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THE UNITY OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ETHICS

Chapter eight suggested that Christianity is not only a set of beliefs and practices but also a social project. Chapter nine examined that project in relation to gender conflict in a crosscultural context. This concluding chapter considers how a crosscultural Christian can contribute to that project in a strange community. Grandly stated, the Christian social project is the kingdom of God. This chapter explores ways in which personal behavior contributes to the kingdom.

Personal Behavior and the Social Project of Christianity

Anyone who enters a new community makes a social and political impact. Strangers make a bigger than usual impact because of their strangeness. Some of their impact is good and some is bad. Even the very best of early missionaries reinforced the structures of colonialism

by their behavior. Uncritical identification with the interests and values of their own country led them to provide moral and sometimes physical support to Western imperialism.

Similar charges are still levied today against white middle-class members of business, development and mission organizations who enter ethnic or Two-Thirds World communities with notoriously mixed motives. Strangers are often perceived in terms of their social, educational and class position, their race, their economic power and their lifestyle choices. These factors provide the medium of their message.

Very “personal” issues of lifestyle and very “private” matters of finance, family relations and personal integrity affect the social impact of strangers in a new culture. Personal actions have social consequences because everything we do is linked with other people’s lives. I will not play golf in Indonesia, not because there is anything wrong with golf but because many golf courses in Indonesia are on rich land that was taken from poor farmers who had farmed it for centuries. I didn’t steal the land, but if I use it I identify with the rich people who did. By playing on the farmers’ land, I enrich their oppressors. My personal leisure time cannot be divorced from the economic structure of my context.

This chapter examines the dynamics of responsible Christian life in the midst of suffering and injustice by means of a story. An American couple living in Africa fought a costly war against evil that was personal, structural and spiritual. Evil men created structures of social, physical and spiritual oppression. This couple could not coexist with this evil for one simple reason: they are Christians. They were not professional “political activists,” but their compassion for suffering people led them to political action.

Case Study: A Christian Response to Torture

Linda Adams is an American who lived in a town in “Mabuk,” West Africa.¹ Her husband, Frank, was an engineer who worked for a local airline. They lived in a nice part of town, and their neighbor to the north was the Internal Police Department (IPD, or secret police). The head of the IPD was a large, powerful man named Kofi who often traveled with Frank. Kofi was a tribal “brother” to the president of the country and reputedly close to him. People said he practiced witchcraft. He had a frightening reputation.

Kofi and other leaders of the IPD frequently dropped in at the Adams house to ask for small favors or just hang around. The second in command came for pointers on how to play the guitar. Kofi liked to joke about how hard Linda worked and about their relatively simple lifestyle.

Men frequently came to Linda’s house, sometimes directly from the IPD, to sell smuggled items, gold or even hashish. Linda and her husband repeatedly refused to buy. After this had happened many times, Linda practically threw one insistent seller of hashish out of the house. She suspected a setup.

Occasionally IPD officials called in the Adamses’ workers and questioned them about the Adamses’ activities. Linda felt they were just trying to show who was in control. She told the workers not to worry but just tell the truth.

After about four years the trouble began. Linda writes,

I began to hear screams coming from the secret police offices, especially at night. We had electricity only three hours in the evening and during this time I would hear screams as the lights would flicker. Frank was often gone for days and even as much as

two weeks at a time and he could not believe that I was hearing people tortured. I doubted my own senses and discreetly asked a neighbor who was married to a Mabukian government official if she was hearing these noises. She looked at me very long and said, "Yes, sometimes there are bad things in this country." "Does your husband know?" I asked her. "One does well to pretend not to hear," she replied.

I prayed about it and asked our Bible-study group to pray about it. In general they did not seem to want to know about this but promised they would pray.

The screams became worse and now there was the sound of moaning and screaming, sometimes even in the day. Then I saw IPD men beating an old man on the steps. They beat him almost senseless in broad daylight. I started to go over and try to intervene. The gardener stopped me, "Please Madame, it won't help and you will get hurt."

When Frank returned from his trip I told him I could not live there and continue to do nothing. The very next day he saw them beating an old man on his bare feet. One of the men involved was the third in command, [whom we called] "Dark Glasses." Frank went over and asked to speak to Kofi. Kofi laughed and assured him the man being beaten was a thief and, "in this country, unlike yours, we must sometimes resort to distasteful measures." When we told the workers this explanation they snorted, "That's a lie, they wanted to extort money from him and he refused."

Not long after this the IPD soldiers began to harass our night guard and on two occasions fined him for not having certain papers. Our gardener also complained of harassment. The screams began anew and got worse until it was almost a daily happening. Then one night I heard a woman screaming against our fence. The IPD were raping

her. I ran out of the house and threatened the soldiers with everything I could think of. They waved a rifle at me and told me to mind my own business. Frank was on a trip and the night guard, an elderly man, ran after me. He begged me to come back into the house. He was very upset about the woman but begged me, "Madame, there is nothing you can do. Please, you are my responsibility." He was very frightened.

When Frank returned I told him the story and we sat down to pray and think what we should do. It was now obvious that none of our Western friends were willing to get involved. To involve any of our regular African workers or friends would be very dangerous to them and we did not have the right to do that.

Frank went to our boss, an African Christian man living in another town. He is a man of some status and wealth. He said we could move (we were living in one of his homes); he could build a very high, soundproof fence around our present house; or we could press the matter and he would do what he could to help us. After prayer we chose the latter. Really we felt we had no choice.

Our boss began to feel out the matter. He found that we were giving an accurate picture of the conditions but ran into a dead end. He was not big enough. Frank often did repairs for the Governor of the province and decided to take a chance and tell him. The Governor listened and seemed interested and concerned. He promised to do something.

In the meantime our boss suggested we contact the Catholic Bishop who had great prestige and often used the airline. Most of the government officials, including the IPD officials, are Catholic and might listen to the Bishop.

Frank contacted the Bishop, an imposing man in purple silk with a huge ring on his finger that everybody kissed. He was very

receptive, asked intelligent questions, and promised he would do all in his power to stop the torture.

And it stopped. The IPD still treated people roughly but the screams and beatings stopped and the neighborhood settled down to its usual hum.

A few months later Frank and I stepped innocently into the middle of an IPD action while strolling near our home. We were arrested. "Dark Glasses" held a gun to our heads and told us he could kill us any time he liked. After taking us to IPD headquarters he released me. Frank was tortured for a short time, threatened with the gun again and thrown into the detention room. During the course of the threats "Dark Glasses" said, "You drive right by me in your car and I eat your dust but I can kill you any time I like."

I got the immediate help of our boss and after several hours of hassle, he was able to get Frank released. We were under house arrest for some weeks and gradually everything returned to normal. Kofi would wave and joke and call me "the woman who works like a man" and "sister." The second in command, who had not been present during our trouble, disappeared. Some said he had moved, others that he had had a mental breakdown.

During the time of our troubles one single missionary friend and several Mabukian Christians came by to "sit with us," as they say. Other missionary friends said they couldn't afford to get mixed up with the IPD or their work would come to an end. One Christian Canadian in our Bible study felt that we had asked for trouble by meddling in things that didn't concern us and caused danger to our friends. I felt shamed somehow as though we had committed some big social *faux pas* but I didn't know what it was.

