

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND SOCIETY (THE POOR AND PERSECUTED)

BISHOP ERNEST PAUL KOMANAPALLI

Greetings to my esteemed friends, colleagues and co-heirs of the blessings of God!

I have been asked to share my thoughts on the subject of “The Kingdom of God and Society with an emphasis on the poor and persecuted. This is a topic of concern to me as well a passion of mine as I have been called to live and work in an environment where both the poor and persecuted are evidenced in number and circumstance.

To establish what we are speaking of we must clearly define what is meant by poor and persecuted. Most people would agree Poor is more than just economics. It transcends your whole being. Donald Kraybill in his book “The upside-down Kingdom” defines poor in three categories:

- A. Materially poor
In sufficient housing, clothing or food
- B. Generally oppressed, -The captives, slaves, sick, destitute, persecuted and the desperate
Disenfranchised, those who cannot speak for themselves or defend themselves
- C. Humble in Spirit-Poor toward God
Standing before God pleading for Mercy with Broken and Contrite Spirits

Jesus Christ came into this world preaching the message of the Kingdom of God. This radical concept stood then and stands today in direct contrast to the kingdom of this world as we know it. The kingdom of the world while claiming to unite and uplift actually works to divide human kind along the lines of race, creed, education, economics and politics. We see in a world trumpeted as being interdependent, interconnected and interwoven, the reality of segregation, oppression and division coming to a fuller light. In contrast, The Kingdom of God unites people who have been segregated by walls of injustice.

The Church being an instrument of the manifestation and implementation of the Kingdom of God is to not catch up to the world in reaching out to the disenfranchised, oppressed and afflicted but is to actually spear head a movement towards reconciliation, restoration , upliftment and justice. However too many times the church has failed in the aspect of its mission and has merely waited for governmental authorities to rectify a malady caused more by human behavior than governmental programs.

Billy Graham in his book *Peace with God* writes: “Jesus taught that we are to take regeneration in one hand and a cup of cold water in the other. Christians, above all others, should be concerned with social

problems and social injustices...the Christian is to take his place in society with moral courage and stand up for that which is right, just and honorable”

Carlos Mraida in his article “Kingdom, church and society: Three different styles” brilliantly exposes how the church in an attempt to mimic the kingdom of the world in structure, effect and process has lost its distinctiveness as an divine option of the order of things and has instead become a sanitized religious clone.

Why do we have a responsibility towards the poor and persecuted?

There are three foundations which explain our responsibility as a church. 1: The Word of God 2: The Kingdom of God and 3: The Cultural Mandate.

1. The Word of God clearly establishes a tradition both in the Old Testament and New Testament for the caring of the poor, speaking up for the afflicted and provision for the widow and the orphan. “Blessed is he who considers the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” Psalm 41:1. There is a strong basis that God has, is working and will work for the benefit of the poor and he who works in this divine mission is co-laboring with Him. “I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the afflicted, and executes justice for the needy.” Psalm 140:12, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” Proverbs 19:17
2. Jesus and all the apostles preached the Kingdom of God. It was an important theme both before and after the resurrection. The Kingdom of God is not a territorial rule; it is understood as a reigning of the King of Kings and Lord of lords over all who will submit to his lordship. The Kingdom came to earth when Jesus was incarnated and entered into direct conflict with the kingdom of satan. The Bible teaches that satan was defeated by Jesus Christ on the cross, but he continues to exercise tremendous power and will do so until Jesus returns a second time. At that point God will reign supreme, sword will be beat into plowshares, justice will roll down like a river, poverty, discrimination, oppression, sickness, and all other social ills will disappear like mist in the morning sun.

The Holy Spirit working in the Church is seeking to destroy the walls that have been built upon the foundations of injustice. In Acts 2:16-21 we see 4 walls keeping the poor and persecuted from enjoying their full rights as children of God.

- a. Wall 1, The Ethnic wall. upon all flesh. There is no racial distinction
- b. Wall 2, The Gender wall , neither male nor female in the Kingdom of God
- c. Wall 3, The Age wall, no age discrimination
- d. Wall 4, The class wall, neither slave nor free, no economic distinction

When all this will happen, no one knows. Meanwhile as the Kingdom of God is preached and more and more people submit themselves to the reign of the King, the wider blessing of the Kingdom of God will be more evident here and now. God’s people are people who are committed to the promotion of justice and peace. They oppose the kingdom of satan. Since the

kingdom of satan as the late Orlando Costas said, “Stands for what oppressed, dehumanizes and enslaves man, the Kingdom of God must stand for what humanizes, liberates and enriches man.”

