

### The Doing of Justice

We have just finished another year of crisis in our political institutions. These days, it seems, we are being asked to choose between justice and mercy as we witness the unfolding drama of the case against Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

There is the appeal to the culture's sense of empathy, as well as talk of a constitutional crisis as the Executive branch tangles with the Supreme Court in the effort to pursue justice.

In the Old Testament, we are told that God requires *both* justice and mercy. The prophet Micah tells the people of Israel: "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Justice and mercy are meant to be together. Without justice, a nation becomes soft and the law simply becomes a convenient tool for those in power to dominate the weak and powerless. Without mercy, we become merely hard knights of justice, blind to the demands for sympathy and the complexities posed by human weakness.

The pursuit of justice does not happen in a vacuum. Judges, rulers and lawmakers all operate within a social context of power and relationships that make them subject to influence.

Even in ancient Israel, they were not above corruption, as we see in the prophet Isaiah's denunciation of the leaders of his time: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees or deprive the poor of their rights and rob my oppressed people of justice, making the widow their prey, and robbing the fatherless."<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Ezekiel cried out against oppression by the powerful, "You have gone far enough, O princes of Israel...stop dispossessing my people, declares the Sovereign Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah, living among the poor that were left in Jerusalem after the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, likewise refused to be silent before the king and the judges.

The Apostle Paul famously called Christians to submission to authority. However, when Peter and John were forbidden by the Jewish authorities to preach the Gospel, they replied: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."<sup>3</sup>

Especially in a democratic context, the people are duty-bound to hold judge and ruler accountable to our highest laws, as enshrined in the Constitution. Understanding that all earthly authority has been instituted by God, Christians should take this to heart, but should be ready to speak out as well when earthly laws directly conflict with the laws of God as contained in Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 10:1-2

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. 45:9

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:19-20