

## **A Prayer for Clarity: Advocacy and Integral Mission**

*Gary A. Haugen*<sup>1</sup>

As the church of Jesus Christ enters its third millennium, there are many who find themselves on the cusp of a powerful, new insight. The church is perceiving that hurting people not only need the word and bread, they need a voice as well. This work of providing a voice for the voiceless is referred to by many as the ministry of advocacy. Advocacy is a response to the biblical exhortation of Proverbs 31:8-9.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

At this historic moment our greatest need is for clarity of vision about this call to advocacy. The church's response to the call to advocacy is threatened by two opposite hindrances to obedience – paralyzing ignorance and paralyzing sophistication. On the one hand, many in the body of Christ are ignorant of the call. They have not been taught about the earthly need and divine opportunity for advocacy. On the other hand, we are also threatened by an approach to advocacy that becomes intellectually rarefied, operationally remote and overly sophisticated in a way that alienates, confuses and immobilizes much of the body of Christ. We need to ask God to help us make it clear to the Christian community that the work of advocacy is desperately needed, thoroughly biblical and eminently doable.

### **Finding Clarity through Our Neighbour's Story**

The biblical call to advocacy emerges with straightforward simplicity from Christ's command to love our neighbour. Jesus said that all of the law and the prophets were summed up in the command to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40). The lawyer of Luke 10 was able to repeat to Jesus this correct answer. But finding, as we all do, that the right answer is easier to recite than to obey, the lawyer ran for cover by suggesting that the whole matter was more complicated than Jesus allowed. Undeterred, Jesus pressed the point home with unrelenting clarity by telling a simple story about a man laying beaten along the road to Jericho (Luke 10:30-37). What, Jesus asked, would a person who loved the wounded man do in such a situation?

Through the simplicity of story Jesus sweeps away sophisticated diversions. He confronts us with the clear facts about an individual human being in need and asks: What does love require? Likewise, the biblical call to advocacy emerges

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with singular clarity through simple stories about neighbours in need – stories that force us to ask: What does love require?

I would like to offer the stories of six neighbours from around the world and ask of the body of Christ: What does love require?

Joyti is a 14 year-old girl from a rural town in India who was abducted and drugged by four women who sold her into a brothel in Bombay. She has been locked away in an underground cell and severely beaten with metal rods, plastic pipe and electrical cords until submitting to provide sex to the customers. Now she must work seven days a week servicing 20-40 customers a day.

Osner is a 45 year-old man in Haiti who was illegally arrested and thrown in prison when the local mayor wanted to seize part of his land for her personal use. The detention is completely illegal under Haitian law and five different court orders have been issued demanding his release, but the prison authorities refuse to release him because of their political relationship with the mayor.

Carlos is an 8 year-old orphan boy who lives on the streets of La Paz, Bolivia. Carlos is frequently assaulted by the local police who kick him and beat him with their batons if he does not pay them money.

Shama is a 10 year-old girl who was sold into bonded slavery for a family debt of \$35 which was incurred to pay for her mother's medical treatment. As a result, for the last three years, Shama has been forced to work six days a week, 12-14 hours a day rolling cigarettes by hand. She must roll 2,000 cigarettes a day or else she gets beaten. Her bonded slavery is completely illegal under Indian law, but local authorities do not enforce the law.

Domingo is an elderly peasant farmer in Honduras who was shot in the face and leg when police illegally opened fire on him and other Lenca Indians while they were marching in the capital city for better government services in their remote region. The President of Honduras issued a promise to compensate all the injured, but nearly a year has gone by and the payments have never come. Now Domingo has lost his house and land because he is disabled and cannot work to make the payments.

Catherine is a 13 year-old girl who lives in a Manila slum and cannot go to school because her aunt forces her to work as a domestic servant. Worse, Catherine's aunt allows some of her male friends to live in the house and one of them raped Catherine while everyone else was out of the home. Catherine managed to file a complaint with the police, but the rapist is the son of a policeman and they have ignored the order to arrest the man for two years.

