

The Mission of Justice¹

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the biblical material, renewed attention to which has contributed to the rise in Christian commitment to the mission of justice. In particular, it looks at the ways in which that imperative has been articulated by evangelicals. The Old Testament prophets denounce injustice and this finds its echo in the book of James and in Revelation. Jesus was Justice Incarnate and calls His followers to demonstrate justice. Whilst there is continuing debate about whether action for justice is best understood as integrated with, inseparable from or even part of evangelism, there is growing agreement that the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without obedience to the Great Commandments, and that may involve using law as an instrument to achieve justice.

Keywords

biblical theology, justice, Lausanne, mission

The Imperative for Justice Mission

The history of the modern missionary movement might be summarised, in schematic and grossly oversimplified terms, in the following way. Christian missionaries believed that the Great Commission compelled them to go to the four corners of the world to tell people the good news about Jesus Christ. As part of their mission, they needed to translate the Bible into local languages and to teach local people to read and write. Christian schools were therefore established.

Christians then saw the need for hospitals to meet people's health needs and for wells and other basic infrastructure for the good of communities. Christians saw the need for clean water and reliable harvests, so Christian engineers and agricultural consultants came in and worked with poor communities. All these things were understood as being part of the will of God for these communities. Christians worked in partnership with God to bring about these aspects of God's will.

Despite these impressive efforts in the areas of evangelisation, education, health and community development, there was for a long time no parallel movement of Christians seeking to bring about an improvement in access to justice. The tacit attitude of Christian Churches was that earthly justice was either unimportant or unachievable, and that the Final Judgment was the only justice worth working and waiting for.

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There has, however, been a radical change of attitude. Roberto S. Goizueta observes:

As one looks back on upon the last third of the twentieth century, the theological insight that has arguably had the greatest impact on the life of the church is the notion that the God of Jesus Christ is revealed in a privileged, preferential way among the poor and marginalized peoples of the world – a notion at the very heart of the Gospel itself. There is not a single corner of the Christian world that has not felt the impact of the renewed attention to that claim ...²

An increased sensitivity to the sufferings of the poor has led to a recognition of the importance of justice, and in particular the use of law to enforce rights and entitlements, as a part of the Church's mission. As well as the numerous organisations which focus specifically on the persecuted church, existing Christian mission organisations have been taking a greater interest in questions of justice, and a number of new organisations such as the Dalit Freedom Network and International Justice Mission have been established to pursue justice and legal rights for the poor, whatever their religion.

International Justice Mission ("IJM"), was founded in 1997 by American attorney Gary Haugen, with a manifesto to release victims of injustice and oppression through legal and political advocacy spelt out in his book *Good News About Injustice*.³ Haugen had discovered, through surveying 65 organisations representing 40,000 missionaries that almost everywhere Christian workers were aware of injustice and abuses of power, yet there existed no specialist Christian organisation with the expertise and the resources to address these issues.

Before founding IJM, Haugen had been the director of the United Nations genocide investigation in Rwanda. He had turned to the Scriptures to find a response to the unutterable horrors he discovered there. It was in the Psalms that he found words which gave voice to the emotions provoked by what he had seen.

As he began reflecting more generally on injustice around the world, Haugen saw obvious parallels between the child prostitution, child labour, slavery, murder, corruption, abuse of police power, detention or disappearance without trial, and torture, which he was documenting today, and the situations described and condemned by the Old Testament prophets. He was far from alone in finding in the Hebrew Scriptures resources for a more holistic understanding of salvation than one which concentrates exclusively on saving souls.

Constructing a Biblical Theology of Justice Mission

Evangelical theologies of justice, such as the one put forward by Haugen, are often not only theologically but also methodologically distinct from liberation theology.⁴ The Exodus features little, if at all, in the biblical resources from which such theologies are created. The *Torah* (Mosaic law) is also seen as sensitive and potentially explosive material and underutilised.⁵ Any adequate biblical theology of justice would have to examine both the Exodus and the *Torah* for an account of God's delivering purposes and guidelines for a just society. Space prevents me from exploring those questions in the context of this article.⁶

The importance of justice is, however, also apparent in the writings of the Old Testament prophets and, as will be seen, the same concerns are reiterated in the book of James and in chapter 18 of Revelation. These prophetic and apocalyptic witnesses to justice find their centre in the teaching and the person of Jesus, the one who is Justice Incarnate.