Some months later while driving the wife of a worker to a mission hospital, I saw "Dark Glasses" trudging down the road towards the

hospital. I knew I should pick him up, but I did not do it. Instead I wished that he would find he had cancer and that I could see his eyes, without the sunglasses, when he heard the news. . . .

There is no question that I should have picked up “Dark Glasses” on the way to the hospital (Luke 6:27-28). Also my hatred of him was an act akin to his mistreatment of other human beings. Although I probably injured only myself, it is possible I did him a greater wrong than I know.

In this story most people who knew of the torture avoided doing anything about it. Whether Christian or non-Christian, most felt it was none of their business. Fear was no doubt a major factor. Involvement was costly. Not only could involvement put their own lives at risk, but it also threatened other values. The government could terminate mission work, national Christians might “disappear,” friends and family could be hurt.

Like good Christians in Germany, who looked the other way when Nazis arrested their Jewish neighbors, many people find it easier to ignore social problems that do not directly affect them. Unless their own daughter or spouse is being tortured, it’s best to “pretend not to hear.”

Costly action for social justice is not just dangerous but also lonely. The Adamses felt alienated from friends who distanced themselves from their dangerous action. Prayer by friends unwilling to help is cheap. Those who stood with them were unlikely allies: household workers, a Catholic bishop, a distant colleague, one single missionary and African Christians who came to “sit with them.” All but one were Africans who had more to fear than their Western friends.

Linda and Frank’s wisdom and courage are instructive for Christians who work for justice. In order to do what they did, they had to be certain kinds of people first. The primary virtues of faith, hope and

love (1 Cor 13) gave definition to their lives. They did not know it, but they were ready to be used by God because the story they were living gave them “no other choice.” Someone else would have just moved out or, more likely, never have gone to Mabuk.

The option of building a soundproof wall around the house is a parable of our times. The cries of the oppressed assault us. We all find ways to stop our ears. We turn off the TV, close the book, look the other way, pass by on the other side. We must, to preserve our sanity. Linda and Frank did not. Against the pleading of an elderly night watchman, Linda went into the garden and wept drops of blood. There was “nothing she could do,” but she did it anyway.

The Story as a Paradigm for Christian Social Involvement

This is a true story, not just because it really happened but in the sense that it tells the truth about life in the real world. It tells the truth about good and evil, sin and redemption, death and resurrection. Linda’s account is truer than the nightly news. There are many ambiguities in her story, because that is the way life is. But hers is a gospel story. In it we see the love and suffering of Christ for a lost world.

The sequence and structure of events in this story are very important. The story provides a paradigm with which to interpret many aspects of the search for justice in a crosscultural context. The following twenty points use this story as a framework for unpacking essential elements in Christian social and personal ethics.

1. *Social location and commitment.* Linda and Frank chose to live in “Mabuk” with the express purpose of serving the people as Christians. Social location and commitment to the people are basic to the story. None of this would have happened if they had stayed in an American suburb and worked in a “normal” job appropriate to their education.

While they did not consciously choose to live with the poor, their neighbors turned out to be powerless victims in a house of torture. One response would have been to move. But they chose to stay. The Adamses did not have answers or an ideology to solve the problems of the world. But they lived close to the questions.

People who live close to the poor experience their suffering. Their experience of others' suffering is painful. Pain is a powerful stimulus to action, not just for the sake of the other but also to remove the cause of one's own suffering. Personal experience of others' oppression is a far greater stimulus to action than the evening news. Politically correct ideas or a theology of liberation may hinder real compassion if a person's social location is premised on living as comfortably as possible. Proximity to poverty makes direct action for justice possible and necessary.

In a course on crosscultural ethics one of my students was a conservative missionary who had spent many years in Africa. She was an independent thinker and refused to be swayed by my emphasis on social justice. Throughout the course she aggressively argued that verbal evangelism was primary. Social ethics was not an integral part of the gospel, she said, but an optional byproduct. I thought her ideas were simplistic, but as the course progressed I admired her more and more.

She had spent her whole life living with the poor and working for their welfare. For many years she had lived in a grass hut with a mud floor. She gave away her possessions, helped the people obtain clean water, organized them to resist government attempts to take their land, taught them to read and affirmed their pride in their traditional culture. She had not gone to Africa to do these things, but she loved the people. The Christian social project was part of who she was, irrespective of her theology. Her location among poor people made her actions possible and necessary.

A Christian Marxist was in the same course. He was passionately concerned for justice. He had a comfortable apartment in a prosperous community and worked for the Bank of America. He was still young, so it is impossible to judge the trajectory of his life. But it is safe to guess that unless he changes his social location, his rhetoric will fade into a more self-justifying ideology.

The first three rules of real estate are said to be “location, location, location.” Perhaps these should also be the first three words of the Christian social project.² One need not cross national borders to be located among neighbors who need the light of God’s justice and love. Just get out of the suburbs and take a stroll downtown. The first step for anyone concerned about social justice may be to move house.

2. *Integrity in everyday life.* The Adamses’ integrity during the four years prior to the crisis provided the foundation for their action. They lived in relatively simple comfort and were hospitable to whoever came to their door. They practiced regular spiritual disciplines and lived transparently. In his business Frank was known for his honesty, precision and incorruptibility. Both of them worked hard and served with humility. They refused to profit from minor acts of injustice (smuggling). If they had compromised with questionable activities in everyday life, they would have been vulnerable to blackmail. Their honesty allowed them to live openly and without fear.

The Adamses are not professional social activists, but their lives are focused on the kingdom. Prayer was not cheap for them but an urgent necessity in time of crisis. Prayer and Bible study were regular practices that shaped their experience. Their marriage evidenced love, mutual respect and fidelity. This is not to say they were perfect saints. My impression is that they are both stubborn, strong-willed people.

Activism for justice cannot be isolated from the fabric of life. The Christian social project is not something to seek in leisure time, after

we come home from work, or when a crisis occurs. It is rooted in a lifestyle that enfleshes the values of the kingdom. Everyday life demonstrates the substance of our faith. A crisis just dramatizes or magnifies what we're already made of. If we ever do something really *good*, it's probably the fruit of what we do every day—the “habits of the heart.”

3. *Getting at the truth through research and social analysis.* When the crisis occurred, Linda made sure of the facts. She neither trusted her own immediate perceptions nor avoided ugly realities, but checked her suspicions with several different sources. Even though her husband initially doubted the substance of her fears, Linda set out to find independent confirmations of the truth. Throughout this story Linda and Frank continued to build an ever-stronger case against the practices next door.

This is very wise. Especially in a strange context, fears can blow things out of proportion. In Indonesia we often hear terrible screams and moaning at night. But we just grin (or scowl) and bear it. The humanlike sounds let us know that the alley cats are mating again!

In this case, as the empirical evidence mounted the facts became clear, grotesque and insistent. Often social injustice is more hidden or ambiguous. A human tendency is to half know and half not want to know what is really going on.

Once we suspected that Lucy, a very bright little girl from a poor neighborhood near us, was being abused by her parents. She was always very dirty, dressed in rags, and twice she appeared at our door with scrapes on her face and body. While cleaning the cuts, Frances asked how she got hurt. Both she and her friends appeared very embarrassed by this question as well as by any reference to Lucy's parents. It seemed odd.