## Identifying Our Neighbour's Needs

If followers of Jesus Christ are to respond in love to each of his people, the first task is to identify the nature of their needs. In the early days of the modern missionary movement evangelicals focused on responding to those who needed to *hear* the gospel. Heroic strides have been made in the verbal proclamation of the gospel over the last century and a half. And it remains true today that we certainly do not love our neighbours well if we do not explain to them the gospel truth.

Yet the evangelical missionary movement grievously erred to the extent that it failed to respond in love to the other needs of its neighbours. As early as 1947 the evangelical theologian Carl F H Henry challenged an evangelism of mere words, insisting that: 'There is no room for a gospel that is indifferent to the needs of the total man or the global man.'<sup>2</sup>

This began to change in the later part of the twentieth century. A new generation of evangelical leaders returned the church to a biblical view of evangelism which ministered to the whole person. Evangelicalism embraced a witness in which the verbal proclamation of the gospel and care for our neighbour's physical and social needs are, in the words of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, 'both part of our Christian duty'. Over the last generation, the evangelical community has developed tremendous capacities to respond to those who suffer from deprivation. In 2000 evangelical relief and development organizations in the United States alone spent more than \$1 billion in responding to the needs of deprivation in our world.<sup>3</sup>

But this is where the old era ends and the new era of justice advocacy begins. In our six simple stories we see a different category of people who are hurting in our world. The traditional ministries of the evangelical community do not respond to their needs. They are not suffering today because they have not heard the gospel or do not have a church among their people. And so we do not show meaningful love to them in their situation by merely bringing the gifts of verbal evangelism. Nor are they suffering because of deprivation. None of them are hurting because they do not have food, shelter or healthcare. They are in a different category of need. They are suffering because they have an oppressor. They are hurting because they have bullies who abuse them. They are victims of injustice. And, for the most part, the existing ministries of the evangelical community do not provide meaningful help at their point of need.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry, Carl F. H., *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947)

<sup>3</sup> World Vision, World Relief, World Concern, Compassion International, The Salvation Army, Food for the Hungry, Action International, Samaritan's Purse, Food for the Poor and Habitat for Humanity.

This, then, is the vast, new frontier of justice advocacy. And it would be difficult to identify another area of ministry where there is such a disparity between the magnitude of the need, the clarity of the biblical mandate and the dearth of actual ministry.

### **The Magnitude of the Need**

Let us first clarify the nature and magnitude of the need. To do so it is important to reinforce the distinction between those who suffer from *deprivation* and those who suffer from *oppression*. We meet the needs of those who suffer deprivation – the lack of access to some material good – by providing material goods or services. But those who suffer oppression are hurting because they are victimized by the sin of injustice. The Bible defines this as the abuse of power. It is taking from others what God has given them – their life, liberty, the fruit of their love and the fruit of their labour. We cannot respond to this need simply by providing them with some material good. To show authentic love to the victim of oppression we must rescue them from their oppressor, bring the perpetrator to account, seek the restoration of the victim and prevent the abuse happening again.

If you love Joyti, you must try to get her out of the brothel. If you love Osner, you must seek his release from prison. If you love Carlos, you must stop the police beatings. If you love Shama, you must release her from slavery. If you love Domingo or Catherine, you must seek justice for them. This is what love requires. Yet this is not what most evangelical mission or development agencies are doing. While it may not be appropriate for every organization to take up this role, our clear biblical mandate suggests that somebody in the body of Christ certainly should.

This, then, is a distinctive need – different from those who suffer from not hearing the gospel and different from those who suffer deprivation. But what is the magnitude of the need? How many people in our world suffer because of the oppressive power of others?

There are at least a million children taken into forced prostitution new every year. In countries like Haiti and Honduras 85 percent of those held in prisons and jails have never been charged or convicted of a crime. In India alone there are at least ten million children who are held illegally in bonded slavery. There are hundreds of thousands of children living on the streets in the cities of the developing world who are vulnerable to brutal police abuse. Thousands of impoverished women and children in the developing world are sexually assaulted every year without anyone investigating the crime.