The Prophets

The Old Testament's concern for justice is not abstract but is focussed around specific vulnerable people. Three in particular are identified as the objects of God's special concern: the foreigner, the orphan and the widow (Job 22:9; 24:3, 21; Psalm 68:5; 94:6; 146:9; Proverbs 15:25). These three are identified because each of them has lost the protection of close family members and so is vulnerable to social isolation, economic poverty, oppression and exploitation. This concern is to be found embedded within the social legislation of the Mosaic Law itself (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 24:17–21; 26:13; 27:19) and is repeated in the messages of the prophets (Isaiah 1:17; 10:2; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; 49:11; Ezekiel 22:7; Malachi 3:5).

Amos is the quintessential prophet of social justice but although the other prophets had a different focus to their message, social injustice is repeatedly part of the reason why God will bring judgement on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

In Amos, God's fury against Israel was all the greater because of what God has done for them: rescuing them from Egypt (Amos 2:10; 3:1), destroying the Amorites (Amos 2:9), giving them prophets and Nazirites to remind them of the need for holiness (Amos 2:11), and choosing them as his people (Amos 3:1). Amos' uncomfortable message is that "Israel's election did not give her a monopoly on divine favour, but called her to special moral responsibility; she was called to be 'a holy people unto Yahweh . . .'"⁷ This meant reflecting God's character, a character which was, in Amos' understanding, defined by God's justice.

Micah's message included the so-called "Micah Mandate" of Micah 6:8. Even Hosea, whose main focus was on Israel's refusal to live within the covenant characterised as adultery, says in Hosea 12:6–7: "But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always."

The 8th-century prophets are unanimous in their insistence that right rituals, righteous worship, are abhorrent in God's sight without righteous actions towards the disadvantaged in society (Hosea 3:4; 8:11–13; Micah 6:6–8). "The prophets simply would not allow Israel to get away with claiming the blessing and protection of the covenant relationship for their society while trampling on the socio-economic demands of that relationship."⁸

Justice is always at the top of God's agenda. Jeremiah spoke God's word to the rulers of Judah at a time when Jerusalem was about to fall to the Babylonian armies. Even in those circumstances, God's message was that those with power should "administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done" (Jeremiah 21:12, NIV).

Jeremiah compared the sons of Josiah with their father and declared that failing to uphold justice was a sin on a par with idolatry (Jeremiah 22:2–5, 9). Whereas Josiah's sons constructed their palaces using forced labour, their father was commended by Jeremiah, not for his religious, reforming zeal but because "He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well." (Jeremiah 22:16, NIV). Instead of following their father, his sons set their hearts "only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion." (Jeremiah 22:17, NIV).

The writer of Isaiah 58:5–7 placed a similar emphasis on just conduct, condemning the rich for fasting but refusing to loosen the chains of injustice, free the oppressed, share their food with the hungry, shelter the wanderer, clothe the naked, or show compassion to their fellow human beings. It is these actions of love for one's neighbour which are identified as the kind of fasting acceptable to God.

Looking back at why the exile had occurred, Zechariah repeats the same theme:

This is why the Lord Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor . . .” But they refused to pay attention. . . . So the Lord Almighty was very angry . . . [and] scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations. (Zech. 7:10)

Calvin’s conclusion from his study of the Old Testament was that “It is righteousness (justice) to take charge at the innocent, to defend and avenge them, and set them free: it is judgement to withstand the audacity of the wicked, to repress their violence and punish their faults.”⁹

If that is true for God’s people in the Old Testament, how much more must it be true for God’s people in the New Testament, who know the fullness of God’s power to save. Our worship of God, our expressions of our love for God, cannot be disconnected from our demonstrations of love for our neighbours. The act of loving our neighbour is an intrinsic expression of love for God.