3. The Cultural Mandate had its origin in God. It was first given before the fall, when only Adam and Eve comprised the human race. As the Creation narrative unfolds, God says, “and now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small” Genesis 1.26. It was done, and Adam and Eve were ready to receive their first recorded divine commandment; “Have children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals...” Genesis 1.28 these first humans were given what Robert Webber calls “delegated sovereignty” over God’s earthly creation. They were to treat creation as God himself would treat it. That was the cultural mandate.

In New Testament times, Jesus not only exemplified the Cultural mandate in his own life and ministry; he summed up the entire teaching of the law and the prophets by saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: love your neighbor as you love yourself (Matthew 22:37-39) No one can be a kingdom person without loving one’s neighbor. No Christian can please God without fulfilling the Cultural Mandate.

The specific content of the Cultural Mandate is vast. God expects a great deal of those to whom he has entrusted the earth and all of its goodness. Distribution of wealth, the balance of nature, marriage and the family, human government, keeping the peace, cultural integrity, liberation of the oppressed—these and other global responsibilities rightly fall within the Cultural Mandate. (Wagner C., Peter 1989)

IS GOD ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR?

Ronald Sider in his book “Rich Christians in an age of hunger” reminds us how judgment came down on the people of Israel always for 2 main reasons; idolatry and neglect and oppression of the poor. He also points out how God spoke through Amos showing through the veil of economic prosperity and growth the injustices borne by the poor.

He asks the question; is God on the side of the Poor? I would then ask if so, it begs the question which side am I on?

Sider points out 3 pivotal points of history which answer this question.

1. The Exodus: God while exercising His faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham brings freedom to His people the Israelites from Slavery and oppression. He goes on to mention in Deut. 5:6 the Lord declares “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The God of the Bible wants it known that He is the liberator of the oppressed.

2. Destruction and Captivity: After the Israelites have settled in the Promised land they were to be people of justice. When they were oppressed, God brought freedom. When they were oppressing others they were sent into captivity. The message seen in the prophets was the God dealt harshly with His people when they oppressed other people especially the poor.
3. The incarnation: We believe the greatest revelation of God was in Jesus. How did the anointed one, the Messiah, The Christ define his mission?

Luke 4:18-19

18"*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;*
19To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

Everything Jesus said or did pointed out to his rescuing of the poor, the afflicted and the oppressed. Though Jesus came for all it is interesting to note the poor were the only group singled out as recipients of Jesus' gospel.

The whole question of whether God is on the side of the poor brings up many questions of which we do not have time to answer. But the basic ones we can. Is God on the side of the poor? Yes. By reason then is he against the rich and successful? No. God is not in any measure against those who have succeeded in life through lawful and just means. He is however interested to bring those who cannot fend for themselves, who cannot speak for themselves into the same plane as to allow them to rise above their circumstance and enjoy together with all God's children.

It was in His messianic mission proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah and repeated by John the Baptist:

Luke 3:4-6

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.
5*Every valley shall be filled
*And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;
6*And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*****

What shall we do then?

Let us go forward. Let the Church rise and take its rightful place as the voice of the voiceless, standing up for those that cannot stand for themselves. Where there is hunger let us feed, where there is cold let us shelter, where there is fear and despair let us bring hope. Matthew 25 speaks that one day we will stand in judgment and our religious activities will not be on display but what we have done for the “least of these”. While we have learned to be the light in society proclaiming the name and salvation of Jesus Christ let us not forget to be the salt that seasons society with values and virtues from on high.

We must be a visible Church exemplifying the Kingdom of God not just internally but externally and politically. Before political parties corrupt the issues and interest groups hijack them for their own interests, let the church speak out so justice may roll down like mighty waters.

I close with this scripture and may it ignite a voice within all of us to see the Kingdom of God reflected in each of our societies raising the poor and persecuted to a place of blessing and peace.

Proverbs 31:8-9

8Open your mouth for the speechless,
In the cause of all who are appointed to die.
9Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And plead the cause of the poor and needy.