

Integrating Christian Witness

*Reflections on*  
**Advocacy  
and Justice**



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*Reflections on*

# **Advocacy and Justice**

Tim Dearborn



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# Introduction

These reflections warrant a few introductory comments. The biblical faith conveys a deep tradition of advocacy, stretching from Genesis to Revelation. Advocacy has always marked the Judeo-Christian tradition throughout history, and been part of World Vision's work since our founding.

These reflections do not represent any 'official' position of World Vision International on either the Christian foundations for advocacy or our approach to it. Rather, they are a summary of my personal reflections on the Christian faith and the centrality of advocacy for justice in the life and ministry of the people of God. They were prepared for the Global Advocacy Steering Group's meeting in January 2009 and thus reflect a discussion with a particular group within the limitations of time. I make no presumption to suggest they are comprehensive or definitive. They are efforts to provide brief consideration of aspects of advocacy and justice relevant to the work of a Christian humanitarian agency. Obviously, many others have done much more thorough and systematic biblical and theological reflections on justice and advocacy than are expressed in these few pages.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I have made no effort to illustrate these reflections with many of the fruitful and powerful examples of advocacy from throughout the World Vision Partnership or from other organisations. Readers are encouraged to 'fill-in' with their own examples.

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1 See for example, Diane Olson and Laura Dean Friedrich, *Weaving a Just Future for Children: An Advocacy Guide* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008). See the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance for an extensive list of resources.

I offer these thoughts to further our conversation and I assume that through this process, over the coming years, we will develop together as a global Partnership a more thorough and comprehensive understanding and integration of our Christian faith in our advocacy for justice.

# Theological Foundations for Advocacy

## Becoming a community of advocates

Advocacy is not a purely human activity. As a Christian organisation, World Vision's engagement in advocacy and justice work is not simply driven by its mission mandate or by the needs of the world—but by the nature and character of God.

### **The Triune God is *the* Advocate**

Advocacy is as old as God! God is *the* Advocate. Throughout the Old Testament, we encounter the God who hears the cries of the poor, the oppressed and the victims of injustice. Beginning with Cain, God heard the cries of his brother Abel's blood (Gen. 4:9-11). Job affirmed that God hears the cries of the fatherless and the poor (Job 29:12; 34:28). The Psalmist sings, 'the poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord' (Ps. 34:6); 'O Lord, who is like you? You deliver the weak...and needy' (Ps. 35:10). The prophets repeatedly speak God's anger against Israel for 'crushing my people, ...[and] grinding the face of the poor' (Isa. 3:14-15). God hears the cries of those in distress and condemns those who 'deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed' (Isa. 5:6-8; 10:2). The list of verses goes on and on—all to say that the heart of God the Father is the heart of an Advocate.

## God the Spirit

In the New Testament, the Spirit is actually named ‘the Advocate.’ Jesus describes this in his great teaching on advocacy found in John 14:12-31 and 16:7-15. He promises that the Father will give us another Advocate, to be with us forever (14:16). This Advocate will not merely be outside us, but dwelling in us, for ‘he abides with you, and he will be in you’ (14:17).

This Advocate has a three-fold work.

- **Firstly**, we will be led into truth, for ‘the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything’ (14:26).
- **Secondly**, we will receive peace. ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you’ (14:27).
- **Finally**, in chapter 16 Jesus describes another work of the Advocate, to ‘prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment’ (16:8).

Insight into the biblical meaning of advocacy can be found in the word that is translated in these verses as ‘advocate,’ *paracletos*. This literally means one who is called alongside to speak on behalf of another and to make another strong. It is a rich combination of both comforter and counsellor.

**Counsellor** translates the aspect of *paracletos* that conveys one who leads us into truth and convicts of sin, speaking on behalf of God. That is the work of a good counsellor.

**Comforter** portrays the Father and Son dwelling in us through the Spirit, bringing us peace that is not derived from our circumstances but by God’s life within us. To comfort someone is not simply to console them, but to make them strong.

Thus we need both counsellor and comforter to understand the meaning of Jesus’ word, and both are encompassed in the word Advocate—one who comes alongside us to speak on our behalf, strengthen us and lead us into truth.

## God the Son

In I John 2:1, Jesus himself is described as the Advocate—speaking on our behalf when our sins accuse us. We gain significant insights into advocacy through examining Jesus’ five-fold ministry as the Advocate.

**Firstly**, Jesus speaks for us because we cannot speak for ourselves. ‘Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?...Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’ (Rom. 8:33-34). When we are advocates, we are speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves. Proverbs 31:8-9 encourages us to ‘open our mouths for the mute, for the rights of the unfortunate...and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.’

**Secondly**, Jesus does not remain at a distance from us as our Advocate. He emptied himself (Phil. 2) and fully identified with our poverty and oppression—even to the point of death. He fully embraced our situation (Heb. 4:15). Advocacy is not paternalistic charity of the powerful seeking to care for the powerless. It is Jesus becoming one of us, dwelling amongst us. The closer we are identified with those on behalf of whom we want to speak, the more we will be advocates in the way of our Lord.

