitute humanity that are Manila’s slums, three million cries for help and mercy reverberate around the throne room and entry halls of his court.

God hears! And he rises in indignation and anger!

He looks for one who will stand before him for the poor of this city. Two thousand years ago, finding none, he sent his own Son, declaring:

Behold, my servant, whom I uphold.  
My chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him,

He will bring forth justice to the nations.  
(Isaiah 42:1)

Notice his choosing. Note his empowering. And note his purpose: a missionary call to bring forth justice to the ends the earth. Jesus repeated these thoughts in Luke 4:18, when he said the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach the gospel to the poor. Jesus’ gospel was good news to the oppressed, good news of a kingdom where justice will reign. Note also the servant’s methodology, his manner of bringing justice:

He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street. (Isaiah 42:2)

God does not send high-flying diplomats on shuttle diplomacy. God’s servant is not an articulate demonstrator, megaphone in hand. Or a flashy, traveling evangelist with glossy promotional materials.

He comes humbly, riding on an ass, washing others’ feet, healing sword-cut ears. Isaiah tells of the Messiah’s gentleness:

A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. (42:3)

He doesn’t snap off those of us who are broken reeds, but gently binds us up. He does not snuff out, like a candlewick between his fingers, those who are almost burned out. Instead, he fans us back until we become a blazing light.

Such is God’s method of bringing justice. And this justice is sure:

He will not fail or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth. (42:4)

We are his body, called to the same role as our Master. We are servants of the Servant.

“If anyone serves me,” he says, “he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also” (John 12:26). How high a calling!

As the basis of his lifestyle, Paul claimed a passage from another one of these servant songs. It defined the task of the servant as follows: “My servant . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

We, too, are called to declare this salvation to the ends of the earth as God’s servants. Incarnating God is to incarnate justice and righteousness in a servant lifestyle:

For he delivers the needy when he calls,  
the poor and him who has no helper.  
He has pity on the weak and needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.  
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;  
and precious is their blood in his sight.  
(Psalm 72:12–14)

### Personal justice

There are four levels of doing justice: first, in personal dealings; second, in peacemaking, bringing reconciliation between parties; third, in establishing movements of people who live justly; and fourth, in causing change at the upper levels of society.

The first level of justice begins with the fear of the Lord—the Lord who hears the poor and acts on their behalf. This gives us a deep fear of offending or humiliating a poor man. Personal justice begins in small things. Once, I forgot to pay the girl from the squatter home next door. She typed for me two or three days each week. I had almost reached my destination in another province when I remembered: “Oh no, I forgot to pay my typist!” I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach as this verse flashed into my mind:

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy . . . You shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the LORD, and it be sin in you” (Deuteronomy 24:14–15).

In addition to justice in small things, personal uprightness in its biblical context includes social justice. Ezekiel describes the righteous person as one who: “does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances—he is righteous” (Ezekiel 18:7–9).

### Justice as peacemaking

Being rich among the poor, however, requires more than personal justice with a social component. In a situation of injustice and oppression, discipleship involves a second level of doing justice: peacemaking, bringing reconciliation between parties, seeking justice for those unjustly treated.

“Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy,” commands the King of Massa in Proverbs 31:9. Speaking out is dangerous. The disciple in the slums will alternately be labeled “CIA” or “Marxist,” depending on who is against him. Neither label is correct, for we work not for the communist nor the capitalist cause. We work only to do the righteousness of the kingdom.

Consider the sad letter I received from my Filipina *kumadre*, my “blood sister”:

Eli has now no employer, so we are not earning even a single penny. We are just making a living through borrowing and debts. With regard to our

kids, they are often contaminated by common illnesses successively. You know, Viv, we do not know how to solve our problems. Incidentally, the government agency that owns our land is asking us to vacate the place where we are in for the reason of not remitting our payment since we have lived here.

I responded by helping them make their payment. Her next letter was even more troubling, and explained how the cost of 3,825 pesos for their house had now become 9,460 pesos over two-and-a-half years.

Doing justice in that case meant finding out whether this 300 percent increase in the price of a house was due to unjust policies written by the government or whether a corrupt official was behind it. Justice meant trying to rectify the situation. It meant giving to my brother and sister in need, never expecting it back. It meant finding work for my *kumpadre*. And where my lack of resources and time made all of this impossible immediately, it meant looking to God to bring his judgment on those who perpetuate such legal crimes. For God: “will not revoke the punishment . . . because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 2:6–7).

### **Injustice cries out from the land!**

The servant missionary seeking to bring justice and righteousness to the people in the slum must understand the history of exploitation that forced the people there.