I basically ignored the situation. I probably didn't want to know. But

Frances went to visit Lucy's home. In the hovel where the little girl lived, Frances met her parents and discovered that they are both blind. They have no running water, electricity or plumbing, and no regular source of income. They make their living by begging. Suddenly Lucy's unkempt appearance and the embarrassment the girls exhibited at the mention of her parents were explainable.

Lucy is a scrappy, rebellious little kid, and her wounds are likely the result of fights with other rough children. Since she denies any mistreatment, it seems quite likely that she is not abused. Her condition can be explained by other factors. At least we know that her parents send her to school and are trying to cope with a very difficult reality. We can help her a little, but her suffering is primarily rooted in structures of poverty, not individual malice.

Sometimes the reality of injustice can be discovered only through social scientific research. When our first daughter was born in Singapore (1972), Frances had to insist on breastfeeding her. White-coated representatives of the Nestlé Corporation gave her free samples of baby formula and told her she could not and should not breastfeed her baby. Formula feeding was the "modern" way. Nurses refused to wake her for the night feeding. If she had not been insistent, by the time she left the hospital her milk would have begun to dry up and she would have had to buy formula.

Since we knew breast milk is best, we thought this was just an isolated occurrence of misguided ignorance. But others looked more deeply into the facts and discovered our experience was a worldwide phenomenon. The Nestlé Corporation was pushing its products on poor and uneducated women all over the world. Research showed that child mortality rose dramatically in poor contexts where Nestlé was successful. Poor mothers watered down the formula to save money and used unsafe water supplies. The tragedy is that it was so unnecessary.

Medical research shows that mother's milk is healthier, even in the best of conditions, let alone in conditions of poverty.

The result of this research was a worldwide boycott of Nestlé products which finally succeeded in pressuring the corporation to give up its aggressive "marketing" tactics and conform to UNESCO guidelines. None of this could have happened if there were not people who, like Linda, checked the facts. Research was needed to discover a structured economic practice that was directly causing the death of thousands of infants.

Ethics needs social science to find out the facts and interpret the moral questions that arise from them. Social science can never be completely value-free, because the moral commitments (or lack thereof) of the researcher influence the direction of the investigation. Linda could have investigated soundproofing when she was bothered by noises. Instead she investigated the causes. The facts are interpreted and valued in relation to the commitments of the investigator. The sounds next door were not just facts to Linda. She evaluated them through the lens of her commitment to the Mabukian people.

A further step in the relation between ethics and social science is social analysis. According to Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, "Social analysis is the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships."³ Social analysis in this situation would ask questions like, How did the IPD come into being and why? What is its relation to other structures of power, such as the president, the courts, the legislature, the regular police, the military, the business community, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, the international community, organized crime and racial or tribal groups? Are there any laws to which it must conform—in theory or in practice? Who benefits from its activities? What kind of people are arrested by the IPD and why? What kinds

of people work for the IPD and why? Why do they torture people? What is the IPD's source of funding? What are its positive functions? Does it have any powerful enemies? Are there any democratic structures capable of challenging its activities? Where is it vulnerable?

If Linda and Frank, or any other group, wanted to make a permanent impact on the practices of the IPD, these are the kind of questions they would need to ask. They would need to do social analysis. Frank and Linda's protest was apparently effective in curbing the practices of the secret police. But there is no guarantee that the torture did not just move to another location or go underground. The IPD could also build soundproof walls.

4. *Community and racism.* When sufficient evidence was gathered, Linda shared everything with Frank. Together they sought strength and wisdom in prayer and with a few close friends. The community they initially depended on proved less helpful than the one that gathered around them later. But even a weak community is better than none. The small group promised to pray for them and provided an outlet for their thoughts and feelings.

These Western friends did not really want to hear about torture next door and later deserted Frank and Linda. This should not surprise us too much. The twelve apostles did the same to Jesus. Later they came back, and most were martyred for their faith. We should not judge too harshly those who cannot go the distance. People are at different stages of faith. All of us will lack courage and fail our friends sometimes.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to speculate about a likely cause of the friends' faintheartedness: racism. The written account of this story is too sparse to allow us to know for sure, but racism is a common reality in affluent white communities. If white people were being tortured by blacks in the house next door, it is unlikely that the white Bible study group would just want to "mind their own business." They

might feel their kinship with the raped and battered and find courage to go to their defense. If the tortured happened to be white missionaries, it's hard to imagine the white community pretending not to hear.

Racism shuts out compassion by drawing a sharp line between our own humanity and that of another race. In contexts where whites are rich, educated and powerful while those who suffer oppression are black, poor, uneducated and powerless, racism lies at the door. Racism is a cancer that undermines a community's ability to love its neighbors. Racism also becomes a social location. It puts a great gulf between "us and them," whatever the physical geography.

There is a social structure to racism. A white community of privilege needs the black elite in an African country to defend the social order. The masses of poor are a threat to the wealthy whites. Repression prevents rebellion that could threaten the security of the status quo. That does not mean the whites approve of torture. But if it occurs, it is better not to know. In any case, it can be tolerated as long as it is only blacks who suffer. The apparatus of repression has to be strong in an unjust society. It is dangerous to threaten it, not only because it could turn its instruments on the whites but also because it defends a social order favorable to the whites.

A similar structure of racism underlies police brutality toward people of color in North American cities. Blacks and other people of color can be safely brutalized, both because they are relatively powerless and because the white majority does not challenge the practice. Whites just don't want to know about it. The apparatus of repression (police) is necessary to protect public order. As long as whites are not assaulted by the police, "certain excesses" are tolerated for the sake of security. Fear of crime and media that glorify violence against the "bad guys" reinforce the structure. "Dirty Harry" is a hero.

Racism also structures the U.S. prison system. America incarcerates a higher percentage of its own population than any other country in the world, except South Africa. But the prison population does not match demographics. Most prisoners are nonwhite. It is likely that crime occurs in fairly even proportions in every racial group and economic stratum. But white-collar crime, white-people crime and economic crime by people with power goes unpunished. It's easier to lock up an angry black teenager who threatens 'the public order.'⁴

White missionaries, "tentmakers" and Christians in any nonwhite community are not immune from racism. Even if they came for "ministry," paternalistic racism is quite compatible with a desire to serve. Sometimes effective Christians are aware of their racism and fight a lifelong battle against it. In any case, no matter how subtle, racism is a deadly foe of the kingdom of God. In Christ there are no Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. The dividing wall has been broken down. Those who try to rebuild it are enemies of justice.

The community that finally came alongside the Adamses in their need was largely black. Blacks could appreciate the risk the Adamses took because they could identify with the victims in the house of torture. They or their families might easily be next. The black Christians who confronted the apparatus of repression or "came to sit" with the Adamses were unencumbered with racism. Thus they were free to love both their white neighbors and the victims of torture.

Those who live in a strange culture must find their own balance between meeting valid needs through a culturally similar support group and finding community with the local people. It is easier to relate deeply to people from the same cultural background, especially if there is a language barrier with the foreign culture. But white people can easily become "ghettoized" and "liminoid," or alienated from the dominant culture. Racism is a constant danger. As Frank and Linda

discovered, closeness to the local community is usually a better route to evangelism and social justice than the comfort of a Western subculture.