It is clear from the prophetic writings already cited, as well as from the injunctions to do justice in the law-courts to be found in the wisdom literature (Proverbs 16:10; 18:5; 29:4, 26; Ecclesiastes 5:8) and in the Torah (Exodus 23:2, 6; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 16:19–20; 27:19), that the use of legal process to achieve justice was supposed to be part of the commitment of the Israelites to God.

But, the Hebrew Scriptures themselves indicate that God holds all human beings accountable for injustice. Books such as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel see Israel’s God as judging the nations on the basis of universally applicable moral criteria.¹⁰ Although justice is supposed to be a specially defining characteristic of the people of God, God has set His face against injustice wherever and however it occurs. The force of the prophets’ message about justice is inescapable. Injustice has consequences, and the ultimate consequence is the collapse of the civilisation. Like a creeping parasite such as ivy, in the end it will strangle its host to death.

The prophets looked forward to the day when God would come and establish God’s justice on the earth. However, the prophets also saw that the God who will one day act definitively, at the end of history, in order to bring justice to God’s people, is also the God who acts in history to bring justice for God’s people.

In spite of this, there has been a current in Christian thought which has taken the view that limited, if any, justice is to be expected from earthly law-courts in the Christian era. A full exploration of these issues would require an account both of Church history and of the exegesis of Romans 13:1–7, other passages in the epistles dealing with government, and Jesus’ comments about Caesar. I have considered these issues at length in chapters 6 to 9 of *A Biblical View of Law and Justice*.

The key contention in favour of the potential for law to be used as an instrument of justice is that structures of law and authority are not established by God with a blank cheque, entirely free to pursue whatever goals the holders of power wish to. Nor is the role of law merely to create a stable social space, however unjust, so that the Church can proclaim the good news about Jesus. Instead, law and political authority is given for a reason. Governors, rulers, are given a specific responsibility from God, the responsibility to “punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13–14; Romans 13:3–4). The use of law by Christians to achieve justice can be understood as exhorting and encouraging those who have that God-given responsibility to exercise it more faithfully.

James

In the New Testament, the concerns of Amos are reflected in the book of James. James knew that under the New Covenant, justice remained as important to God as it had been under the Old Covenant. He wrote: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look

after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27, NIV). It is significant that James refers to orphans and widows, two of the three categories of people the Old Testament see as especially vulnerable.

James is suspicious of riches (James 1:9–11; 2:1–7) and scornful of the possibility of a faith which does not express itself in practical compassion (James 2:14–18; 3:13). But he saves his most forceful attack for those who have made profit for themselves by fraud and oppression, through failing to pay their workers on time (James 5:4) and through violence against those who stood in their way (James 5:6). James is clear, as the prophets were clear, that the people of God should imitate God by being passionate in their fight against oppression and injustice.

Revelation 18

The same foment against injustice is to be found in the book of Revelation. Revelation 18 pronounces God’s judgment upon injustice, in a passage which Christian activists have read as condemning unfair trade and banking practices. “Babylon” is a civilisation from which the merchants of the earth have profited, but their trade was far from fair.

The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no-one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. (Revelation 18:11–13).

This vision of trade as an oppressive system, leading to opulence on the one hand and to slavery and injustice on the other, is increasingly recognised as a powerful challenge to the prosperous nations of the world today. Addressing the U.S. National Prayer Breakfast, Bono said this:

Preventing the poorest of the poor from selling their products while we sing the virtues of the free market... that’s a justice issue. Holding children to ransom for the debts of their grandparents . . . That’s a justice issue. Withholding life-saving medicines out of deference to the Office of Patents . . . that’s a justice issue.¹¹

The Gospels

In the New Testament, Jesus reaffirmed the importance of the call to justice. He saved his harshest words for the Pharisees who claimed great knowledge of God but neglected “the more important matters of God’s law: justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23). He condemned them because their meticulous religious observances were not matched by a concern about the things which actually matter most to God: “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.” (Luke 11:42).

Each of the Gospel writers starts his account of Jesus’ mission at a different point, and each has a different focus. Whereas Mark begins his gospel with Jesus calling His disciples, Luke starts with Jesus standing up in the synagogue in Nazareth, turning to the book of the prophet Isaiah, and reading from it:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

And recovery of sight for the blind,
 To release the oppressed,
 To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

When He had finished, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down, before adding: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:17–21). In so doing, Jesus had attributed to Himself the kingly role of the Servant of the Lord set out in Isaiah 42:1–9.