In the rural Philippines, the provinces’ leading families, Spanish priests, American businessmen, and the Japanese war machine have all contributed to this poverty. Now, feudal barons who own the land farmed by tenants reinvest their profits in industry, land speculation, and multinational companies in Manila.

Eventually, the money is shipped out of the economy through the multinationals to the United States, Japan, and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

One day as I was out jogging in the Filipino countryside (sometimes I did culturally unacceptable things like jogging alone), I ran past the massive gates of a mansion. I stopped and peered through the gates at the grounds and the building, just visible behind the guards.

I jogged to a basketball court nearby and began talking with some local farmers. I asked them where their landlord had earned the money to build his mansion. They sat around on their haunches, joking back and forth about the question. In between the jokes (a way of covering embarrassment or shame), they told me how most of the local families gave 50 percent of their crop to the landlord. Before the land reform law was implemented, he used to provide them with help if they were sick or in need. Those that obtained ownership rights to the land no longer received such help in time of need. They were forced to go into debt to the money-lender, who charged a much higher rate than the landlord exacted. (For every five pesos, the lender receives six pesos the next day—this system is called “five-six.”) Proverbs comments: “The fallow ground of the poor yields much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (13:23). Most poor farmers are constantly confronted with these injustices. But working in a government job does not guarantee fair treatment either.

One of our friends in the slum, Susan, moved into an accountant’s position in the local municipal office. She soon discovered that her bosses “fiddled” the books for profit. The auditor was in the know and received his cut. The investigator from the Bureau of Internal Revenue was paid off when he came. How could Susan continue to work and maintain her integrity as a Christian? If she exposed the system or rebelled against it, she would lose her job.

## Is God biased for the poor?

Does God have a bias for the poor? Is he involved in a class war? The Scriptures do not support a Marxist analysis of class war. In James 5:1–6, God *does* appear to have a bias for the poor, but only an *apparent* bias. God seems to prefer the poor only if we compare his care for them with our own lack of concern.

As a good father will protect his youngest from being beaten by his eldest son *precisely because* he is a good and just father, so God particularly prefers, protects, and identifies with the poor. But let us not call him partial. Although he is a compassionate God, we know that he is an impartial God. He treats *all* as of infinite value and worth.

But his compassion and justice compels his involvement with the less fortunate. He condemns the unconcerned, luxurious lifestyle and oppression of the rich. James says:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you (5:1–6).

## Justice in Christian community

The third level of doing justice in the slums is to establish movements of believers who:

(a) demonstrate justice in their lifestyles with each other

(b) begin to bring justice into the life and leadership of their immediate community.

Communal justice, like personal justice, also begins with small things. And all justice is rooted in prayer.

For example, God filled us with a desire to pray for an end to the unsanitary garbage in one part of the community. Garbage is a small issue, but seeking God's care in the small issues affects the community. An answered prayer gave us the freedom and respect to relate to community leaders and officials on more major issues such as when the landowners brought in bulldozers to push down homes.

Our responsibility was to become recognized spiritual leaders within the community. If we could establish trust and deepen our relationships day by day, the community might look to us and to God when they faced bigger issues.

Just lifestyles must be seen in believers first. The church must be established in justice as a reference point for non-believers. John Perkins describes the growth of a community of believers who demonstrated justice in their relationships to a racially torn community. Their dream was: "to carve out of the heart of Jackson, Mississippi, a community of believers reconciled to God and to each other. To bring together a fellowship of blacks and whites, rich and poor. Such could make a positive difference in the lives of a community enslaved by poverty and racism."<sup>4</sup>

But is it enough to demonstrate justice through holy living? Some see church planting as bringing a small group of believers out of a life of sin into the Kingdom of God. These believers stay in the community but live separate, holy lives.

Others view church planting as empowering believers to establish the kingdom of God within their community. Instead of believers entering the Kingdom of God and leaving worldliness behind, believers are encouraged to stay "in the world" and actively work to bring the Kingdom of God into their community.

Because of my Anabaptist and fundamentalist heritage, I focused on a separated group of believers during my first years of church planting. Such separated communities have, paradoxically, brought many major political changes into our own society. They can be true lights and bright beacons on a hill. Armed with a strong conviction of rescuing people from damnation, these Christians have often become deeply involved in the problems of their age.

Quakers developed the early mental hospitals; the Salvation Army pioneered the first sheltered workshop schemes; the Mennonites have consistently worked at peacemaking nationally and internationally. Early Anabaptists advocated separation of church and state, religious liberty, and the role of free choice in matters of faith, each of which became major political issues in their time.<sup>5</sup> Modern non-religious social work often imitates activities developed by such groups.

