



Christ & the Workplace – A Cry for Justice

The collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh on April 24 killed over 1,000 people. This number is so large, it's hard to grasp the magnitude of the human suffering. Each of the deceased is a person, a unique human being and child of God. Each person had life and connections with other people: as someone's child, friend, spouse, sibling, neighbor, co-worker. The grief and helplessness on the faces of the people in this picture can only begin to express the depth of this human disaster.

Much opinion about this tragedy has been expressed in news media throughout the world. Following are a couple of Christ and the Workplace lenses to help us appreciate the suffering of our Bangladesh world-neighbors, and think about what we can do in response:

- Justice
- The marketplace

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Justice:

Jesus' sense of justice is at the center of much of his teachings. There are many Scripture passages we can refer to; the following verses from the prophet Micah is core to Jesus' values:

*...what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

The late Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Ramirez, and his followers applied these teachings in their troubled country as love, serve and defend the poor. This is what Jesus did. We must do as he and they have done, and expressing our faith that this is God's world, and it does change.

To love and serve the poor through charitable gifts is easy. To defend them and be advocate for their needs is hard! But, it is what Jesus expects us to do.

We must encourage our politicians to pressure foreign governments to protect garment industry workers. Change follows when incentives and pressure are applied to politicians and their governments. In Canada, for example, let us remember our two founding principles, and the order in which they appear:

- sovereignty of God (understood in the Christian context)
- rule of law

The Marketplace:

Let us never underestimate the power of consumers to affect change in the marketplace! Retailers are vulnerable to pressure from prospective and longstanding customers. E-mails and letters to senior management; phone calls or petitions to customer service; refusal to buy merchandise from countries where workers are exploited – these are three means which consumers can use with great effectiveness.

Consumer action in the marketplace says to retailers: *change your purchasing standards or lose our business*. If retailers are serious about needing and serving customers, they will change. There is no more effective way to change retailer values than through the wallet!

Conclusion:

Everyone likes a bargain, where quality exceeds price. But, when this comes at the price of human wellbeing and life, it is wrong. Justice – God’s love and equality for all people – must prevail in the marketplace. This is God’s world; it operates according to God’s values. We must respect them, whether as customers or retail organizations. When those values are ignored, the consequences can be terrible.

If we are serious about following Jesus and his values in the marketplace (where we spend most of our waking time and energy), we must advocate change where business practices destroy human life! Let us stand with the poor and the oppressed:

- do not buy items from exploited people
- advocate change through our politicians
- encourage retailers to change their purchasing values

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