Healings, miracles, the defeat of demons, the rescuing of those who are as good as dead, good news to the poor, release for the prisoners and the oppressed: all these were characteristics of the Kingdom of God Jesus was announcing.

The teaching of the Church, either implicitly or explicitly, has often been that Jesus' proclamation was to be heard metaphorically. The poor to whom the good news was to be proclaimed were the spiritually poor; the prisoners whom Jesus came to free were those trapped in the prisons of bad habits, of alcohol dependence, and of drug abuse. The blind are the spiritually blind and the oppressed are those trapped by spiritual burdens.

Whilst this is true, it is not the whole truth. Jesus' first listeners would not have understood Him to be speaking in solely metaphorical terms. They did not divide body and soul in the way in which the West has tended to do ever since Plato. They would have heard Jesus proclaiming good news to the materially poor, announcing release from false or unjust imprisonment, the impossible recovery of sight for the physically blind, freedom from the oppression of indebtedness, slavery and servitude.

When Jesus, the instrument of God's deliverance, came to earth He responded to human sickness with healing; to human hunger with food; and to human fears with protection. He calls His followers to do likewise. Just as the Gospels describe Jesus healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving sins, serving others, so His disciples should be involved in similar activities as they bear witness to Jesus, who is both the herald and the agent of God's justice.

In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31–46 the issue is presented even more starkly. There the judgment of Christ is presented in terms of whether people have fed the hungry, given the thirsty something to drink, invited in the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison. It is difficult to see that defending the innocent and standing up for the rights of the poor do not fit naturally alongside the actions listed in the parable.

The Incarnation itself as Justice Mission

Even more than understanding the individual actions of Jesus as justice mission, the entire shape of Jesus' ministry can be seen as justice mission. There are three aspects to this. First, Jesus came alongside the poor, the suffering and the oppressed. He spent time with them, He listened to them, He taught them. Jesus was God with them, God Incarnate, God made flesh, interested in them. Second, the Jewish understanding of the Torah was that it was seamless. Justice could not be separated from holiness. Jesus' perfect life was not just lived in perfect holiness, it was also lived in perfect justice. The New Testament declares that in Jesus justice has been personified. Acts 3:14 and 7:52 proclaim Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One. The Apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that Jesus has become our justice (*dikaïosunē*), holiness and redemption. Jesus fulfilled the Micah mandate perfectly: He always acted justly, He continually loved mercy, He forever walked humbly with His God. Third, Jesus freely chose to be part of God's ultimate and paradoxical expression of justice, in submitting to death on a cross.¹²

The Challenge for the Church

For evangelicals, the challenge has not only been to integrate justice mission into the *praxis* of the Church but also to provide a satisfactory articulation of its place within evangelical theology and missiology.

Anderson's Distinction Between Witness to God the Creator and to God the Redeemer

In England and beyond, the discovery (or to be exact, the re-discovery)¹³ of justice as an integral part of Christian mission owes much to legal scholar Professor Sir Norman Anderson¹⁴ and to Rev. John Stott. Anderson recognised that “Jesus clearly had a particular care for the poor and wanted his disciples to share his concern for social justice”.¹⁵ Because Christians know that all human beings have been created in the image of God, we are “compelled to stand against all that debases and dehumanises men and women.”¹⁶

In a sermon given in Bristol at the start of the Legal Year, Anderson said,

[God] cares about [whether] man and woman have adequate food, decent housing, sanitary and healthful conditions; He cares about education, enlightenment and progress; that the poor (and all who need protection) should be set free from any social or economic exploitation; and that honesty, decency, morality and fair dealing should prevail in both civic and private life. And, to this end, it is His will that just laws should be promulgated, and should be administered with impartial justice by all concerned. This was proclaimed from the housetops by the Old Testament prophets, and is equally clear in the New Testament epistles, where we are explicitly told that it is the God-given function of governments . . . “to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”

Nonetheless, Anderson drew a clear distinction between Christian witness to God as Creator and Christian witness to God as Redeemer.