But as I listened to the urgent cries of the poor, and studied the writings of Booth, Kagawa, Calvin, and Wesley and their work among the poor, as well as the history of missions, my separatist missions strategy was challenged.

I pored over the Bible. Passages such as Proverbs 11:10–11, (“When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices . . . By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted”) indicate an active involvement by the righteous in community leadership. God was leading me to a desire to establish the kingdom within every level of society—and, where the social structure permits (as in Calvin’s Geneva or in last century Tonga), over society.<sup>6</sup>

We discovered a vital principle in Jeremiah’s prophecy to the exiled Israelites when they were taken to Babylon: “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. . . . But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:5–7).

As aliens and exiles looking towards our heavenly home, we must also seek the welfare of the cities in which we are living. Although our future in the kingdom is secure, we should not sit back and do nothing. We must obey our Master’s command to love our neighbor and try to bring kingdom principles to bear on the structures of society around us.

### Upper-class evangelism

To serve the poor, seeking personal justice, peacemaking justice, and communal justice are not enough. We must seek changes at the upper levels of society. But only a few of us are called to this task.

For most of us, God has called us to apprenticeship: to start where we are, take what we have, and do what we can at a community level. To do this, we might first establish communities of believers, alternative economic structures and small businesses, and then motivate local politicians to right decisions and confront local leaders with their wrongs. God may then give us grace for a wider field of ministry, but let us not be arrogant.

On the other hand, the few Christians of the upper class who have been committed to bringing the kingdom of God into or over every aspect of society have brought about fundamental social changes. The rich are the key to unlocking the poverty of the poor.

This is the cry of that famous passage in Isaiah 59:12–16, where the steps of social breakdown are described and the Lord cries for a man of justice:

We know our iniquities . . .  
speaking oppression and revolt . . .  
Justice is turned back . . .  
for truth has fallen in the public squares,  
and uprightness cannot enter . . .  
The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that



there was no justice.  
 He saw that there was no man,  
 and wondered that there was no one to intervene;  
 [no intercessor].  
 Then his own arm brought him victory,  
 and his righteousness upheld him.

The most famous group of upper-class Christians in English history was the Clapham Sect, friends of William Wilberforce. They were influential noblemen, bankers, politicians, and industrialists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> At one time, they infiltrated and took over the entire directorate of the East India Company, using it to champion the rights of the native races! Their persistent advocacy of morality in all dealings with subject nations did much to create notions of trusteeship and responsible imperial government. The relief of debtors, the destruction of slavery, the mitigation of the savage eighteenth century penal code, the ending of discrimination against Jews, Catholics and Protestant dissenters, the provision of charity to the victims of the Industrial Revolution—these reforms and others like them are credited to these evangelists.

Today, God continues to look for leaders committed to such truth and justice.

### **Effective social change**

If great social changes that help the poor are brought about by the rich, why work directly with the poor?

First, mass movements from the grassroots eventually produce changes in the top of society. The members of the Clapham Sect were the direct descendants of the Wesleyan revival. McLelland, in a significant study on entrepreneurs, shows that the two great waves of achievement in England were associated with Protestant reform or revival. Christians with a strong concern for perfection in this world tended to produce an achievement orientation in their sons, which turned the boys to business. Fifty years after revival,

England reached a peak of achievement as these men entered national and business leadership.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps our primary political activity, then, is renewal at the grassroots. As we establish movements of men and women converted and passionately committed to holiness, they will act like leaven in bread and ultimately transform society.

Second, the assumption that the center of power is the Prime Minister or the President is based on a non-Christian concept of power. Establishing spiritual “power bases” among the poor may be the key to changing a society. Spiritual power, as opposed to political power, is used by people able to influence the One who rules over politicians.<sup>9</sup> Power to move the hand that moves the world can be tapped by poor Christians who know the scriptural injunction: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1–2).

Such prayers are not intoned set phrases repeated at weekly worship in dead churches. They are the prayers of people who know how to prevail on God to implement political change, who recognize that “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1).

Righteous poor people who possess spiritual power and renounce natural concepts of power are, perhaps, the key to social change. But they must also be wise in the issues of the time. Poor but wise people, unable to be bought by wealth or power, are the key to godly societies.

St. Francis Xavier, the nobleman who renounced social status and opened Asia to the gospel, was one such poor, wise man. He won to Christ tens of thousands in India, the Moluccas, and Japan. He washed the wounds of lepers, prayed for the sick to be healed, and preached the gospel. Xavier sagely commented: “The world

is not ruled by principles of politics or economics, but by the mysterious realities of sin and grace.”<sup>10</sup>

Third, we work with the poor rather than the rich because of the example of Jesus. He could have come as a rich man—as the great welfare king. Instead, he came as a babe in a Bethlehem manger, surrounded by common shepherds.