**Thirdly**, Jesus’ advocacy was not a short-term campaign, but an unending engagement. ‘He always lives to make intercession for us’ (Heb. 7:25). We do not merely launch a three-month advocacy effort for a specific limited need. Rather, we exist to advocate continually on behalf of those who are poor and oppressed.

**Fourthly**, Jesus is our Advocate precisely because he does what we ourselves cannot do and brings what we cannot bring. Jesus comes before the Father with the perfect relationship and righteousness that we are incapable of bringing (Heb. 8:3). When we come to do our advocacy work, we dare not resort to methods of intimidation, anger, power manipulation and threat of embarrassment that are often used in human ventures. If we are to counter the forces that oppress (or ignore) those who are poor in the way of Jesus, then we must also act with his humility and goodness.

**Fifthly**, we recognise another force against whom advocacy must stand. As the Advocate, Jesus bore the wrath of and defeat the powers of the Adversary. If a courtroom has both an advocate and a prosecutor, the Adversary is the prosecuting attorney—the accuser. If we are not prepared to labour against ‘principalities and powers’ and think we are labouring merely against ‘flesh and blood,’ then we are not prepared to be advocates (Eph. 6:12). Advocacy is not simply a human activity. To address ‘root causes of poverty’ requires multi-faceted engagement: politically, culturally, socially, economically, environmentally—as well as to confront in the name of Jesus by the power of the Spirit the spiritual authority structures of this world that are aligned against God’s good intentions for humankind and all creation.

### **A community of advocates**

How do those who are voiceless and without influence find someone who will speak and act on their behalf? To answer this, consider another staggering truth of the Gospel when Jesus says regarding the Advocate, ‘Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these’ (John 14:12). If we are honest, don’t we find this statement somewhat incredible? How could we possibly do greater works than Jesus?

The only limitation, the only thing incomplete about Jesus’ ministry is that people’s encounter with him was limited to one person, in one place, at one moment of time. He was a first century Palestinian Jew. If people wanted to encounter him, they had to find him—by the side of a lake, walking through their village, teaching in the Temple.

Now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, we can share in Jesus’ ministry—making it visible everywhere. This is the high and holy privilege of our work as Christians and the work of World Vision. We are called to participate in the very work of God. This is not a burdensome task or strenuous obligation. Rather we are allowed to experience the joy of seeing the Advocate work through us.

Of course, this ministry puts us at great risk. Confronting the Adversary—the one who keeps people orphaned, voiceless and enslaved—is threatening. Advocates are threats to oppressors and systems of oppression, and therefore will be threatened. However, even knowing that advocacy for humankind would lead to his own death, Jesus still proclaimed that the ruler of this world has no power over him, for the Adversary has already been condemned (John 14:30; 16:11).

## Conclusion

During the Jerusalem Council when elders of the early church debated Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, they endorsed incorporation of Gentiles into the church on one condition: 'They only asked one thing—that we remember the poor' (Gal. 2:10). In English, a 'member' is someone who belongs to a group. To 're-member' is to reconnect. Remembrance is a relational word, not simply a word describing mental memory.

Advocacy as re-membering is to connect victims of injustice, oppression and poverty with those who are in a position to be used by God to deliver them. This understanding is enhanced by the French word for remember, *souvenir*. *Venir* is the verb 'to come', and *sous* is 'from beneath.' To remember the poor is to come from beneath them to support and advocate on their behalf—rather than to come from above or ahead (Fr. *avenir*). Christian advocacy is the use of power to support from below those who are on the margins, rather than the condescending use of power from above or outside.

No one likes a critic. A critic stands in front of us and points a finger at us, telling us what is wrong with our lives. Advocacy is not criticism. Critics cannot be advocates, leading people into a better life, for critics simply imprison people in defensiveness, irritation or guilt. *Who we are* as advocates is central to *what we do* in our advocacy. Advocacy is not merely a political activity, but also a highly spiritual activity. Advocacy is not simply the fruit of communication campaigns and public relations techniques, but also or more so the fruit of our character and our relationships. To *do* advocacy, we must *be* advocates. To be advocates for God's justice, we have to be filled with the life of the Advocate.

Advocacy is the stewardship of influence on behalf of those who are poor and oppressed. This is central to World Vision's mission and calling as a Christian organisation. The ministry of advocacy and justice is integral to its Christian commitments. Therefore, participation in development of advocacy campaigns and mobilisation of children, families, communities and churches for advocacy on behalf of those who are poor and oppressed is integral to our Christian Commitments. World Vision is decisively positioned for more effective advocacy. For this to occur, it needs to bring together in seamless integration grassroots engagement that gives credibility and facts, with expertise in communication and marketing, and the capacity to mobilise people and spiritual intercession.