God is Creator. He has made this world; He loves it. He still cares that men and women have enough to eat; decent houses to live in; worthy moral standards; noble literature and art; scientific research; everything.

But men and women are estranged from Him. They are lost – in a state of rebellion and none of these things I've mentioned are salvation. So God the Creator became God the Redeemer Our job, as Christians, [is] to be His witnesses in *both* these capacities (as Creator and Redeemer).

We witness to Him as Creator when we, too, care about men and women – food, housing, politics, laws, art, morality, every part of human life. When we stand for what is right and work for social justice.

But we must also witness to Him as Redeemer. None of these things save. Individuals must come to Christ as Saviour and Lord through personal evangelism.

The better we witness to God as Creator, the more effective will be our witness to Him as Redeemer.¹⁷

Evangelicalism as a movement has subsequently moved beyond Anderson's position, drawing action for justice closer towards the heart of Christian mission whilst maintaining a distinction between action for justice and evangelism. John Stott, in particular, was significant in the adoption in 1974 of the Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism and Christian Social Responsibility.

The Lausanne Covenant's Affirmation of Evangelism and Christian Social Responsibility

Article 5 of the Lausanne Covenant states:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.

John Stott's commentary on article 5 argues that "Christian duty arises from Christian doctrine" and identifies four main doctrines as the sources for Christian social duty, namely the doctrines of God, man, salvation and the kingdom.¹⁸

The Doctrine of God

Because God has created all human beings and because each one of us will be held accountable by God on the day of judgement, God is concerned "for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of [human beings] from every kind of oppression." Stott stresses that "Justice, reconciliation and freedom . . . were God's will for society long before they became man's quest."

The Doctrine of Man

Stott finds Christian social concern in its recognition that each and every human being has been made in the image of God and thus possesses inherent dignity which means that they "should be respected and served, *and indeed loved* (Leviticus 19:18; Luke 6:27,35), not exploited." Stott argues that the doctrine of the image of God enables us to see that the evils, for example, of racial discrimination and social prejudice are an offense to human dignity and therefore to the God in whose image human beings are made. He goes so far as to say that "to insult [human beings] in these ways is to blaspheme God".

The Doctrine of Salvation

Stott denies that salvation is to be equated with political and economic liberation. It is far more than that.

Reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation. Nevertheless, it is our duty to be involved in socio-political action; that is, both in social action (caring for society's casualties) and in political action (concerned for the structures of society itself). For both active evangelistic and social involvement are necessary expressions not only of our doctrines of God and man (as we have seen) but also of our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ Salvation is deliverance from evil, and implicit in God's desire to save people from evil is his judgment on the evil from which he saves them. Moreover, this evil is both individual and

social. Since God hates evil and injustice, *we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.*

The Doctrine of the Kingdom

Finally, Stott argues that to be a citizen of Christ’s kingdom is to be under an obligation to exhibit righteousness and to seek to spread righteousness through “the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.”

Developments beyond Lausanne

Subsequent to the Lausanne Covenant there has been an increasing recognition that, at least in certain contexts, if the proclamation of the Christian gospel is not accompanied by a commitment to meeting people’s material needs it is simply incredible. Tim Chester argues that although evangelism and social action are distinct activities, and proclamation of the gospel is central, “evangelism and social action are inseparable, especially in ministry among the poor”.¹⁹

Reflecting on many years living as a missionary in the slums of Asian cities, Vig Grigg has suggested that the Bridge Illustration used in evangelism needs transforming to recognise the holistic breadth of God’s salvation.²⁰