5. *Prayer and the struggle against evil.* When Linda and Frank gathered with their friends, the first thing they did was pray. Prayer is a practice of dependence. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our own weakness.

No one can solve the major social problems of our day. As in this situation, the powers arrayed against those who oppose oppression seem far too strong to fight. Prayer clarified to Linda and Frank that God is higher in power and authority than the secret police. Insofar as the Adamses recognized in prayer that their lives were in God's hands, they were freed from the power of the IPD.

Prayer was a lifeline for the Adamses because it was a part of their struggle against evil. Those Christians who promised to pray but refused to struggle in a real social context were alienated from true prayer. Prayer without involvement is like faith without works. It's dead (Jas 2:17). True prayer is not prior to or separate from struggle against evil, it's part of the struggle. Prayer is another form of action.

The spiritual world is not separated from the empirical world of evil. Spiritual good and evil are incarnated in real historical events. In prayer we struggle against evil in ourselves and in the world. If we pray as a substitute for acting to oppose what is evil, we have ceased to struggle and our prayer is hollow. Such prayer is not only useless, it is an abomination to God. It is a pious mask for evil (Is 1:11-17).

I do not mean that we should cease to pray when we are powerless to act. Sometimes prayer is the only way we can struggle against evil. But prayer may be part of the evil if it is a religious form of disobedience to God.⁵

In prayer Linda and Frank sought wisdom, strength, safety and power from God. They also prayed for the victims and asked God to intervene on their behalf. In prayer their will was united with God's to oppose the powers of oppression. Social action often involves confrontation with "principalities and powers." Prayer is an essential part of this confrontation on a spiritual level.

In many Two-Thirds World countries, most people, whether or not they are Christians, assume the existence of demonic power. The likelihood that Kofi practiced witchcraft underlines the probability that those who tortured their victims were influenced by the demonic. The demonic may be conceptualized as personal evil beings or as social structures that incarnate an evil will.⁶ In either case, evil is a force greater than the perversity of an individual person or group. It is a spiritual power that must be opposed spiritually.

If Paul is to be believed, our struggle against evil is always a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12). Prayer is not just a psychological practice or a form of communication with God. It is a weapon and a defense against evil. Linda and Frank needed God's strength and protection if they were to confront the principalities and powers next door. Prayer is an integral part of the Christian social project.

6. *Confronting the problem directly.* When no doubt remained, Frank went straight to the source of the violence to complain. The director of the secret police responded with jokes and lies. This is a typical response to confrontation and exposure of evil.

Sometimes confrontation is enough to stop an unjust practice, even if it is not acknowledged. Those who deny the problem are anxious not to get caught again. In this case the secret police (with the possible exception of the second in command) were invulnerable to shame and addicted to violence.

Directly confronting those responsible for injustice may be the first step in bringing pressure against them. It lets them know that their deeds are noticed and opposed. It also gives them a chance to explain or justify facets of the problem that you have not seen. Usually there's more than one side to an issue.

When student activists opposed the building of a new university campus on the shores of an environmentally threatened lake, they went straight to confront the president of the university. He showed them careful research that suggested that irrigation and farming practices around the lake were far more damaging to the lake than the campus. A political battle had been waged for the use of the land, and the university had narrowly won, partly because it was less damaging to the environment than the other options. The students thought a park around the lake was a better solution, but they went home from the meeting with a lot to ponder about lesser evils in an imperfect world.

Face-to-face confrontation may be more or less effective depending on the cultural context (see chapter five). In some cases sending an intermediary is more effective. But face-to-face encounter is always stark. It puts the person on the spot and may make him lose face. The results are unpredictable. Personal confrontation is an act of courage. It allows the guilty party to plan measures and mobilize resources to destroy or neutralize the confronter. Whether confrontation is right, wise or justified depends on the situation.

A foreigner is sometimes better situated to confront evil in this way than a local citizen. A foreigner cannot "disappear" without an international incident. But a white stranger is vulnerable in other ways. He or she may be resented as a neocolonialist meddler who has no right to criticize. The white person represents the hated colonialists—white racists who exploited and oppressed the people for hundreds of years. What right do white guests have to criticize their

hosts? (See chapter six.) White people with powerful enemies may soon find themselves without a visa.

Sensitivity to criticism from former colonial powers runs very deep and can prompt drastic responses. Not long ago Holland threatened to withhold aid to Indonesia in protest over human-rights abuses in East Timor, an island ruled by Indonesia. Holland was the chair of a group of nations that provided substantial funds for Indonesian development. Indonesia responded by unilaterally rejecting all future aid from Holland and dissolving the group Holland chaired. Many Indonesians, including some human-rights activists, cheered the decision. Even if they don't like what their own government does, Indonesians hate criticism and pressure from their former colonial masters.

7. *Harassment, intimidation and hope.* The immediate result of Frank's open complaint against the IPD was harassment of the least powerful in his household, the workers. Soon there was also a flagrant increase in violent oppression. The screams came to be heard daily. This was a clear message meant to intimidate the Adamses. Kofi was rejecting any curb on the activities of the IPD. He was saying, "If you oppose me, you'll be sorry. And it won't do any good anyway."

Action for social justice often seems futile and may even make things worse in the short term. Even in the long term the situation may deteriorate. The Adamses' deeds were not guaranteed success. They were not premised on effectiveness. Usually action intended to bring about justice must be carefully planned to bring about the most good for the most people. Heroic moral deeds that just make the situation worse are usually unwise no matter how good the motives. We must be "wise as serpents and gentle as doves."

But sometimes we have no choice. As in the case of Linda and Frank, if the situation is morally intolerable it should not be physically tolerated.⁷ Resisting gross injustice against all odds is a moral duty that

cannot be escaped. Some actions are optional and dependent on their probability of producing positive results. But an ethic of calculation cannot be the last word. Hope for the kingdom of God sees further than the eye of reason dares look.

The early Reinhold Niebuhr wrote,

Without the ultra-rational hopes and passions of religion, no society will have the courage to conquer despair and attempt the impossible; for the vision of a just society is an impossible one which can be approximated only by those who do not regard it as impossible. The truest visions of religion are illusions which may be partially realized by being resolutely believed. For what religion believes to be true is not wholly true but ought to be true; and may become true if its truth is not doubted.⁸

The paradox of this statement leaves the impression that the necessary tool of social idealism is an irrational passion that is somewhat out of touch with reality. What this view lacks is an eschatological perspective of the coming kingdom of God. Actions that are “futile” or even make things worse may be important as signs of the presence of the kingdom. They are premised on hope not just in the effectiveness of the act but in the ultimate reality of God’s kingdom. The forces of evil are to be opposed not because we know we will defeat them in our lifetime but because we believe God has already defeated them in Christ. Even if they win in the present, their days are numbered. The kingdom of God is coming.

At this point in their story, Linda and Frank were a good example of this. The likelihood that a conservative Christian American couple could influence the practices of the secret police were not very great. Their protest seemed to make things worse. Their friends thought they were just endangering themselves and those around them. But they had hopes and commitments to a power greater than the IPD. They

could not back down, because they were living the gospel story. They were a light in a dark place.