God is calling the people of God to be a community of advocates—those who will participate in God's passion to see the marginalised brought to the centre, the captives set free, and the oppressed flourish. The marks of the kingdom of God are that the voiceless speak, the earless hear, the footless walk, the handless embrace. It is that for which we pray when we say, 'thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

# Christian Advocacy with Governments

## **Avoiding the risk of becoming a non-prophet organisation**

How does a non-profit organisation advocate on behalf of those who are *'poor and oppressed'* while depending for its income and work on the powerful and prosperous? Wherever World Vision works, it works in some form of partnership with governments and social powers. It always registers with and often are funded by governments. It complies with government labour and charity laws. Sometimes World Vision accepts government-appointed staff. Its programmes often are implemented in partnership with government agencies and always comply with government and multilateral humanitarian and organisational standards and agreements.

Through partnerships with governments and dependency on the powerful, it unavoidably witnesses to their policies and values. World Vision wants to ensure that we receive maximum resources and maximum access to serve those who are poor. Explicitly or implicitly, humanitarian agencies inevitably observe or comply with the policies and values of governments and those with power (even while advocating for better policies and values).

How do aid and development workers receive the charity of the powerful with one hand, while with the other still challenge values and priorities? To avoid jeopardising relationships with those in power and risk losing access to resources that might mitigate poverty or oppression, the organisation may acknowledge or tolerate political and social realities even when it may not think these are consistent with the will of God.

Do charitable organisations risk becoming agents of the powerful, rather than advocates for the powerless? Do they risk losing their role as a non-governmental organisation? Do they risk witnessing to kingdoms other than Christ's?

World Vision may be a non-profit organisation, but if it became a non-prophet organisation it would lose its voice and fail in its mission. Here's the challenge: how do we work with the powerful on behalf of the powerless in ways that preserve popularity (broad-based appeal), integrity (credibility and character), as well as our prophetic mission (to both woo and to warn those who knowingly or unknowingly contribute to affliction of the poor)?

'Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, say: "Hear the word of God...Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place"' (Jer. 22:1-3).

'Through the church [and the church's Christian non-governmental organisations], the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities' (Eph. 3:10).

## Four suggestions for remaining prophetic

1. **We don't advocate against governments or those in power but for them:** Our message to governments and those in power is the same as our message to the poor and powerless: Be *all that God created you to be*. Our advocacy is based on the conviction that all we are asking is that people fulfil their reason for existence.

Some well-known biblical teachings about government are often misapplied.

- **Government is instituted by God:** ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment’ (Rom. 13:1-2).
- **Government exists to judge bad conduct and approve good:** ‘For rulers are not a terror to good but to bad...For it is God’s servant for your good...The authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing’ (Rom. 13: 3-4, 6).
- **If governments do this, they deserve taxes, honour and respect:** ‘Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due’ (Rom. 13:7).

**The unspoken implication is clear:** In the midst of a totalitarian regime, Paul did not dare say it, but the text implies *if governing authorities don’t fulfil these functions, they don’t deserve submission*. Wherever human governments and social powers fulfil these mandates, we gladly partner together in the purposes of God. However, when governments and those with socio-economic power reward evil and punish good, we advocate for change and resist their power. They are failing to fulfil their God-given mandate and therefore are illegitimate.

## 2. We are not empowered by governments or human powers for our work.

The Christian community is empowered by the Spirit so that we express in our social relations the will and way of God. Through the birth, death and resurrection of Christ, God has disarmed rebellious powers and redeemed all of creation. We do not accept a sacred/secular dualism or the separation of personal piety from public life (Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:10, 2:10, 3:10, 4:10). Christ will put all powers under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25). God will make everything subject to

Christ (1 Cor. 15:28). We live in anticipation of the universal unveiling of the victory that has already been accomplished in Christ.

Power is not spiritually neutral. In fact, scripture is clear that power of any sort can be subverted and exploited by spiritual opponents to the will and ways of God. A Christian NGO is no more exempt from this threat of corruption than a secular (or religious) government. If we rely on the endorsing, enabling power of the powerful for our work, we stand on dangerous ground. As soon as we are at home with the powerful rather than a challenge to them, we are in grave danger.

**Therefore, prayer is integral to advocacy.** Advocacy is intercession, and intercessory prayer is the principle form of Christian advocacy. We pray for ourselves, as well as for the powerless and powerful. In modern and particularly western culture, this ‘strategy’ is laughable, but we who converse with the living God know that everything depends upon this ongoing relationship.

### 3. **If we’re not willing to lose the respect of the powerful, we risk being enslaved to them.**

The gospel makes it troublingly clear: Kingdom life is likely to put us in conflict with the kingdoms of the world. If we have as our goal being liked, appreciated, respected and admired, we risk being subverted by the kingdoms of the world. Jesus proclaims that citizens of the kingdom:

- Are willing to be disrespected even by family (leave father and mother, see Mark 10:29; Matt. 12:29; Luke 18:29)
- Are willing to be vulnerable (be wanderers, without home, see Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58)
- Are willing to be despised (be hated, see Mark 13:13; Matt. 10:22)
- Are willing to be actively opposed (be persecuted, see Luke 6:22; Matt. 5:10-11).