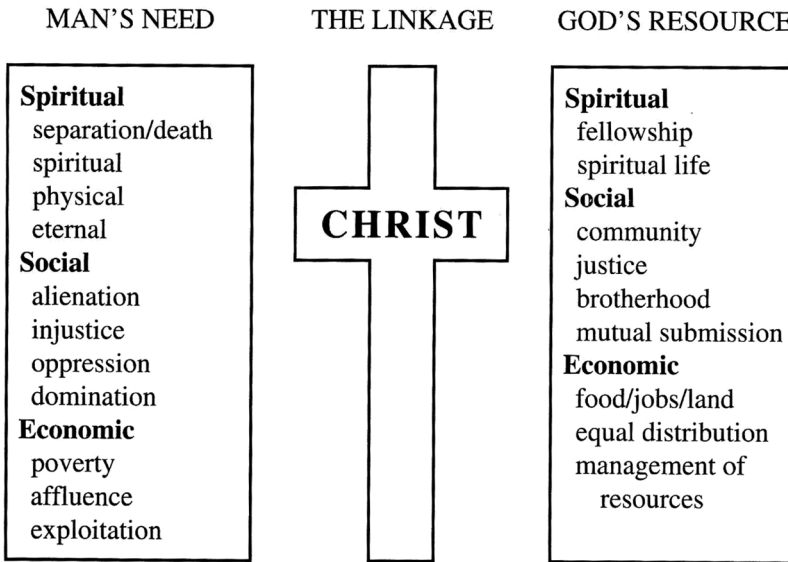


Figure 1. The Bridge Illustration

The Manila Manifesto

The emphasis on justice as an aspect of holistic mission was expressed, at the Second International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Manila in 1989. The Congress affirmed its commitment to the Lausanne Covenant and issued Twenty-One Affirmations. Affirmations 8 and 9 were:

8. We affirm that we must demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter.

9. We affirm that the proclamation of God's kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness.

In a section headed "Good News for Today", appended to the Manila Manifesto, it is stated:

We have again been confronted with Luke's emphasis that the gospel is good news for the poor and have asked ourselves what this means to the majority of the world's population who are destitute, suffering or oppressed. We have been reminded that the law, the prophets and the wisdom books, all the teaching and ministry of Jesus, all stress God's concern for the materially poor and our consequent duty to defend and care for them. Scripture also refers to the spiritually poor who look to God alone for mercy. The gospel comes as good news to both. The spiritually poor, who, whatever their economic circumstances, humble themselves before God, receive by faith the free gift of salvation. There is no other way for anybody to enter the Kingdom of God. The materially poor and powerless find in addition a new dignity as God's children, and the love of brothers and sisters who struggle with them for their liberation from everything which demeans or oppresses them.²¹

The Manila Manifesto section on "The Gospel and Social Responsibility" affirms the primacy of evangelism, giving people "the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour" but nonetheless insists that "as we preach the Kingdom of God we must be committed to its demands of justice and peace." This is recognised as involving ministry to the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for prisoners, helping the disadvantaged and handicapped, and delivering the oppressed. It also involves the denunciation of evil including "institutionalized violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, the drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights". True mission is understood to be "incarnational. It necessitates entering humbly into other people's worlds, identifying with their social reality, their sorrow and suffering, and their struggles for justice against oppressive powers."

Paul Marshall on the Breadth of the Great Commission

Paul Marshall wants to go further still, arguing that proclaiming the *evangel* involves many of the activities which evangelicalism still only recognises under the separate and subordinate category of social action.

Evangelism includes winning individual converts, but it also includes proclaiming the whole *evangel*, God's good news for all creation. It includes proclamation to the nations about obedience to God, to the prisoners about freedom, to the poor about release – in short, it includes many of the things now labelled as "social action". Repentance and conversion themselves involve turning from one life to another in every aspect of human existence

Adding "social action" and "evangelism" together still tends to portray them as separate things that must both be done, rather than as two facets of one overall task. In place of this two-fold scheme we should understand that our task is creation-wide and creation-deep We are to proclaim and to show in our lives that Christ is Lord over every part of life. Just as every part of life is affected by human sin, so all parts of life can be renewed and redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is our only solid hope for families, factories or politics.

True Christian social action is always evangelistic work, for no area of life is “neutral”, supposedly immune from the effects of sin and the reach of redemption . . . All areas of life must be linked to new life in Jesus Christ. In turn, true Christian evangelism is always social action because it lives and proclaims what is good news in each area of life.²²

The concern some evangelicals have with formulations such as Marshall’s is that when evangelism and Christian social action are assimilated to one another, the ultimate result is, however unintentional, that evangelism is likely to be ignored.