He had a reason, though we don’t fully understand it, to identify with and minister among the poor. He had a reason for refusing Herod’s courts and Satan’s offer.

For Jesus, doing justice involved riding not on a centurion’s chariot, but on an ass. The heroes of his stories were children and slaves, not generals and politicians. Instead of overthrowing the unjust Romans and their empire (72,000 angels are a match for most Roman legions), he stopped to heal an ear with his touch.

But there will come a day when he will return with sword in hand, when the grapes of wrath will be pressed out and judgment on oppression, evil, and sin will be executed: “He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth” (Isaiah 42:4).

Jesus is a model of a revolutionary who never revolted, a man of power who refused others’ concepts of power, a man of justice who refused to be others’ judge, a man with his spirit attuned to the heavens who was constantly involved in dust and dirt, pain and people.<sup>11</sup>

Part of Jesus’ genius in working with the poor was that the rich came to him as well. Nicodemus searched out Jesus because of Jesus’ credentials. It was not Jesus’ political power that attracted him. It was his observation of Jesus’ spiritual power worked out in signs among the poor.

“Rabbi,” he said, “we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him” (John 3:2).

In the same way, living among the poor of Manila gives credibility and an opening to the upper-class, for many upper-class Filipinos have a highly developed social conscience and are actively involved in helping the poor of their country.

Rothie was such a man: a politician, an academic, a former revolutionary, a man of integrity and compassion. During the Indonesian communist uprising, Rothie and a friend had flown to Indonesia to fight for justice. Later, as the executive assistant of a university, he had worked to clean up its corruption. This resulted in 117 staff being fired by presidential order—only to be reinstated when Libya put “oil” pressure on those in political power! Rothie left quickly after the reinstatement and for a year was afraid to leave his house.

But that didn’t stop him. He began to work with local fishermen, seeking to break the cycle of poverty in which they lived. First he provided a punt boat which enabled their canoes to travel further out to sea, reap bigger catches, and extend their fishing season because of greater safety during the monsoon. He then studied how to better market their fish. He established a “cool” store, so the fish could be sold when the price was highest. Next he helped the fishermen’s wives to become productive with gardening, goats, and sewing.

I met Rothie after he had come to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. From the moment I met him, I loved him. He was a man who sought after justice with all his heart—both in society and in his own life.

When he was an executive in the university, he organized a great feast for visiting Arab dignitaries. Rothie made sure all was in order and everybody adequately fed, and then he and his wife quietly stepped out the back door to their own room and ate canned sardines and rice.

One day, after he flew home from a meeting with government leaders about rights for a minority group, he told me, “I have



cleared my calendar. I have three days. I want you to teach me the Scriptures.”

This was a deeply humbling experience for a young, insecure, poorly taught missionary. My mind raced. What could *I* teach this brilliant anthropologist-politician? The only basis of rapport I had with such a man was that I cared enough about his people, the poor, to live with them. Suddenly, I thought of the contrast between God’s political perspective and society’s.

“We will work through the book of Daniel,” I told him. “I think it will help you see God’s ways of bringing about political change.”

### The loyal reformers

The Lord has opened doors for other upper-class Christians in Manila working to bring justice for the poor within the structures of government. They speak prophetically to the government and speak out against sin at all levels in society—personally and politically, from their positions of respect and honor. They take seriously our mandate to “pay . . . respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Romans 13:7) and to “honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:17)—even if he has no clothes!

These passages were written in the context of the great exploitation, oppression, and Machiavellian politics of the Roman Empire, so they hold true for us today no matter how evil a leadership rules over us.

Another example of a man with an *entree* to the seat of power was a colonel, an advisor to the President, whose task was to prepare plans for a sugar factory complex. After his conversion, he consumed book after book on the Christian basis for socio-political and economic development. He thought through a Christian framework as a basis for management-labor relations and profit sharing. His proposals were the basis for discussion

at the highest level of government, discussion that inevitably included aspects of the gospel.

A host of biblical concepts on work, justice, and love are basic to labor relations. Take one statement to employers: “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns” (Deuteronomy 24:14).

This brief statement would radically reform a large percentage of the factories and close some multinationals in Manila if it were applied today. The Bible is a never-to-be-put-down textbook on such issues as labor, profit making, work, successful management patterns, and many other areas of business and politics. The Bible clearly points out the responsibilities expected of people in high positions towards the poor.

While not in agreement with the major themes of Gustavo Gutierrez, I do appreciate his excellent summary of the biblical perspective:

The Bible speaks of positive and concrete measures to prevent poverty from becoming established among the people of God. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, there is very detailed legislation designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth and the consequent exploitation.