How can we advocate on behalf of the status-less, wealth-less and disrespected without risking our status, income and respectability? The risks we are willing to take are the measure of whether our primary identity is with the powerful or the powerless, the affluent or the poor—and dare we say it—with the kingdoms of this world or the kingdom of God.

**4. The impact of advocacy depends on integrated, long-term, multi-dimensional strategies for comprehensive transformation, rather than short-term campaigns for immediate action.**

It takes time to nurture people's willingness to use power to protect and benefit those on the margins—to develop communities that embrace the despised, to adjust their lifestyles so others can flourish, and to alter foreign and domestic policy so that all nations under God have opportunity to prosper.

World Vision's mission statement declares its commitment to children in poverty and in 'at-risk' circumstances. Because it cares for their long-term well-being, including their education, vision for their lives and their communities, and preparation for future responsibility—World Vision builds advocacy campaigns not just for children, but with them. It works to nourish a new generation with a new set of values, a new moral vision, and a new driving ambition. Its advocacy is focused on mobilising faith communities to walk the path of the Good Samaritan and see others as our neighbours. Advocacy ultimately is not about words and policies but about lives and communities. As Bishop John Taylor says in *Enough is Enough*, 'Never underestimate the power of a committed, joyous and daring minority who dare to say "enough is enough" and live a different way of life.'<sup>1</sup>

People's imagination of God's will and ways and their vision for the coming future is often distorted by their context, culture and sin. Politicians are tempted to move according to public opinion. Unless they are totalitarian tyrants, they depend on popular support. Jim

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1 Bishop John Taylor, *Enough is Enough* (London: SMC Press, 1975), 68.

Wallis says, ‘If politicians go whichever way the wind is blowing, then change the direction of the wind. Change the wind, transform the debate, recast the discussion, alter the context in which decisions are being made, and you will change the outcomes. Move the conversation around a crucial issue to a whole new place, and you will open up possibilities never dreamed of before. And you will be surprised at how fast the politicians adjust to the change in the wind.’<sup>2</sup>

What can give people the courage and capacity to do this? We recognise that walking in the way of the kingdom is to bear the cross (Matt. 10:38; Luke 14:27; Mark 8:38). John Bright has written, ‘We know that the Church has been great when she has cast herself straight into the teeth of history at her Master’s bidding. When she has grown fat and sought to avoid the Cross, she could neither be great nor produce greatness.’<sup>3</sup>

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2 Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005) 22.

3 John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 268-269.

# Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

## Comparing social service and social justice

Christian faith does not merely establish motives, methods or means by which we advocate for justice (prayer, partnerships with churches in advocacy, etc.). Rather, it is constitutive of our advocacy. Several affirmations provide the foundation for Christians' pursuit of social justice.

### 1. The meaning of justice

**Justice is not simply about right laws.** It's about right relationships. Justice is not merely a legal word describing rights and duties, judgment and punishment, but a relational word describing a vital dimension of life-giving community. Laws and rights provide criteria to measure the quality of human character and community, but do not in themselves constitute justice. Justice isn't first of all a legal term—*the measurement of our lives according to God's law and code of ethics*. Justice is a relational term—*people living in right relationship with God, one another and the natural creation*.

Biblical justice is about people living the way God intends for us to live. This means guarding the dignity and God-given rights of all people, including those who are abused, excluded and exploited. It means loving our neighbour as we love ourselves.

**Justice means to make life right.** The Hebrew and Arabic words for justice and righteousness share common roots, describing the quality of character and conduct necessary for people to flourish in relation with God and one another. Justice literally means ‘to make right’ and righteous is ‘to be right.’ Justice is for life to be right socially—outside me. Righteousness is for life to be right personally—within me. The poor don’t simply need charity; they need justice. Merely giving alms won’t make life right and resolve the structural (social, political, cultural, macroeconomic and even spiritual) contributors to their poverty. The poor need justice, expressed in structural change, protection from exploitation and access to opportunity.

When its mission statement calls World Vision to seek justice, promote human transformation and bear witness to the good news of the kingdom, in some ways it is saying the same thing three times, three ways. Making life right is for people (and their societies) to be transformed. This is evidence—or witness—of the coming of God’s kingdom.

As already asserted, justice is rooted in the character and nature of God. The biblical faith affirms that God is love and God is just. The God of the Bible *loves* (Isa. 61:8; Ps. 37:28) and *does* justice (Ps. 103:6; 140:12), especially securing justice for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. As God *is* just and loving, so we are to do justice and live in love (Mic. 6:8; Amos 5:24; Deut. 16:20). The Bible reveals God as the One who pursues the marginalised to bring them home, who delivers the captives to make them free. Nothing in scripture more vividly discloses this than the Exodus account. So Israel is continually called to ‘Remember, remember, you were once slaves in Egypt. Therefore, you must care for widows, orphans and strangers.’