The Intrinsic Link Between the Great Commission and the Great Commandments

Whilst many evangelicals would not want to go quite as far as Marshall does, there is a growing consensus about the interrelationship between the Great Commission and the Two Great Commandments. Jesus told His followers not only to go into the whole earth and make disciples, but also to teach them everything He had commanded (Matthew 28:18–20). He commanded them to love one another (John 14) but also to seek first the kingdom of God and His justice (Matthew 6:33). He stressed justice, mercy and faithfulness as central to God’s law (Matthew 23:23).

D’Souza and Rogers insist that “The Great Commission must always go hand in hand with the Great Commandment, and the Great Commandment is deeply linked with the need for involvement in the lives of those who are oppressed, persecuted, abused, and dehumanized.”²³ In the same way, Haugen argues that the commands to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves are at the core of the Christian’s calling. “Accordingly, the call to remember the oppressed is couched in the logic of love: “Remember . . . those who are mistreated *as if you yourselves were suffering*.” The Scriptures are confident that if we imagine that we are the child prostitute, the torture victim, the child labourer, we would not want to be forgotten.”²⁴

Conclusions

The witness of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, is that God hates injustice. God is angered when power and influence are abused. God is outraged when the rights of the powerless are not protected, when there is no-one to plead their case or to help them enforce their entitlements. Abuse of power and unequal access to justice appal God. God is angered when the courts are corrupt and the law is used as an instrument of oppression rather than liberation.

God is passionate about these things. “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity.” (Isaiah 61:8, NIV). “[L]et him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:24, NIV).

There is an increasing realization that God’s people are called to be obedient to God and to be prepared to act as God’s instruments of mercy and justice in those places to which God has called them. The Church is called to “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 the needy” (Proverbs 31:8–9). If Christians respond obediently to God, God will use them to release the oppressed and demonstrate God’s power to secure justice for the poor and to uphold the cause of the needy (Psalm 140:12–13). However, it would be a fairytale dream to imagine that injustice on earth could be entirely abolished. There are good theological reasons for expecting only fragmentary and limited justice on earth.²⁵ Nonetheless, Jesus has set an example which Christians ought

to follow: “while never neglecting or subordinating spiritual needs, Jesus called his followers to respond to hunger with food, to nakedness with clothes, to imprisonment with visitation, to beatings with bandages and to injustice with justice (Mt. 15:32–38; 25:35–36; Lk. 10:34; 11:42)”.

Moreover, Nicholas Sagovsky has recently contended that the Eucharist, the repeated celebration at the heart of the Christian faith, is a key impetus to the pursuit of justice by Christians. Sagovsky argues that the Eucharist, communion, is “a memorial established in hope of God’s reign of justice”.²⁶ In communion, we remember the death of the one who was Justice Incarnate, unjustly executed by two of the ancient world’s most sophisticated legal systems. The Eucharist is also a provisional celebration in which “We proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”. As well as looking back to the cross, the Eucharist looks forward to the day when Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Action for justice, including using law to achieve justice, is now recognised as an integral part of Christian mission within evangelicalism. There remain, nonetheless, discussions about how that action is related to the proclamation of the Gospel. It seems likely that Christians will continue to disagree about the precise theological basis for and consequences of pursuing justice in this fallen world. It is therefore salutary to remind ourselves that, as Duncan Forrester says, “The doing of justice is, for Christians, more important than getting our ideas straight.”²⁷ Martin Luther King spoke of the paralysis of analysis, recognising how discussions about theories of justice can become a camouflage, a self-deceiving “excuse for inaction, . . . disguise for selfishness, . . . reason for failure to respond to the cry of the neighbour for justice.” Christian thinking about justice has to lead to action for justice. It has to change our behaviour, to inform our action, to show us what it means in practice to love our neighbours as ourselves.