It is said, for example, that what remains in the fields after the harvest and the gathering of olives and grapes should not be collected; it is for the alien, the orphan, the widow (Deut. 24:19–21; Lev. 19:9, 10). Even more, the fields should not be harvested to the very edge so that something remains for the poor and the aliens (Lev. 23:22).

The Sabbath, the day of the Lord, has a social significance; it is a day of rest for the slave and the alien (Ex. 23:12; Deut. 5:14). The triennial tithe is

not to be carried to the temple; rather it is for the alien, the orphan and the widow (Deut. 14:28–29; 26:12). Interest on loans is forbidden (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35–37; Deut. 23:20). Other important measures include the Sabbath year and the jubilee year. Every seven years, the fields will be left to lie fallow “to provide food for the poor of your people” (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25:2–7), although it is recognized that this duty is not always fulfilled (Lev. 26:34, 35). After seven years, the slaves were to regain their freedom (Ex. 21:2–6), and debts were to be pardoned (Deut. 15:1–18).

This is also the meaning of the jubilee year of Lev. 25:10 ff. It was . . . a general emancipation . . . of all the inhabitants of the land. The fields lay fallow; every man reentered his ancestral property, i.e. the fields and houses which had been alienated returned to their original owners.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to function at upper levels of leadership within a corrupt society. The higher up the ladder, the greater the extent of corruption. In an oppressive regime, it is not unusual for a Christian to reach a high level in government or business, only to have to resign because of injustice.

The more corrupt a society’s leaders become, the less Christians are free to function. The church then moves more and more into an Anabaptist, separatist lifestyle. Theologies based on those of Calvin and Luther become less effective. Their theologies came out of contexts where Christians had freedom to play a role at the upper levels of society.

It is interesting to see this principle work out in the roles of the prophets. The pre-exilic prophets in the Old Testament (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah) worked from outside the establishment, perhaps because of the extent of its evil, whereas the post-exilic prophets (Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)

worked from within the established political and religious leadership. Emerging Christian leaders in developing countries today face a situation more akin to the pre-exilic one.

### **Demonic politics**

Like the pre-exilic prophets, upper class Christians can “respect the Emperor” while standing in political opposition. Some, like Daniel, recognize the spiritual powers that function behind governments. One of the chief angels took three weeks to break out of a battle with the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” and reach Daniel. This supernatural being delayed him until finally Michael came to relieve him (Daniel 10:13).

Most politicians are people of the world, people who live outside of the Word of God. But some in power have been overcome not only by sin, but also by demonic principalities and powers. We readily recognize this in Hitler (even a cursory reading of his life shows all the classic symptoms of demonic possession), in Idi Amin, or in Colonel Gaddafi. Structures that such men create are not only corrupted by the world, as are all structures to some degree, but may be demonized.

It is against such “principalities [and] powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” that we are to wrestle when entering the political realm. That is why prayer is our most potent political weapon. In Chapter 2 of Colossians, Paul tells us that the elemental spirits of the universe perpetrate both human philosophies and empty religious traditions. He reminds the Colossians that such “principalities and powers” are disarmed (rendered inoperative) by the cross.<sup>13</sup>

As workers in the slums seeking to bring justice, we are in direct confrontation with powerful demonic forces. How do we best confront such demons? Through love and reconciliation. While rejecting the demonic philosophies, we honor and respect all men. We work side by side with people who reject our faith,

recognizing the genuine searchings of the social worker and the good intentions of the religious leader.

John Perkins sums up his own experience in a paragraph, which in many ways is the crux of his book, *With Justice for All*:

Demanding our rights had not softened the white community as we hoped it would. Instead, it had stiffened their opposition. Lying there on my bed, I was able to see that confronting white people with hostility was only going to create war. If there was going to be any healing it would have to take place in an atmosphere of love. I had been trying to demand justice. Now God was opening my eyes to a new and better strategy—seeking reconciliation.

I could not bring justice for other people. As a Christian, my responsibility was to seek to be reconciled. Then out of reconciliation, justice would flow.

Affirmative action integration and so on might be useful, but they alone were not justice. True justice could come only as people's hearts were made right with God and God's love motivated them to be reconciled to each other.<sup>14</sup>

### **Contention with authorities**

Defending the right and contending for truth are part of our call to righteousness. Jesus was no spineless coward. When slapped on the face and treated unjustly, he demanded, "Why do you strike me?" (John 18:23).

When the Pharisees misused their authority—an authority given by men but not by God—he refused to recognize it.