The few Christians who opposed the arrest of their Jewish neighbors in Nazi Germany were also involved in futile acts. Their protests did little or nothing to halt the murder of Jews. All they seemingly accomplished was to increase their own suffering and that of their families. But their protest was a witness that has lasted until today. They served a different kingdom from the Nazis, and their presence was a sign of hope that their kingdom was not extinguished.

During the 1970s, when most of the United States was into “self-realization” and was “drowning in a sea of luke-warm yogurt,”⁹ my wife and I were part of a small group who regularly protested the U.S. nuclear arms policy. Hardly anyone in the country seemed to care. It was not on the agenda of a country exhausted from the turmoil of the sixties and the pain of the Vietnam War. Our pitiful little protests outside Lockheed Missile Corporation seemed hopelessly idealistic and futile.

We were protesting the manufacture of nuclear missiles, some of which were over one hundred times as powerful as the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. These weapons were targeted on millions of Soviet citizens, many of whom hated their own government. Our country was seriously threatening the “evil empire” with a holocaust that would make World War II look like child’s play.

As far as I could see, our protests did very little good. They just made the Lockheed workers mad. The president didn’t hear. We had been producing nuclear warheads at a rate of three a day since World War II. When President Reagan was elected in 1981, he poured in billions of new dollars to speed up the process. When Daniel Berrigan broke into a missile plant and personally destroyed a nuclear warhead, he seriously joked that it was the world’s first act of nuclear

disarmament. None had ever been destroyed before. For his efforts he was sentenced to years in prison. Only in the mid-1980s did the morality of nuclear targeting get on the national agenda.

The little group continued its protests year after year, not because they seemed to be effective but because, like Linda and Frank, we *had* to say something.¹⁰

8. *Costly presence at the side of the afflicted.* Linda took immediate action when it was necessary. She did not plug her ears, stay weeping in the house or plead feminine helplessness. When the time came, she risked her life to stop a brutal rape in progress. She could not call the police; the rapists *were* the police! The weapons she used were her presence, her anger, her social status and whatever verbal threats she could think of on the spot.

Being on the side of the poor means being *at* their side physically when they have no other ally. It's obviously dangerous. The crazed soldier, intent on sexual violence, could have easily killed Linda. But she was not alone. God was in her as she was next to the victim of rape. She was the presence of God, pleading on behalf of the oppressed. Does this mean she could not have been killed? No indeed. Jesus was killed; most of the apostles were killed.

Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. (Heb 11:35-38)

The young Reinhold Niebuhr was right. Only those with “ultra-rational hopes and passions” dare to put their lives in danger for tormented strangers. One of the reasons liberal Christianity is so anemic is that it often preaches a social ethic without the resurrection. Paul said, “If

Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” (1 Cor 15:17). If Christ is not raised and his kingdom is not coming, who would dare to sacrifice themselves for an anonymous victim of the secret police? In the gospel story Linda was living, the resurrection was central.

In some countries the very presence of American citizens can stop people from being killed. White skin has many negative associations. But one advantage Americans have is that in most countries they are not lightly killed. The international ramifications are too serious.

This principle was dramatically demonstrated over a period of years by the Christian organization Witness for Peace. In 1985 my wife, Frances, joined a women’s delegation from Witness for Peace to go to Nicaragua. They intended to travel to the most dangerous part of the country, where guerrilla attacks by the contras were most likely. Frequently contras used U.S. weapons to massacre whole settlements: men, women and children. Frances and her group went to a dangerous border area and worked in the fields with the people of a village. Experience had shown that wherever there were North Americans present, the contras would not attack. So peasants’ lives were protected when there were white people by their side. (Ironically, Witness for Peace tactics would be of little value against the violence in North American cities. White skin is no protection in the ghetto.)

When Linda confronted the soldier in the garden, she did not only go as a white American, she also went as a woman. The presence of an angry, fearless woman is very different from the presence of a man. Soldiers are trained to fight and kill other men and dominate weak women. A strong, unarmed woman poses no physical threat to a soldier, but her moral authority may be stronger than that of a man, especially if the culture is matrifocal. Men do not expect to be opposed by an unarmed woman and may not know how to respond. If her anger is righteous and she is filled with the Holy Spirit, she a

formidable presence indeed.

Pauline Hamilton, a missionary in Taiwan who was my local guardian when I was a teenager at boarding school, was a spectacular example of the power of Christian presence. It was not just her white skin, her Ph.D. in physiology and her American passport that made her presence powerful. Part of it was her robust laugh, her intense integrity, her uncompromising bravery and her subtle, loving wisdom. These virtues showed the presence of Christ in her. Both police and gang members stood in awe of her.

For years Pauline worked with gang members, some of whom stayed in her home. She was physically weak, and there were several attempts on her life, but somehow no one could bring her down. Whenever she came around, the most brutal Mafia-like criminals would cease their violent and illegal activities. Thus she could go where the police did not dare. On a number of occasions authorities received a tipoff regarding a major war between rival gangs. The police did not want to intervene, because they were afraid of the danger. But they called "Grandma Han" and let her know. She would go to the pool hall or apartment block where the confrontation was to take place and would hang around all night talking to gang leaders. As long as she was there, nothing would happen. Her presence brought the presence of Christ. And everyone could recognize it.

9. *Reflection, prayer and planning.* After the violence in the garden, the Adamses did not rush into further action or flee the danger. They sat down together for further reflection on their experience, more prayer and careful planning. They realistically counted their true friends and decided not to involve those who were most vulnerable.

Those concerned about justice in another culture must be very careful about the impact of their actions on national colleagues and friends. One activist missionary, after leaving a delicate situation, wrote

a scathing report about the government. The report was internationally publicized. As a result, national Christians associated with his denomination experienced intense pressure from the government. The report made a fragile situation much worse and created severe tensions between American and local Christians in that denomination. The report satisfied the righteous indignation of the missionary, but the local Christians had to bear the fallout after he was long gone from the situation.

Linda and Frank's careful reflection, prayer and planning are a familiar sequence to those acquainted with the "hermeneutical circle." The hermeneutical circle is a model of how to do moral and theological interpretation. Experience in a context of commitment leads to communal reflection on the experience in light of the Word of God. Social analysis making use of the appropriate social sciences clarifies the nature of the ethical problems and possible responses. Pastoral planning devises strategies for change and gives rise to appropriate action. Action to bring positive change is a new experience to be reflected upon, and the circle continues (see diagram).

Interpretation is a process, not a once-for-all decision. Moral activity is constantly tested in prayer, reflection on experience, Bible study, discussion in community, social analysis, planning and renewed activity. It is a circle without beginning or end.

Linda and Frank were already committed. They were already acting. They were already struggling to know the truth. Their theological and ethical reflection was based on actual experience and always open to new understanding. Their prayer was engaged. Therefore their planning was realistic.