### The goal of biblical justice is not punishment of wrongdoers.

The biblical teaching on how to respond to perpetrators of evil and injustice is understood progressively, culminating in the rule of Jesus Christ:

- The human norm seems to have been (and some would say remains) *disproportionate retaliation* and revenge in response to harm (see the story of Samson in Judges 14-15, especially 15:3-7, for an example of justice interpreted as revenge).
- Scripture indicates that God sought to replace the norm of revenge with *proportionate retribution*: ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’ (see Lev. 21:23-24; Deut. 19:19-21). As noted by a number of sages, by that rule, we all will eventually end up blind, toothless and without limbs. Of course, the rule of law is better than brute power, domination by elites, or the whim of rulers. In many places, World Vision advocates for the rule of law in societies as a major breakthrough in protecting well-being of people.
- Jesus Christ embodies and announces a third way, the rule of God, a radically different approach of *disproportionate love*. (More on this third alternative below.)

## 2. The call to do justice

Justice isn’t simply something we desire, wait for, or seek. God’s people are called in scripture to do it. God’s call for justice is uttered with particular clarity and simplicity through the Prophet Micah: ‘He has told you humankind what is good and what the Lord requires of you—to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord your God’ (v. 6).

Justice is making life right—making life right for children orphaned by AIDS, for Palestinians victimised by almost 60 years of internationally and religiously sanctioned oppression and violence, for the world’s poor locked out of access to means of production to create sustainable livelihoods, for girls who are often most marginalised and most exploited in societies, and for ethnic minorities oppressed by racism and prejudice.

**The way to do justice is by loving mercy and walking humbly** (Mic. 6:8). In both Hebrew and Arabic, the root for mercy can also mean ‘womb.’ This makes great sense. A mother’s womb is a safe place where life can be nourished and prepared to flourish. Mercy is to create human societies where life and especially the life of the poor and marginalised can be protected and nourished. That is how Christians are required to do justice. Not first of all by punishing wrongdoers, but first of all by making life safe for children, the vulnerable and the poor to thrive.

Humility shares the same linguistic root as ‘soil.’ We walk humbly rather than arrogantly, gently rather than with anger, united in compassion rather than divided in fear and enmity. When we focus on the future of our children—whether we are Muslim or Christian—we share a common longing for them to flourish and have a future filled with goodness. This ought to humble us.

### 3. **The radical third way of justice as disproportionate love**

This God-modelled understanding of social justice is the most stunning. Disproportionate love forms the distinctive characteristic of a biblically rooted Christian view of social justice and care for the poor. In Christ, God reveals this radically different approach to justice—justice as unrestrained love.

Jesus said, ‘You have heard it said, “eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well .... You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.... If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?’ (Matt. 5:38-46).

We must immediately admit that even Christians seldom practice this. This strategy of Jesus appears naïve, weak and foolish. Yet, the gospel proclaims this is the ultimate strength. The gospel proclaims that justice is served and human life is made right by radical love, love for even our enemies. This is the very nature of the God of justice.

Some assumptions of the rule of disproportionate love include:

- The only way to defeat evil is to absorb it in unrestrained love.
- The only way to right wrongs is to make everything right.
- The only way to eliminate enemies is to turn them into friends.
- Executing a murderer or punishing an offender may balance the scale, but only by creating greater suffering.
- Waging war against attackers or those who threaten us may assert our dignity and stop some attacks, but doesn't correct the issues that provoked the conflict in first place. War can lead to the absence of conflict—but seldom to peace as reconciliation and justice.
- If people are converted by force or by inducements, they have merely been conquered.
- If people are restrained by violence or by threat, they have merely been made captives.
- The only way lives are made right is by love—to live together as friends in the love of God.

**This way of unrestrained love only makes sense in light of the Cross.** Christians (that is, Christ-followers, not those who happen to live in a culture that is nominally Christian) are convinced that in Jesus the Messiah God has borne the judgment for all injustice, sin and causes of suffering. We realise many in the world consider this as scandalous and even as blasphemous.

Nevertheless, we believe that Jesus willingly took upon himself the full weight of human and demonic evil, disobedience to God and faithlessness. God's sovereignty, justice and love were expressed in that ultimate act of unrestrained love and in God's triumph in Jesus' resurrection. We believe that now, as we are crucified through the Holy Spirit with Christ, we share in both his suffering and in his

new life that reconciles all things to God—making life right. The Spirit empowers us to participate in this injustice-bearing character of God by not defending our own rights, instead defending the rights of others so that they might flourish in community with us.

**For Christians, pursuit of social justice for the poor is the decisive mark of being people who submit to the will and way of God.** The people of God are to be characterised by the pursuit of justice for the exploited, marginalised and abused. In so doing we witness to the righteousness of God’s coming kingdom, in which all will experience the quality of character and community for which we were created. Jesus the Messiah says that on the Day of Judgment, God’s measuring scale will not be our profession of faith, nor our acts of sacrifice. Rather in the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus says that on the Day of Judgment the righteous and unrighteous will be separated according to their care for the hungry, homeless, poor and oppressed. God so identifies with the poor, that when we serve those who are oppressed, we are serving God.