"You brood of vipers" is not a statement of a politician trying to win votes by compromise. It was the statement of the rightful King who had come to establish his kingdom.

The Old Testament prophets were not weak in their opposition to evil. Time and time again, God's spokesmen in the Scriptures recognized that he had appointed human authorities. They speak forcefully against sin. They do cry out in defense of cultural identity, and frequently call those in authority to repent. But they never call those under authority to rise up in rebellion.<sup>15</sup>

Moses, while leading a minority group out from oppression, went to the Pharaohs to gain permission and ultimately left the outcome to God. David, while outlawed from his society, refused to fight his king, leaving it to God to judge his case. Jude tells us that even when the archangel Michael contended with the devil, he said, "The Lord rebuke you." He did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment himself.

But submission, gentleness, and obedience to authority are not humble acquiescence to unjust structures and unjust authority. Giving "honor to those whom honor is due" is not in conflict with contending for truth or standing for the rights of the poor. Love, honor, and reconciliation define the context and attitudes behind contention.

Ezekiel 45:9 has two interesting couplets: "Put away *violence and oppression*, and execute *justice and righteousness*."

Violence and oppression are linked together as the opposite of justice and righteousness. Some encourage violent revolution as a way of overcoming oppression. But righteousness and justice—not violence and bitterness—are the vanquishers of oppression.

### **Time and change**

Why do we reject revolutionary violence? Those who would advocate it believe that gradual reforms of society are too slow,

that political structures are too evil. By escalating the bitterness and bloodletting, the evil will be destroyed by *sudden change*.

Others champion *managed change*, recognizing that violent change unleashes forces into a community that destroy its fabric for generations.<sup>16</sup>

Christians recognize both components of change. Our action is to preach repentance—introducing reform step-by-step into a society to keep it from going rotten. But as we repent, we must recognize that some societies and structures within society (such as white slavery) are so evil that God will violently destroy them.

He does not desire increasing violence, but ends injustice through leaders who bring national repentance and transformation. Failing to find such people, God intervenes by his own arm. Such was the case of Nineveh in Jonah's day. Because the world's greatest city of its time repented, God did not destroy it!

Gradual reforms and revolutions may improve the lot of the poor. But we are not optimistic that they will create lasting "shalom." Christian reforms keep society from rotteness, but we must recognize our inability to make it holy.

Reforms are not reform enough. Revolutions are not revolutionary enough. But God's strategy is a long-term strategy that cannot fail. His kingdom, like a grain of mustard seed, will continue to grow until it has branches in every nation, tribe, and tongue. It advances through suffering servants who by the death of their Master overcome death, and who by the goodness of their lives disarm evil, hatred, and violence.

This is the good news, the hope that we proclaim day after day.

### Political options

The chart on pages 196–197 summarizes possible Christian responses to the injustices of squatter society. There are three main categories of response. The first category is a "spiritual

discipleship" model growing from Anabaptist, fundamentalist, or Pentecostal roots. These models encourage us to be "like Jesus."

The second category, the holistic discipleship model, is developed from a desire to see the kingdom rule *over* or be expressed *in* every facet of human life. It recognizes that Jesus chose to limit himself—to a single human body, to a time, to a people, to a geography, to a three-year ministry. The role he chose was and is today the spearhead of establishing the kingdom. But there are many other roles in the body of Christ.

This category considers kingdom *principles* to be eternal, but *applications* to be time and culture-bound. A Christian should not stay out of law as a career because Jesus was not a lawyer. There is a place for the Christian community development worker even though Jesus was not a community development worker. Because he was not a politician does not imply Christians should give up politics.

All of the Scriptures written across 2000 years need to be known and understood if we would know what is right to do in any given time and place. The Bible can help us be a godly lawyer, community developer, or politician. The principles lived out and taught by Jesus were also lived out by Moses the lawyer, Nehemiah the community developer, and Daniel the politician.

One difference between the first two categories is the understanding of power. Category I sees that since we are fighting against demonic forces and philosophies in government, we must rely primarily on spiritual warfare.

For "the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood] but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4, Amplified). Category I sees the power of God to heal the sick and set people free from demons as the spearhead of the kingdom of God.