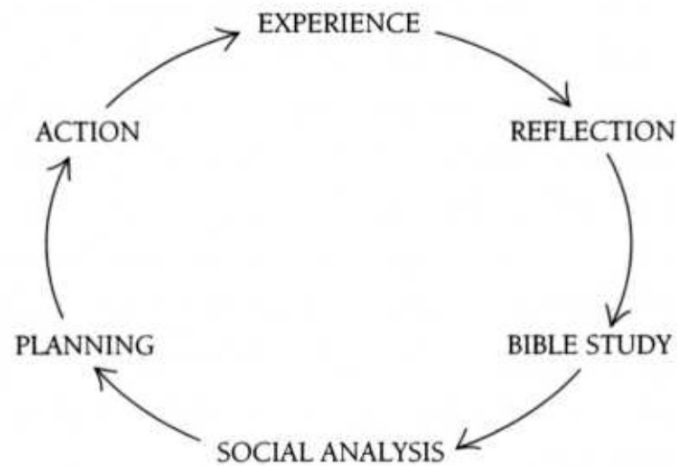
10. *Dependence on local leadership versus neocolonialism.* The most critically important decision the Adamses made was not the decision to protest against the torture. Rather, it was the way they went about it.

They decided to ask advice from their African colleagues. The plan that took shape relied on African leadership and worked through local channels of power. The Adamses turned to Africans for guidance.

Westerners like to solve problems by themselves. If they have to work through institutions and power structures, they prefer Western institutions and power structures, or at least local ones that are under Western control. This gives an illusion of control. A mission board, a foreign-dominated denomination, a multinational corporation, a Western human-rights organization and even the U.S. embassy are all safe channels of influence. These are rule-governed, law-oriented institutions that have set procedures comprehensible to a Westerner. They are “rational.”

Many non-Western cultures do things differently. Law may be less important than who you know. Relationships are more significant than rights. Things get done in a roundabout manner. Obligations and honor take precedence over predetermined procedures and principles. The facts are less important than the feelings of the parties involved. Boundaries and lines of authority are vague and intuitive. Truth-telling is subordinate to harmony. What’s “right” is what makes all parties happy.

One reason the Adamses’ friends did not want to be involved may have been a perception that the IPD was beyond the pale of rational (Western-style) control. How do you tackle an African director of secret police who is related to the president, practices witchcraft and tortures people in broad daylight? If the U.S. embassy can’t do anything, there must be nothing any Westerner can do.



The hermeneutical circle

Western cultural procedures are absolutized as right. Abstract principles of rational organization derived from universal reason were a cardinal faith of the Enlightenment and are still assumed by many people today. But this is a typical neocolonialist attitude. Neocolonialism operates wherever national institutions are formally independent but actually controlled by a foreign power. In many countries the church is still a neocolonialist institution. On paper it is independent, but missionaries have the money, education, resources and plans necessary to maintain the church's programs.

National Christians are grateful. They certainly don't want to shut off the aid. But they are also resentful, sometimes without knowing why. Local leaders measure themselves by the standards of Western conceptual patterns, forms of organization, theology and lifestyle. They don't measure up to their Western "partners." So they try harder, import more missionaries, feel inferior and nurse a burning resentment. If possible they go to the West for more education.¹¹

The church is not unique in its neocolonialist characteristics. Businesses, universities, nongovernmental organizations and even governments have the same neocolonialist structure. Of course this analysis is oversimplified. There are many universally valid aspects of Western modernization. National institutions need advice and resources from the West in order to develop in the modern or postmodern world. International partnerships are valuable. But partnerships must be equal, and national leadership is imperative. Culturally appropriate social institutions cannot be imported. They must be locally grown. The search for justice must come from the inside rather than being imposed.

When the Adamses decided to rely on African leadership, they acted as a catalyst to prod African Christians to challenge unjust practices in an African way. First they went to their African superior. He suggested several safe ways they could avoid the problem. This was appropriate. They were embarked on a dangerous path, and he was concerned with their safety. Throughout these events he showed considerable courage and promised to stand with them if they went ahead. They were no longer standing alone.

11. *The decision to go ahead.* After more prayer, Linda and Frank realized what they had to do. They would continue their campaign to stop the torture. They were not trying to be heroic. Like Paul, who said, "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" the Adamses had no choice but to fight for the victims who lived and died next door. Their response was less a decision than a compulsion. As Linda said, "Really we felt we had no choice." Nevertheless, their response took courage. Compulsions *can* be resisted.

The moral compulsion to tackle a particular social problem comes from the Spirit of God, the conscience of the individual and the consensus of the community. No doubt there were other social problems close by which the Adamses felt no such compulsion to

tackle. Perhaps there were people in dire poverty just down the road. “Not everything that should be done, can be done, and not everything that can be done, should be done by you.”¹² The choice of which aspects of the Christian social project a person chooses to address is a matter of social location, prayer, competence, opportunity, individual conscience and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian has a responsibility to love their neighbor and struggle for the kingdom in one way or another. In a cash economy, putting money in an envelope for a good organization is an important means of reaching out. But if our path directly passes that of a suffering neighbor or a pattern of oppression, it is dangerous to the soul to cross to the other side.

12. *On not giving up.* The Adamses’ first attempt to work through the power structure was a failure. Their African superior was not big enough. He ran into a dead end. We are not told exactly what this meant. Perhaps he was told to “shut up or else.” Perhaps he could not even get an appointment with a key person. Perhaps lower officials confirmed the Adamses’ story but higher officials responded with jokes and denials.

A dead end is seldom absolute. There is usually something more that can be done if you are brave and persistent. But perhaps Frank’s superior had reached the point where if he pushed any harder, he would get seriously hurt.

This is the point at which many Christians would quit and pull out. Linda and Frank had tried their best. They had done their duty. But they were not trying to do their duty. They were trying to stop the torture. The cries of suffering next door were etched in their minds. It was real people they cared about, not a social issue.

Most forms of oppression will not yield to the first attempts to stop them. Real social change only comes from people with “ultra-rational

hopes and passions.” The Adamses just kept looking for a bigger handle on the situation.

13. *Trying the most important political contact they had.* The Adamses tried the governor, with uncertain results. We do not know if this contact was helpful. The governor may or may not have been a significant factor in their final success. A governor may be small potatoes compared to the head of the secret police who is close to the president. The governor may not have really cared. On the other hand, even if he had little power over the situation and didn’t care, addressing him with the problem made it official and public. A governor is a symbolic political figure who must at least appear to care about his subjects. Contacting the governor upped the ante.

Progressive exposure of evil at ever higher levels has a cumulative impact. Paul writes, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed to the light becomes visible” (Eph 5:11-13).

Perhaps 90 percent of work for social justice consists of interpreting and exposing social evil. Evil likes darkness and cannot stand exposure. The story does not mention the possibility of using the media. Perhaps the media were controlled by those in power. If not, taking the problem to the press would be a logical next step in the exposure of evil.

14. *The religious leader as a key political figure.* It was Frank’s African boss who identified the key person: the Catholic bishop. In white middle-class Protestant culture, religion and politics are sharply divided. A white American does not go to a pastor to get something done politically. That division is not nearly so sharp in black and Latin American cultures. Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Bishop Oscar Romero and Dom Helder Camara were (or are) political figures who

brought more profound social change than most politicians. In most of the world (not only Iran) religious leaders have great political power. Mahatma Gandhi brought down the British empire. Bishop Desmond Tutu is in the forefront of the current demise of apartheid in South Africa.

Recently the Indonesian National Lottery was eliminated by the government after mounting nationwide demonstrations. The campaign against the lottery as oppressive to the poor was spearheaded by Muslim leaders who are relatively immune from political coercion. Hardly any “secular” political figure could have achieved the same results, because the governmental elite benefited from the lottery. Politicians are subject to many kinds of pressure, but religious leaders with a wide popular base of support have power. In the “People Power” movement that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, it is possible that the most significant political leader was not Cory Aquino but Jaime Cardinal Sin.