**Because Christ is present with those who are oppressed, marginalised and suffering, our work with them is not charity but worship.** Together we encounter God. Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 when he says the purpose of giving to the poor is not simple charity, but that there would be a fair balance—equity, justice. This is based on the nature of God: ‘For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’ (v. 9). Jesus’ brother James defines true religion not as ardent worship or noble sacrifice, but as ‘caring for widows and orphans in their distress and keeping ourselves unstained by the world’ (Jas. 1:26-27).

This echoes Jesus’ first sermon recorded in the Gospel of Luke 4:18-19: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go

free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' We also hear some of his last words, as recorded in the Gospel of John 20:21-22: 'As the Father has sent me, so send I you...Receive the Holy Spirit.'

Now is the time in history for Christians to witness to the world of life in Christ by living God's call to seek justice for those who are poor, oppressed and marginalised. May we not be known as the people of self-indulgence, legalism, aggression and defensiveness. Rather, may the world know us as those who bring freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind, release to the oppressed, and the Jubilee of God's cancelling all our debts.

The following two charts provide overviews of biblical theology for engagement in social justice and a comparison of the difference between social service and social justice.

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## Seven Theological Foundations for Social Justice

1. **God's nature:** God exists in a communion of Triune Love, establishing the way and pattern for just and harmonious sharing amongst humankind.
2. **Human nature:** All people exist in the image of God and therefore are to be treated with justice.
3. **God's will:** God loves all of God's creation and wills that all creation will experience fullness of life in the shalom, justice and reconciliation of God's kingdom.
4. **God's establishment of justice in Jesus Christ:** In the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God has acted decisively to defeat all that thwarts life from being right (just) and to establish God's kingdom of righteousness on earth.
5. **God's work through the Christian community:** God's call to Israel and now the Church is to be the community that demonstrates God's special commitment to those on the margins, the outsiders, the victims of injustice and oppression—for in so doing

we demonstrate the nature of God and the quality of life for which we are created. Because justice involves human life in reconciled harmony, human participation as agents of justice is vital. Therefore, God chooses to work through people to establish justice.

6. **God's work through the Spirit:** God is not restricted to human agency. It is the work of the Spirit to convict the world of justice (John 16). Therefore, human engagement in justice is rooted in prayerful dependency and discernment, and those who seek justice can celebrate expressions of justice wherever they are found, regardless of the human agent.
  7. **God's ultimate provision of justice:** The biblical faith is rooted in confidence that one day the world will be recreated as the domain of justice. Evil, oppression, injustice and suffering will be eliminated from the new creation. Although current expressions of justice are only partial, we persist in bold confidence knowing that all acts of justice are signs of God's coming kingdom. To enable small expressions of social justice now is to give witness to the ultimate just society yet to come. To persist in injustice is to live on the wrong side of the future.
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Social Service	Social Justice
Service is done by those with power and abilities to help those without, and to fix their problems. The focus can be more on the task than people.	Justice recognises that everyone, both victim and perpetrator, needs for life to be made right.
Service risks diminishing recipients' dignity when resources, power and skills are 'owned' by the 'giver.'	Justice restores human dignity by creating an environment in which all involved 'give' and 'receive' in reciprocal learning and mutual ministry.
Service is something we do for others.	Justice is something we do with others.
Service is a set of activities or an event.	Justice is a social structure and a lifestyle.
Service expects results immediately.	Justice hopes for results some time soon, but recognises that systemic changes take time.
The goal of service is to help others.	The goal of justice is to remove obstacles so that others can help themselves.
Service focuses on what we can accomplish.	Justice focuses on how we can work with others so that life is made right.
Service addresses symptoms of injustice and oppression.	Justice addresses causes of suffering, as well as symptoms.

Adapted from *Deep Justice in a Broken World*, by Chap Clark & Kara Powell (Zondervan, 2008).

# A Proposed Biblical Model for an Advocacy Campaign

## Strategic planning template

### Learning from Mordecai and Esther

We now face a very appropriate set of ‘how-to’ questions: What do we do with the biblical truths we have just explored? How do we bring a biblical model of advocacy and justice to life—or more specifically, to earth? To translate the utter practicality of the biblical insights we’ve explored into real-life 21st-century advocacy, we turn again to scripture. The ancient Jewish story of Mordecai and Esther provides one of the greatest examples of advocacy in the Bible. Both Mordecai and his cousin and ward Esther were captives in Babylon. Not only was she a captive, we could say she was a victim of child-trafficking.

### Background

The book of Esther is written about the period of Israel’s captivity in Babylon. Esther was conscripted to be a member of the palace harem of the Persian emperor called Ahasuerus in Hebrew, who was Xerxes, son of Darius, and who ruled from 485 to 465 BC. The narrative begins with the story of the previous queen’s banishment for failing to submit

to the emperor. After all, ‘every man should be master in his own house’ (Esther 1:22). Esther was an orphaned, third-generation captive, whose ancestors were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Raised by her cousin Mordecai, Esther was forcibly conscripted for the harem because of her beauty and grace. She quickly pleased her palace captors, but she hid her identity as a Jew. She so pleased Xerxes when her turn came to be with him that he named her Queen. Still, her life was utterly precarious, existing solely at his discretion, as the previous queen’s fate made clear. Although Esther became an ‘insider’ to the courts of power, she understood her identity was unquestionably that of an outsider without security or safety.