Category II relates to those already in positions of political or economic power who need to learn the ethical uses of and

**1. “Spiritual” discipleship model**

Involvement	Historical Expressions	Focus of Energy
Non-involvement in politics	Under oppressive regimes (authorities controlled by demonic forces)	Alternative communities demonstrating kingdom power in non-violence
Involvement with the needy	Early church monastic orders	Ministry to the poor and needy
“Spiritual” power struggles (the suffering Christ)	Fundamentalists Mennonites Anabaptists	Conflict with demonic forces in heavenly places

**2. Holistic discipleship model**

Involvement	Historical Expressions	Focus of Energy
<i>Alternative A:</i>		
Political involvement, confrontation, and reform of the power structures (Christ the Reformer)	Under democracies Luther’s attempts at an ordered society Franciscans	Reforming structures: Establishment of governments “infiltrated” with kingdom ethics
<i>Alternative B:</i>		
Involvement in structures with the ethically-based use of force or power (Christ the King)	The Salvation Army Tonga Calvin’s Geneva	Controlling structures: Establishment of governments ruled by kingdom ethics

**3. Christian deviations (non-Christian models—Christian language)**

Involvement	Historical Expressions	Focus of Energy
<i>Alternative A:</i>		
Abuse of power in the name of Christ (the “Byzantine Christ” of purple and scepter)	Christianized and post-Christian societies that have lost the moral base of legitimate power (Cromwell Post-Constantine era)	Accept structures Establishment of kingdom of God on earth by force Kingdom of God seen as servant of political structures
<i>Alternative B:</i>		
Use of power against secular authorities	Oppressive regimes	Overthrown structures God’s kingdom = revolutionary government
Power struggle with oppressive regimes (Christ the Zealot, Christ the humanitarian)	“Pax Marx” Liberation theology	Identification of the “principalities and powers” with corrupt political structures

**1. “Spiritual” discipleship model (continued)**

Involvement	Response to Violence	Political Action
Non-involvement in politics	Quietist approach	Submit to and pray for those in authority;
Involvement with the needy	Non-resistance	Proclaim gospel to the world; separate from evils of State
“Spiritual” power struggles		Overcome violence with pacifism

**2. Holistic discipleship model (continued)**

Involvement	Response to Violence	Political Action
<i>Alternative A:</i>		
Political involvement, confrontation, and reform of the power structures	Activist approach Non-Violence	Individual participation Use godly power (parents, teachers, etc.); rule justly; promote good legislation; be active in public office
<i>Alternative B:</i>		
Involvement in structures with the ethically-based use of force or power	Establishment approach Violence or revolutionary violence	Prophetic proclamation Organize petitions and boycotts; promote “biblical” civil disobedience; protest by using constitutional rights Civil defense

**3. Christian deviations (continued)**

Involvement	Response to Violence	Political Action
<i>Alternative A:</i>		
Abuse of power in the name of Christ	Just war Suppress dissent for piety and stability	Participation in exercise of amoral power, unjust rule, and institutional evil
<i>Alternative B:</i>		
Use of power against secular authorities	Combat violence with violence	Protest of evil = unrequited bitterness; Gospel of the Kingdom = gospel of revolution;
Power struggle with oppressive regimes		Establish alternative revolutionary structure; rebel against corrupt authorities; God is dead, so man must destroy evil



limitations of such power. Some may demonstrate, others pray, while others believe that proclaiming the Word of God to the politicians is more effective.

Category III includes non-biblical alternatives that advocate political viewpoints which themselves are not submitted to biblical authority.

### **Squatter politics**

How does a worker in the slums practically pursue justice at the personal level, in peacemaking, in establishing communities of people, and in causing change at the upper levels of society? There are several key points to keep in mind as we seek to see God's justice come into slums and squatter settlements of the Two-Thirds World.

1. Living among the poor is itself seen as a political action. It is interpreted by many as a symbol of siding with the poor against the oppression of the rich (the government consisting of the rich).

2. Establishing churches where people care for each other and treat each other justly is itself a deeply political action. This involves proclamation, bringing reconciliation into families and between gangs, developing social activities and a social structure for new believers, and becoming involved in economic development projects and leadership training. The worker must relate well to community leaders and government agency employees.

3. Public and private prayer for those in authority enables God to bring justice into society. It is a priority.

4. Since the national Intelligence Service may have a dossier on many Christian leaders, the Christian worker must be careful to clear activities with local leaders so that any questions might be answered beforehand, and all is above board. The worker

should avoid becoming aligned with any political faction in a community.

5. The Christian worker needs to treat community leaders with respect and become involved with them at a practical level. These relationships provide a basis for rebuke when they act corruptly or consultation when the community is threatened.

6. Healing the sick, casting out demons, and bringing about changes through prayer also pave the way for a prophetic ministry to community leaders.

7. The basic issue for illegal squatters is to gain land rights. The Christian worker can encourage oppressive landlords or government officials to repent. Similar confrontations may take place over housing programs, water rights, and sewerage.