The Mabukian bishop was culturally and religiously strange to the evangelical Adamses. They were unlikely to think of him as a political figure. But the Adamses were fortunate to have good advice from an African. The bishop proved sympathetic, intelligent and powerful.

In recent years Christian Catholics and Protestants have frequently worked together for justice. They are natural allies with a common agenda: the kingdom of God. Christians can also cooperate with leaders from other religious faiths. The key role played by the bishop in Linda’s story might be played by a Muslim mullah in another context. Even where ultimate goals and basic theology differ, Christians and other religious or political communities are often “cobelligerents” against social and environmental evil. Cobelligerents are not the same as allies.¹³ While Protestants and Catholics are natural allies, Christians and Buddhists are more likely to be cobelligerents, because the ultimate

goals of their social projects are different. Christians have often worked with Marxists in Latin America for common goals of social justice, even while differing on ultimate aims and intermediate tactics.

In one context Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mk 9:40). Jesus was giving his approval to someone who was fighting evil and casting out demons. The person was not one of Jesus' followers, but he was in the same battle against evil. In another context Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Mt 12:30). In this context, he was referring to those who opposed his struggle against evil and criticized him for healing a blind and mute demoniac. This is a good example of the contextual nature of truth. There is no contradiction in these opposite statements. One is talking about uniting with others to fight evil. The other is talking about apparently neutral people who in fact oppose the kingdom of God.

15. *The apparent victory.* The result of the Mabukian bishop's efforts was dramatic: the torture stopped. The moral authority of the Catholic bishop was more effective than the efforts of a rich businessman and a governor. We do not know what he said or did. We can be sure he did not sue in a court of law or threaten Kofi with physical violence. Kofi would have laughed at "rational" or physical Western tactics. It is unlikely that the bishop suggested an economic boycott of Kofi's business enterprises. Nor would he have appealed to Kofi's humanitarianism or feelings of goodwill. It's more likely that he threatened to shame Kofi and the president of the whole country with a sermon the next Sunday. And it's just possible that he threatened to exorcise the IPD headquarters!

Whatever he did succeeded in a way that surprised Linda and Frank. At least the torture in the house next door stopped. Perhaps the bishop's efforts caused the president to rein in the powers of the IPD.

Westerners sometimes discount the significance of nonviolent moral protest. We are all too aware of the great power of large institutions. Words and moral convictions seem no match for big money, weapons and all the trappings of power. Ethics and moral argument are on a different plane from the “real world.” Idealism is no match for tanks. Beliefs are private matters that are best kept separate from the necessities of power and competition. Even the name for the ancient and noble science of rhetoric has come to connote empty words without power.

To be sure, ideas divorced from action are vain words. But moral and religious convictions, especially if combined with the willingness to suffer, can change the world. This is not just a theory but a reality that has been demonstrated over and over throughout history. Ideas that are effective usually combine with material conditions that lend them support. The “Protestant ethic” did not create capitalism by itself.¹⁴ But material conditions without someone to interpret them mean nothing.

There is a tradition in Javanese culture called “drying oneself in the sun.” It is the last resort of an oppressed person who has no other means of recourse. “Drying oneself in the sun” means to sit or stand in the heat of the sun, perhaps for hours, days or even weeks on end. It is an appeal to the powerful for justice. Indonesia is right on the equator. Anyone who has lived in the tropics knows that standing in the sun is no joke. On a hot day I’ve seen a dozen Indonesian teenagers faint from standing at attention from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. for an outdoor school ceremony. Real “drying oneself in the sun” can result in death.

A few years ago the Indonesian government built a dam that created a large lake. The farmers who lost their land because of the project received practically no compensation. For generations they had worked

the land, but now for the sake of “development” they had to be sacrificed. The farmers tried all the means of conventional and legal appeal, but to no avail. They were penniless peasants fighting millionaires, generals and politicians. Finally they resorted to “drying themselves in the sun.” As the water from the dam rose, they slowly kept moving to higher ground. They would not leave the edge of the lake or stop “drying themselves in the sun.” Finally the government gave in and gave them new land to farm near the lake.¹⁵

Moral protest is powerful when it is combined with a willingness to suffer. Linda and Frank won in their protest against the secret police. But that wasn't the end. There was a further price to pay.

16. *The cost of righteousness.* Linda and Frank were arrested, threatened with death, imprisoned and kept under house arrest. Frank was tortured. Only their friendship with influential Mabukians kept them from experiencing a worse fate. They were abandoned by all but one of their Western friends and felt alienated and shamed by those who ostracized them. Like Job's friends, the Western Christian community, with the exception of one missionary, made the Adamases feel as if their suffering was somehow their own fault.

Frank and Linda were following the way of the cross. Their suffering was part of a long and noble tradition. Jesus said,

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:10-12)

Suffering is a normal fact of life. Everyone suffers, from the richest to the poorest. One multimillionaire once said to me, “Bernie, why is life

so hard? No one ever told me that it would be so hard.” She had everything—a good husband and family, a palatial home and everything money could buy. But she still experienced life as suffering.

Buddhism teaches that suffering is the definition of life. Life is suffering. There is profound truth to the observation, though it is not the whole truth. Only Americans think that suffering is abnormal.

Normal suffering comes from natural causes, from our own sin and from the sin of others. It is not the same as suffering for righteousness or justice.¹⁶ Normal suffering, in itself, is not good. Suffering and death are a result of the curse. They will be finally defeated in the kingdom of God.

Normal suffering is not good, but it need not be evil. Normal suffering helps us to understand what is going on in the real world. James says that all kinds of suffering can produce endurance and lead to maturity (Jas 1:2-4). Those who do not suffer when suffering is appropriate are to be pitied, not envied. Like lepers who have lost physical sensation, they cannot feel pain. When thinking about the suffering caused by warfare, Augustine wrote: “Let everyone who thinks with pain on these great evils, so horrible, so ruthless, acknowledge that this is misery. And if anyone either endures or thinks of them without mental pain, this is a more miserable plight still, for he thinks himself happy because he has lost human feeling.”¹⁷

Suffering for righteousness and justice is different from normal suffering because it is redemptive. That is, it is *potent* for redeeming or liberating people from evil. Suffering for righteousness and justice is a powerful means of bringing in the kingdom. Justice cannot be achieved without suffering. Some of this is mystery. But some of the process is clear. Suffering for justice is a means of uncovering the reality of evil that loves to remain hidden. When the poor farmers “dried themselves in the sun,” they brought shame on those who had

stolen their land for personal gain. When oppression was revealed, it opened the way for justice to be done.

Suffering for justice is also a sign that goodness and truth are not gone from the world. It is a sign that the kingdom is already among us (Mk 1:14). Even if the physical evil is not immediately overcome, the presence of righteous suffering in response to the evil demonstrates that evil has not triumphed. Thus suffering for the kingdom is revelatory both of evil and of the good that opposes it.