In chapter three of the book we encounter Xerxes’ second in command, power-hungry, devious Haman. Haman had a grudge against the Jews and convinced Xerxes to order their execution—a mass genocide of all Hebrew captives. ‘Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day’ (Esther 3:13). Thus, an urgent need for advocacy!

Without imposing anything on the text, chapters 4-8 present a fascinating process for effective advocacy. At each step of Esther’s and Mordecai’s process we see some distinguishing features of biblical advocacy. These qualities stand in stark contrast to many contemporary forms of advocacy that are political, professional and impersonal.

## **Personal lament**

### **1. Begin with passionate lament and personal engagement**

Mordecai’s response to this outrage was to go into mourning. He lamented this impending injustice and evil. What’s more, he did not keep his grief to himself; he called others to join him. Public grief over evil and injustice has an ancient history.

Esther 4:1-3 records, ‘When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went

up to the entrance of the king's gate....In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning amongst the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.'

Advocacy is rooted in a public movement—not simply of confrontation and protest—but of deep lament and mourning that stem from conviction that the particular situation is wrong. Biblical advocacy begins with tears and not stones. Protest provokes protective defensiveness. Mourning and lament invite participation. Street protests may be necessary at some point in an advocacy campaign, but they will ring with integrity if they are founded in repentance and mourning: as well as hope and joy. God wills a different way of life and a better future. Therefore we advocate with confidence and passion. Unless we are passionate, and personally engaged without regard to public image, then our efforts will likely lack credibility and impact.

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### Discernment

- Is a particular advocacy issue something about which we are personally engaged, with on-the-ground credibility?
  - Do we have staff who are passionately concerned, for whom this has become a personal, not just a professional, issue?
  - What are we doing, and what can we do, to mobilise a popular movement of repentance and mourning at this injustice and suffering?
  - How can we unite our capacity both at the grassroots in 80 countries, and amongst our millions of donors in almost 20 support office countries, to campaign for justice in this situation?
  - How can we mobilise churches for united response?
-

## Accurate Information

### 2. Provide accurate information

Mordecai had his facts straight. When asked about his outrage, he was able to provide documents, proving the truthfulness of his concerns.

Esther 4:7-8: ‘Mordecai told him all that had happened and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction.’

Nothing discredits an advocacy campaign more quickly than inaccurate information. We are not merely advocating about matters of personal opinion. Credible advocacy is founded upon documented issues and needs. If we are to speak on behalf of others, we must have our facts straight. People may disagree over what should be done in response to the facts—but the facts must be true and incontrovertible.

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### Discernment

- Do we have our facts straight? Is our information accurate?
  - We have an exceptional capacity to gather ‘grassroots’ data from around the world. How can we more effectively gather this information?
  - We have an exceptional capacity to communicate with winsome appeal and compelling clarity when it comes to fund-raising. How can we harness these skills to communicate with compelling passion the facts about this issue?
-

## Accept Risks

### 3. Accept risks and recognise that we are replaceable

Esther knew the risks she faced if she engaged in this advocacy campaign on behalf of her fellow Jews. Not only would she be identified as a Jew, as a despised third-generation captive, but even entering into the King's presence uninvited could result in immediate execution.

Esther 4:11: 'All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death...I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.'

Mordecai's response to Esther is blunt, and exhilarating in its daring. First, he reminds her that she is so closely identified with the need that even inaction would result in risk. Second, he reminds her that she is dispensable. If she does not act, God will provide another means. Third, he calls her to accept that it might be precisely for this moment that God allowed her to gain access to the royal palace.

Esther 4:13-14: 'Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.'

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## Discernment

- What are the risks we face, organisationally and personally, if we engage in advocacy for this particular issue?
  - What are the risks if we do not act?
  - Are we so closely identified with the victims of this injustice that we share in their suffering? Or, are we insulated from the risks they face?
  - In what ways might it be true that God has given us access to influence precisely to address this issue?
  - Because we face so many different issues, how will advocating for this one risk our impact on others?
  - How do we discern a prioritisation for our advocacy amongst the myriad issues and concerns faced by those who are poor and oppressed?
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## Mobilise Prayer and Spread the Word

### 4. Mobilise prayer and spread the Word

Recognising the severity of very real risks, Esther did not devise an escape plan, or a way to avoid the issues. Nor did she seek to erect security systems for her protection. Rather, she called for united prayer and a movement for change.

Esther 4:16: ‘Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day, I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the King, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.’

God moved in response to this campaign of fasting and prayer. Not only did the king receive Esther (chapter 5), but God dealt directly with him. Sometimes in scripture God speaks to people through dreams. In the case of Xerxes, God worked through insomnia.