Add to these statistics events like the Rwandan genocide in 1994 in which 800,000 people were murdered in eight weeks. How did the Christians of the world manifest the love of Christ to these neighbours? As director of the United

Nation's genocide investigation in Rwanda, I sorted through the corpses of thousands of Tutsi women and children. As they huddled in terror for protection in the churches of Rwanda they did not need Bibles, sermons, food, medicine or housing materials. They needed a voice. They needed a voice that would move the world to restrain their machete-wielding Hutu neighbours. They needed an international security operation whose feasibility is unquestioned by subsequent military analysis.

In 1996 the International Justice Mission conducted a study among 70 evangelical mission and development organizations representing thousands of workers around the world. We asked them if they had workers serving in communities where people suffer injustice and abuse under circumstances in which local authorities could not be relied upon for relief. *All* of the agencies said they did. The most common categories of injustice included:

- public justice corruption
- abusive police or military
- child prostitution
- detention or disappearance without charge or trial
- state-supported discrimination or abuse of ethnic minorities
- organized political intimidation
- state-sponsored torture
- abusive child labour
- corrupt seizure or extortion of land
- forced migration
- forced adult or teenage prostitution
- extortion or withholding of wages
- organized racial violence
- state-sponsored religious persecution
- murder of street children
- child pornography
- state, rebel or paramilitary terrorism
- genocide

In the course of Christian ministry around the world we have learned a lot about the needs of our global neighbours – especially the needs of the poor. They go hungry, they get sick, they go without shelter. But we have also learned that they get abused by others.

The World Bank recently released an extensive study of the experiences of the poor. The multi-volume work is entitled *Voices of the Poor* and was constructed out of personal interviews with tens of thousands of poor people around the globe. The authors repeatedly emphasize the major role oppression and abuse play in the experience of the poor. One of the most striking revelations is the extent to which the police and justice systems side with the rich. Particularly in

urban areas the perception of poor people is that the police do not uphold justice or peace. Instead they are seen by poor people as a threat and a source of insecurity. Women report feeling vulnerable to sexual assault by police and young men say they are beaten up by the police without cause.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Clarity of the Biblical Mandate**

There can be little doubt about the staggering number of people suffering injustice and desperately in need of advocacy. Likewise, there can be no doubt about the clarity of the biblical mandate to respond to this need. It should be sufficient simply to cite Jesus' command to love our neighbour and allow the logic of 'the Golden Rule' to direct us in our response to someone being raped, tortured, imprisoned, pushed off their land or beaten up. If this were happening to us we would want someone to rescue us. This is the logic of the author of Hebrews:

Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Heb. 13:3, NRSV)

If Jesus' greatest commandment were not enough, we have the word of the Lord calling us to 'seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow' (Is. 1:17). The Old Testament prophets make clear that when we do not pursue justice God despises our sacrifices and prayers (Is. 1), our fasting (Is. 58) and our religious festivals (Amos 5). Jesus himself rebuked the religious leaders of his day for neglecting the 'weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith' (Mt. 23:23).

We could tour through the Scriptures documenting God's passion for justice and his call to his people to 'rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked' (Ps. 82:4). Given the extensive nature of the need and the clarity of the biblical mandate, one would expect an extensive deployment of God's people to meet the needs of the abused and the oppressed. Would that it were so.

### **The Dearth of Actual Ministry**

The reality is that the level of engagement in 'seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan and pleading for the widow' is small compared to the need and the biblical mandate. If one simply looks at the categories of abuse identified above in the International Justice Mission survey, one would be hard pressed to identify any category which is the primary operational focus of an existing evangelical mission or development organization. The International Justice Mission drew out of the study's finding that none of the agencies felt equipped to deal with these issues, nor were they aware of any faith-based

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<sup>4</sup> Narayan, Deepa, *et al.*, *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 163.

agency to which they could turn for help. There were indications that the agencies felt they could get some assistance in issues of religious persecution, but this created some unease about the perception that the only time Christians engaged in justice issues was when they themselves were the victims. Consider again the needs of Joyti, Osner, Carlos, Shama, Domingo, and Catherine. What percentage of the church's resources are being deployed to the rescue of the victims of forced prostitution, illegal detention, torture, police abuse, child slavery or other abusive conditions that they represent?

