

## Advocacy as Scripture Calls Us

By Reverend Alexia Salvatierra

Even if Christians understand the biblical call to advocate for justice, many of us do not participate in public policy advocacy, because the way the world advocates gives us spiritual indigestion. The assumptions are secular: power is seen as limited to law, force, money, and numbers. People are seen as fundamentally motivated by self-interest. Confrontation is seen as the only means through which leaders can be moved to make just decisions.

Christians have another alternative beyond participating in secular advocacy. We can participate in broader coalitions in ways that reflect different and more faithful assumptions. We can be in the world but not of the world, providing a powerful testimony to our secular allies in the process.

Jesus calls his disciples to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt. 10:16). To be wise as serpents is to take human sin seriously. Sometimes leaders do hold on to power at any cost. Sometimes leaders are motivated primarily by narrow self-interest. We can be faithful in the face of these realities by following the example of the widow in Luke 18:1-8. The widow has experienced injustice and she knows that the only judge who can help her neither “fears God nor respects people.” However, she trusts that if she stands up and demands justice that she will be satisfied. The unjust judge finally gives in — not because he experiences a conversion, but rather because she pesters him so much that it is more trouble to resist than to respond. She builds a critical mass of pressure. This is not an ungodly act.

A woman who is a World Vision leader in Rwanda had five daughters who were violated and killed in front of her. She says that she finds solace in standing up for justice without ceasing so that no other mother will have to experience that kind of pain. However, if we are only “wise as serpents,” we are missing half of the call. To exercise dove power is to encourage leaders — to give them courage. Like the prophet Nathan standing before King David in 2 Samuel 12:1-27, we call leaders to be their best selves by working with the Holy Spirit to awaken their sense of justice. As military chaplains enable soldiers to remember who they are, who they love, and what they believe, we can be the chaplains on the battlefield for justice. We can minister to and with our leaders, giving them an opportunity to experience the greatest blessing possible — the blessing that comes from obeying God.

We are called to not just to encourage our leaders but we are also called to act as prophets— to continue the prophetic work of our Lord. Jesus is prophet as well as priest and king. What do prophets do?

Prophets speak God’s truth to God’s people in a specific time and place so that they can do God’s will. To do this in the public arena implies three tasks.

**Expose the Lies and Combat them with Divine Truth:** At any time and place, there are deep lies people believe that justify an injustice that is done. For example, the institution of slavery is often justified by the lie that some people are worth more than others. The divine truth is that we are all made in the image of God, equally and infinitely precious.

When we name the lie and the divine truth that disarms it, Christian leaders can experience a change of heart, realizing that they have been making decisions based on a belief that is not of God. In the struggle to desegregate the city of Nashville during the civil rights movement, a key step in the mayor's conversion from supporting segregation to participating in its demise, was a conversation with a young leader who asked him whether he believed, as a Christian, that people should not be able to sit next to each other in a restaurant merely because of the color of their skin. The mayor had to acknowledge that this belief was not biblical.

**Cast a Vision:** "In the last days...your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). The Scriptures are full of beautiful visions of *shalom*, of the beloved community that God desires for his people. Prophets both warn and promise, casting a vision for the world as it should be. When we advocate for justice, we often tend to focus on problems. When we convert our problem language to the language of dreams and visions, leaders can be inspired. We can find ourselves united in a common vision, standing on common sacred ground. Then, a conversation can often become more productive — even with a leader who does not agree with us. Instead of trying to convince a leader to do our will, we can seek together for how to do God's will.

**Speaking the Language of the Heart:** We tend to approach leaders with statistics and rational arguments. While this is important, it is often insufficient. People make decisions on the basis of both the right and left brains, the mind and the heart. The prophet Jeremiah broke a pot. Jesus washed feet and broke bread. These were symbols that spoke more powerfully than words. Sometimes the people of God need to sing as well as talk, use images and tell stories as well as providing rational reasons for policies that save children.

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Original post can be found here: <http://beyond5.org/2015/01/20/advocacy-as-the-scripture-calls-us-part-1/>