Esther 6:1: ‘That night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of records, the annals, and they were read to the king.’

Certainly having someone read historical records aloud might be enough to put anyone to sleep. Instead, the king heard how Mordecai the Jew had saved his life, alerting him to an assassination plot. As the story unfolds, this news plays a central role in the success of Mordecai and Esther’s advocacy.

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## Discernment

- Are we engaged personally and as an organisation in collective, united prayer and fasting for this issue?
  - What could we do to mobilise focussed intercession amongst our staff?
  - How can we work more effectively to invite Christians in many nations and indeed throughout the World Vision Partnership to join us in prayer?
  - What would an answer to prayer look like?
  - For what, specifically, are we asking?
  - Are we keeping track of God’s answers to prayer—and the interventions God brings?
- 

## Credible Influence

### 5. Work through a person with credible influence

If a spokesperson is without credibility, the message will be without impact. Furthermore, if that spokesperson is without access to those who need to hear, then the message will go unheard. Esther had both access and credibility.

Esther 5:2-3: ‘As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favour... “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.”’

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## Discernment

- What credibility and access can we enlist when it comes to this issue?
  - How can we enhance credibility and access if necessary?
  - Who on our staff, or amongst our contacts, has high credibility with those who need to hear about this need, and with those who have ability to change the situation?
  - If necessary, how can we build better relationships with those in the media, those in positions of business and political power, those who have influence over decision-makers and power-brokers to enable greater justice?
  - Do we regularly pray that God will provide influencers with access and credibility?
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## Strategic Process

### 6. Proceed with a strategic process to achieve specific results

Finally, Esther had both a strategy for engaging others with influence, and a clear goal in mind regarding what positive change would look like. Advocacy that is clumsy—without clear action outcomes, or advocacy that is pushy and arrogant—without a wise strategy for how to move people to act, will seldom result in positive change. The rest of the book of Esther chronicles her strategy and the results. Rather than spewing out emotions and generating palace chaos, Esther worked to build a better relationship with the king. Justice is about right relationships, and there advocacy depends on building good relationships.

Esther 5:6-8: “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king.” Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther desires.”

Esther did not just have one banquet. She invited the king and Haman to another even greater feast the next day. Between the two banquets, the king had his sleepless encounter with history and determined that Mordecai, the Jewish cousin of Esther, should be honoured for his service in protecting the king from assassination. This put Haman at risk, for he had been plotting to kill Mordecai because the old Jew had not shown Haman the honour Haman thought he deserved.

Esther 7:2-4: ‘On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.”’

The queen accused Haman. The king was outraged and left the room to reflect on what should be done. Haman fell upon Esther to beg for his life. The king returned and misunderstood Haman’s position lying on the same couch as Esther, and ordered Haman executed (7:5-10). But Esther’s strategy does not end here. She needed specific positive results to restore her people’s safety. Once more Esther approaches the king, ‘weeping and pleading,’ and outlines an entire strategy for how to avert the injustice and evil that Haman had plotted (8:4-9).

## Discernment

- Our advocacy is insufficient if we do not have a precise plan in place for how to nurture positive relationships with those in power, and to enable them to move towards precise action to rectify the situation. We need more than facts about the problem. We need facts about the solution. What exactly are we asking people to do to correct the situation?
- What specific steps can they take?
- How can we assure that this will result in positive change?
- What steps do we need to take in our relationship with them to deepen trust and receptivity?
- The story of Esther and Mordecai is recorded in Scripture to help others learn crucial lessons on leadership for change and advocacy. Part of a good advocacy strategy is recording and passing on our lessons learned.

## Conclusion



Mordecai's and Esther's model provides pivotal insights into how to engage in speaking truth to power, giving voice to cries of the voiceless, amongst those who have the capacity to bring justice to their situation.

Just as their example inspires others' action, recording and communicating how we respond to advocacy challenges, telling the story of our own struggles and achievements, can encourage others, deepen the momentum for change, and broaden a movement of people who are inspired for strategic action.

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## Discernment

- Might this progression in Mordecai's and Esther's advocacy for change provide a helpful process for our discernment, planning and engagement?
  - Does the following Strategic Planning Template provide a discernment and programming tool that could be helpful in designing advocacy campaigns or approaches to change within our organisation or community?
  - What are its strengths?
  - What is missing?
  - How could it be improved?
  - Is it simple enough to be useful?
-

## Strategic Planning Template for an Advocacy Campaign

**Description of issue:** In 100 words, what is the most compelling case you can make for why advocacy on behalf of this issue is consistent with our mission and the biblical faith, and of urgent importance?

Strategy	Present capacity circle: 1=low, 2=moderate, 3=fully effective	Required actions for greater impact
Personal lament and engagement	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	
Accuracy of information	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	
Acceptance of risk	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	
Mobilisation of prayer and a movement for change	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	
Access to credible influence	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	
Strategic process for results and sharing stories of change	1 2 3 Reasons for assessment:	

## About the Author

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