Over recent years a number of Christian ministries – especially in the development field – have begun to appreciate the problems of oppression and to begin advocacy programmes. Recent examples include efforts to speak to issues of Third World debt, conflict diamonds, sex trafficking, child soldiers and child labour. These efforts are promising developments that represent a maturing of the evangelical vision.

Yet agencies involved in this new engagement in advocacy have tended to do so at the fairly rarefied level of public policy advocacy. They have taken on macro-level issues and sought to mobilize public policy elites to pursue structural policy solutions. There is much that is right about this and, indeed, more should be done. The body of Christ has started in the field of advocacy by doing what it knows how to do – public policy research, awareness campaigns and lobbying.

Nevertheless, there are important differences between ministry to individual victims of oppression and issue-based advocacy. If we consider the plight of Joyti, Osner, Carlos, Shama, Domingo and Catherine, and ask how we might most effectively rescue them from their suffering, we would not opt for issue-based advocacy (public policy research, awareness campaigns and lobbying). We would instead be led to what we might call 'case advocacy' – the diverse set of tasks that can be pursued to bring rescue and justice for a victim of abuse and oppression.

By way of example, let us consider the methods by which the International Justice Mission pursued case advocacy in each of our stories.

Criminal investigators were used to infiltrate the brothel where Joyti was being held. Video surveillance technology was used to document where she was being held and by whom. Secure police contacts were mobilized to raid the brothel and release Joyti. Joyti was referred to a place of residential Christian aftercare, her brothel keeper was arrested and is facing prosecution.

American and Haitian lawyers were used in Osner's case to develop legal proofs that his detention was illegal. These were presented to the United States State Department and Congress to secure his release from uncooperative Haitian authorities.

Lawyers and investigators were deployed in Carlos' case to document scores of cases of police abuse, surveillance technology captured abuse on video and interventions were made at the top of the governmental chain of command.

Shama's bonded slavery was professionally investigated and documented, exposing a syndicate of over 400 other bonded slaves. Lawyers intervened with the local magistrate through indigenous relationships, obtaining the release of all the child slaves and the arrest of the moneylenders. Shama and the other children were subsequently given the opportunity to go to school.

In Domingo's case a Honduran attorney was hired to prepare an advocacy package for the President with the support of American lawyers. Within one week of receiving the documents, Domingo and all the 40 victims received full compensation payments.

A Christian lawyer provided free services for Catherine as a private prosecutor, obtained the arrest of the assailant and secured his prosecution.

Each one of these cases involves a victim who is part of larger structural injustice that needs to be addressed through issue-based advocacy. But in our appreciation of the structural and political nature of these problems, we should not leap frog over the victims. We must not ignore the opportunities to rescue millions of needy neighbours. Nor should we neglect the opportunities that exist to resource indigenous Christians for the work of case advocacy within their own communities. Not only does case advocacy provide the best source of the street level intelligence necessary for effective public policy work, it provides a concrete witness of tangible love to actual individuals.

We should not underestimate what can be achieved because of a limited imagination. God has placed diverse gifts in the body of Christ. Many Christians who are active in mission, development or issue-based advocacy would see little hope for the six victims featured in these stories. But for Christian public justice professionals these cases represent precisely the kinds of problems they know how to solve. We should pray that the Lord mobilizes the vast human and financial resources of legal and law enforcement professionals to serve the victims of oppression.

## **Conclusion**

May God grant us the capacity to provide a clear vision for the ministry of justice advocacy and the courage to walk in that sacrificial calling. May we make plain the urgent needs of the voiceless in our world, the biblical invitation to the joy of service and the great hope that God does not give us a ministry for which he will not empower us. In so doing we will point people to the love of Jesus. As David Bosch wrote:

[Jesus] did not soar off into heavenly heights but immersed himself into the altogether real circumstances of the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. Today, too, Christ is where the hungry and the sick are, the exploited and the marginalized. The power of his resurrection propels human history toward the end, under the banner 'Behold, I make all things new!' Like its Lord, the church-in-mission must take sides, *for* life and against death, *for* justice and against oppression.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 426.