If Christians are responsive to God’s justice, we will not turn away from attempts to realise justice in this world but will instead turn to the world in order to do God’s will there, seeking to discern how to realise more of God’s justice in specific situations and in particular human lives. In the words of Viv Grigg, “A hunger for God throws us not into pietism, but into the thick of injustice on this earth.”²⁸

Notes

- 1 A version of this article was presented as the Montagu Barker Lecture at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies on 18 May 2010. I am grateful to those who attended that lecture for their insightful questions and comments.
- 2 Page 299 of Goizueta R S (2004) Gustavo Gutiérrez. In: Scott P and Cavanaugh W T (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (pp. 288–301). Oxford: Blackwell.
- 3 Haugen G A (1999) *Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World*. Leicester: IVP.
- 4 I have examined Haugen’s use of the biblical material and compared it with that of his fellow evangelicals Joseph D’Souza and Benedict Rogers, in McIlroy D (2010) The Use of the Bible by Christian Human Rights Organisations. *Political Theology* 11: 473–485.
- 5 In the American context, it is theonomists such as Rushdoony R J (1973) *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, and Bahnsen G L (1984) *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing who have interpreted the Mosaic Law in the pursuit of an explicitly capitalist, right-wing agenda.
- 6 I explore these issues in chapter 3 of my (2004) book, *A Biblical View of Law and Justice*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- 7 Freeman H E (1968) *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (p. 186). Chicago, IL: Moody.

- 8 Wright C J H (1990) *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (p. 62) Carlisle: Paternoster.
- 9 Calvin J (1961) *The Institutes of Christian Religion* (translated from Latin). Battles; London: SCM Press. IV.20.9.
- 10 Amos's denunciation of Israel's neighbours is to be found in Amos 1:1–25. Isaiah 46–47 denounces Babylon. Oracles against the nations are in Jeremiah 46–51 and Ezekiel 25–32.
- 11 Bono, an extract from his speech at 54th Annual National Prayer Breakfast, Washington DC, USA.
- 12 I have sketched an approach to the atonement in *Towards a Relational and Trinitarian Theology of Atonement Evangelical Quarterly* 80: 13–32 (2008).
- 13 Wolfe J (ed.) (1995) *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780–1980*. London: SPCK.
- 14 For a fuller account of this aspect of Norman Anderson's thought, see my (2009) *The Theology of Law of Norman Anderson*. *Law & Justice* 163: 110–126.
- 15 Anderson J N D (1983) *The Teaching of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 122.
- 16 Anderson J N D (n.d.) untitled notes, SOAS Special Collections Reading Room PP/MS/60/02 box 8: file xxiv.
- 17 Anderson J N D (n.d.) "Untitled talk", unpublished manuscript, SOAS Special Collections Reading Room PP/MS/60/02 box 7: file xxiii; see also Anderson J N D (1972) *Morality, Law and Grace* (p. 104). London: Tyndale.
- 18 Stott J (1974), *LOP 3: The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, article 5, available at <http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-occasional-paper-3.html#5>. All italics are original.
- 19 Chester T (1994) *Good News to the Poor: The Gospel through Social Involvement*. Leicester: IVP.
- 20 Grigg V (2004) *Companion to the Poor: Christ in the Urban Slums* (rev. edn.) (p. 80). Milton Keynes: Authentic.
- 21 The Manila Manifesto, available at: <http://www.lausanne.org/manila-1989/the-manila-manifesto.html>
- 22 Marshall P (1984) *Thine is the Kingdom* (pp. 36–37) Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Scott.
- 23 D'Souza J and Rogers B (2007) *On the Side of the Angels: Justice, Human Rights, and Kingdom Mission* (p. 174). Milton Keynes: Authentic.
- 24 Haugen G A (1999) *Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World* (p. 39). Leicester: IVP.
- 25 I explore these reasons in chapter 7 of *A Biblical View of Law and Justice*. Carlisle: Paternoster (2004) and chapter 5 of *A Trinitarian Theology of Law*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster (2009).
- 26 Sagovsky N (2008) *Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice* (p. xviii). London: SPCK.
- 27 Forrester D (1997) *Christian Justice and Public Policy* (p. 55) Cambridge: CUP.
- 28 Grigg V (2004) *Companion to the Poor: Christ in the Urban Slums* (revd edn.) (p. 174). Milton Keynes: Authentic.

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