8. Believers must first maintain right relationships at home, school, and the office. The Christian worker tries to bring conciliation between groups within the community, organizes protests against civil authorities through petitions and lobbying for land, employment, sewerage, and so on. The people in the community should be encouraged to see the social responsibilities they share, like policing crime, wiping out corruption, securing garbage disposal, and improving hygiene. They should cooperate with the government upgrading program if it is designed and implemented well.

9. The servant of God is not called to handle all these issues. Let me cite three areas of citywide injustice too big for any one person to handle.

In July 1982, Madame Imelda Marcos began a new anti-squatting drive. The "benevolent society" wished to clean up Manila, "the City of Man." Thousands of people were loaded into trucks and deposited into relocation sites miles from the city—without water, without work, without promised facilities.<sup>16</sup>

"Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and



righteousness; cease your evictions of my people, says the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 45:9). No one person could stop this oppression alone.

The slave trade can only occur because the uppermost level of government protects it. Who dares take it on alone?<sup>17</sup>

What about the exportation of Filipino laborers to the Middle East? This is a big source of steady income for family left behind in the squatter settlement, but it has led to thousands of situations of exploitation and trickery. Christian models of recruiting agencies need to be set up. Christian legislation needs to be introduced. Again, who can do this alone?

We need to see ourselves as part of the whole body of Christ and work in partnership to address these larger issues of injustice.

### Unattached!

I read Malcolm Muggeridge’s book *Something Beautiful for God* on the life of Mother Teresa, and found that while not neglecting programs, she had concluded that the greatest gift is loving people, communicating to them their dignity and their worth, even when there is no final way to meet their physical needs. Transferring the personal love and power of God is ultimately of infinite and eternal value.

Involvement with the poor results in different activities and responses in every community, for each community’s needs differ. While we may not solve the problems facing squatters, we must do all in our power to alleviate them.

And we can dream. But we hold lightly our dreams for the cities of the world, because our eyes are fixed on an eternal city designed and built by God. Although unattached to this present world, we freely serve it, for love and justice compel us to. We work with all the energy he inspires within us to preach his kingdom and carve it into the structures of society here on earth.

When the King returns, that kingdom of justice and righteousness will be fully established. The end of those who oppress others and show contempt for God will come (Isaiah 29:20). This vision of the holy city keeps us going in the midst of suffering and sorrow. Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.

### Coming full circle

Milleth had just taught us a Jewish dance. Everybody was rejoicing. The late afternoon shadows rustled back and forth in the wind. Sito announced our special guest—Aling Nena!

She stood up in her finest dress. She had just had her teeth removed and smiled in embarrassment. Then, in clear Tagalog, she began her story.

“I used to be a gambler and a drunkard,” she told us. “Now my life is changed. It is Jesus who has done this!”

Although most of us knew her story, we listened in silence.

She continued, “What I want to do now is to go to those poor people who live on the rubbish dump and preach to them about Jesus. They are poorer than we are. I want them to know what Jesus can do!” And so the kingdom spreads.

### NOTES

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3. In his book *Beyond Manila*, Castillo provides a well-researched analysis of the structural causes and effects of Philippine rural poverty—which is the major cause of urban poverty. Celia T. Castillo, *Beyond Manila, Philippine Rural Problems in Perspective*, International Development Research Center, Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada K1G 3H9, 1980.
4. John Perkins, *With Justice for All* (Regal Books, 1982), 105. Used by permission.
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13. See Henrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John H. Yoder, (Herald Press, 1962, 1977), for a theological analysis of the demonic in politics.
14. Perkins, John, *ibid*, p. 102. Used by permission.
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## Chapter Twelve

### Whom Will I Send?

#### A VISION FOR SERVING ASIA'S URBAN POOR

Verses from Ecclesiastes came to mind one evening when I was back in New Zealand.

There was a little city with a few men in it;  
and a great king came against it and besieged it,  
building great siegeworks against it.  
But there was found in it a poor, wise man,  
and he by his wisdom delivered the city.  
Yet no one remembered that poor man.  
But I say that wisdom is better than might,  
though the poor man's wisdom is despised,  
and his words are not heeded  
(Ecclesiastes 9:14–16).

Battered by reverse culture shock, by illness, and by the rejection of friends, I was wandering down a bush track in the evening light. As I prayed, God brought a picture to my mind—a brilliant picture, in a manner I've come to recognize as from God.

He showed me a hundred "poor, wise" men and women wandering the byways of the slums, dwelling among the poor of ten great cities in Asia—men and women who would, as Wesley says, "fear nothing but God and hate nothing but sin."

A few days later, an artist living up the road dropped me a note with a message the Lord had given her. It spoke of the same call to establish a new movement.

For months I delayed, praying, *Lord, I have no contacts with the influential men of the church. Why call me to establish*