Suffering for justice is participation in the suffering of Christ (2 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 4:13). It is a mystery of Christian faith that the sufferings of Christ were potent for the redemption of the whole world. The cross revealed the full sinfulness of humankind and the unfathomable love of God. The cross changed the world. It became the door through which suffering sinners enter the kingdom. The sufferings of Linda and Frank were part of Christ's suffering. Their pain was the pain of the body of Christ, who died for the oppressed. Many years later, as you read this book, Linda and Frank's sufferings can still reveal the goodness of God.

17. *Unexpected friends.* Brief mention must be made of the fact that Linda and Frank were not deserted in their suffering. Their natural, cultural community might have left them, but it was replaced by a community of African Christians who risked their lives to identify with their white friends.

One of the great rewards of crosscultural life is the experience of solidarity with people who are so culturally different from oneself. It is almost a rule that when there is costly social action, some of those who are most relied on, like the disciples, will cut and run. But they are often replaced by the most amazing and motley crew of new friends.

When we had only been in Indonesia for a few months, we

received the devastating news that Frances's father had died. I'm not sure our suffering would qualify as suffering for righteousness, but it was nevertheless very deep. The amazing thing was that we were surrounded by Indonesians, virtual strangers, who dropped everything to come to our house and express their solidarity with us in sorrow. For the first few days after we received the news, our house was crowded with people all day long. They didn't know Frances's father, but they arranged a memorial service to coincide with the funeral in the States. Christian communal solidarity may be one of the many gifts that some Third World communities can teach the Western church.

18. *Suffering and hatred.* The conclusion of Linda's account is startling. Linda felt hatred, burning and horrible, toward those who had become her enemies. Her feelings toward "Dark Glasses" on the way to the hospital were involuntary and searing. Perhaps the pain of that hatred will last as long as the pain of what was done to her.

Linda's passion reminds me of the cursing psalms. Near the end of one of the most beautiful poems in literature, the psalmist suddenly startles us by writing,

O that you would kill the wicked, O God. . . .

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred;

I count them my enemies. (Ps 139:19, 21-22)

Linda could certainly understand the poet's feelings!

But Linda does not feel justified in her feelings. On the contrary, she feels her hatred for Dark Glasses was "an act akin to his mistreatment of other human beings." Linda saw herself in the same camp as the torturers. In a sense she is right. The cruelty of her wish for Dark Glasses to suffer shows her solidarity with him in sin. Christ tells us to love our enemies, not wish they had cancer. Dark Glasses was not only "out there," he was also in her own heart. If she had

given Dark Glasses a lift and shown him love, it would have been a wonderful end to the story. Who knows what impact such a miraculous act could have had on such a man? No one is beyond the reach of Christ.

Although Linda's hatred of the man was evil, in another sense it is revelatory. Linda's vivid expression of honest, involuntary feelings gives us a glimpse of the depth of the wrong she had experienced. To hate the source of such evil is not evil but good. Her hatred was not only for her own suffering, it was for her husband, for the old man on the steps, for the woman at the fence, for the hundreds of screams and moans she had heard and the countless others she had imagined. Her hatred was God's hatred of evil. Dark Glasses was the symbol of that evil.

Hatred is an occupational hazard in the struggle for justice. Even when hatred is involuntary and focused on real evil, it is still painful. Only God can judge if it is sinful. It may be one more form of suffering for righteousness. Linda's hatred may simply have been a natural human outworking of the evil that was done to her. But even if such was the case, it is a destructive emotion. Freedom and healing for Linda required that she experience the process of forgiveness.

19. *Forgiveness and the persistence of evil.* Forgiveness of those who torture is a miracle and a gift of God. It is a process, not an immediate achievement. One person cannot command another to forgive. Apparent forgiveness is sometimes accompanied by a psychic rewriting of experience to lessen the emotional impact of the evil: We imagine that things were not so bad, and in any case they couldn't happen again. Things are different now, much better no doubt. This is not forgiveness. It is self-deception.

Certainly a human tendency is to exaggerate the fault of our opponents. But whether our enemies were better or worse than our

imagination really has very little to do with forgiveness. Forgiveness does not imply the other was really not so bad. Rather, it suspends judgment and places the other in the hands of a merciful and just God. Because we are finite sinners, we are unable to judge another justly. Forgiveness does not declare the other innocent. Instead it frees the forgiver from the heavy burden of having to be an ignorant, powerless and sinful judge. Forgiveness is not just for the sake of the person who did evil. It is also for the sake of the forgiver. It is liberation from having to play God.

Forgiveness separates persons from the evil they have done. Even the most evil person is better than the sum of evil he or she has done. Kofi may be a wonderful father or a loyal friend. We do not know. In any case it is not relevant to whether Linda and Frank should forgive him. When they forgive him they do not thereby minimize the evil he has done. The one who forgives a fellow human being should not forgive the evil that person has done or is doing. *People* should be forgiven. *Evil* should not be forgiven. Forgiving Kofi seventy-seven times does not imply that he is getting any better (Mt 18:22).

Years after the events of our story, there was a large massacre of students in Mabuk who had been rightfully protesting intolerable conditions in their university. News reports indicated that Kofi was responsible for the massacre. Hundreds of students died as a result of his commands. So even if torture had been stopped as a result of Linda and Frank's earlier actions, Kofi had not been stopped.

Kofi represents the persistence of evil. If you win a battle in one place, he pops up in another. If he is permanently stopped, his brother or cousin pops up. Kofi has to be fought over and over again.

There are seldom permanent victories. If slavery is abolished, racism is quite capable of creating conditions even worse. But even temporary

victories are worth fighting for. We will never know how many people were saved horrible treatment or even death as a result of pressure on Kofi. When structures of oppression are changed, not just one act is stopped. A whole pattern or system of oppression is stopped. If it pops up in another form, that just means it must be fought again.

The flip side of “no permanent victories” is “no permanent defeats.” One of the very few prisoners to survive in a certain concentration camp during World War II used to repeat to herself her mother’s wise advice when she faced disappointments as a girl: “This too shall pass.” Every day, no matter how dark things were, she repeated this sentence and thus retained hope in the future. With hope she could survive when others lay down and died.

20. *Return to the struggle.* If Kofi has to be fought over and over in different ways, it is because he lives in our own hearts. There are those who would react with horror to the actions of Kofi yet abuse their own wife or children. Some who are righteous in their own eyes think of AIDS victims as deserving their torture. The struggle for justice and righteousness in the world begins with repentance and humility. None of us is free of the very things we struggle against. Personal social ethics finally implies that social evil is personal because it is not “out there” but “in here.” Like Linda, we are not that different from “Dark Glasses.”

It is not enough to struggle against evil “in here.” To do so we must also struggle against it “out there.” Christians can keep on doing that over and over again, because of the gospel. Because of the good news, we can forgive ourselves and our enemies. Because of the good news, we know God loves the victims and the oppressors. Because of the good news, we believe in the resurrection and we know that the kingdom of God is coming.

When I was last in Berkeley, one day I was helping my daughter

move to a new apartment. As we unloaded some furniture, a voice hailed me. As if it were an everyday occurrence, Linda and Frank stuck their heads out a neighboring window with a grin and asked what I was doing there. I said I was just back from Indonesia temporarily and asked what they were doing. "Oh," they said, "we're just about to leave for Mabuk." The next day I stopped by their apartment to have a chat, but they were already on their way.