

NOT BY POWER OR WEALTH ALONE

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*“He made you experience want,
He made you experience hunger,
but He gave you manna to eat
which neither you nor your fathers had known,
to show you that man lives
not on bread alone, but that all that
proceeds from the mouth of God
is life for man.”*

Deuteronomy 8:3

The title of the book, *Not by Power or Wealth Alone*, is derived from the aforementioned Biblical passage as well as from a pronouncement of Jesus Christ in Matthew 4:4.¹ This book is a collection of Senator Jovito Salonga’s religious messages, prayers, and speeches delivered most of the time at the Cosmopolitan Church of which he is a member, while a good few were recited on various occasions such as weddings, Christmasses and even during necrological services for some of his loved ones who had gone ahead to meet the Creator. It also contains some of his favorite Bible passages and religious songs, and some of his very own poems and other similar writings.

The book evinces competence of the author in imparting his knowledge and eloquence in conveying his thoughts to his readers. It reflects his audacity to fight dishonesty and injustice. Unlike the books written by other politicians and government leaders, Senator Salonga’s masterpiece projects an aura which one may usually find only in the Bible – spiritually enlightening, powerful, and

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¹ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every

influential. The book is even “sacredly” divided into seven sections, each of which commences with a verse from the Bible.

The first section talks about God’s strength during Senator Salonga’s weakness. After the Plaza Miranda bombing, many thought, including some of his own doctors, that there would be no chance of survival. Miraculously though, he survived, but with a totally blind left eye, a completely deaf right ear, with more than a hundred pieces of shrapnel in his frail body, and with only a flicker of hope in his heart that he may be able to stand up and walk again. But notwithstanding his physical condition, he was still able to fight and struggle against the Marcos dictatorship during the martial law years through constant praying, invigorated by the love of his family, his friends, and the rest of the Filipino people.

The second section discloses the parts of the Scripture which have had the most impact on the life of Senator Salonga as manifested in several of his speeches. From these passages he draws strength to forgive those who have hurt him and his loved ones, and courage to have that child-like humility to admit his own blunders. He is able to realize God’s purpose for giving him a second chance on life -- to continue his advocacy on truth, justice, and freedom. He also learns that one must share in the pains and sorrows of the world, and know that love is the essence of one’s life to truly feel the happiness of walking in the company of Jesus Christ. Senator Salonga remembers someone saying, “We are given two hands, one hand to reach out to God in complete faith and obedience, and the other hand to reach out to our fellowmen in loving concern and compassion.”

The third part enunciates Senator Salonga’s vision of a Church: a Church that respects the laws but prefers to obey God rather than man, a Church that upholds the dignity and value of every person, and a Church that maintains a society where each individual can live free from corruption, oppression, discrimination, and moral vilification. He likewise encourages Christian laymen to enter the world of politics, not necessarily as aspirants, but as advisers, campaigners, and voters. He stresses that one need not be a congressman, a senator, or the president to make a change in the society. One can start by extending God’s grace within his own family, firm, association and organization.

Senator Salonga elucidates on justice and peace in the fourth part of the book. “Justice and peace are public virtues,” he aptly says. “They are also divine imperatives. Our experience during the long dark night of martial law is that there can be no peace without justice. On the other hand, justice without peace is an illusion.” In other words, justice and peace are thoroughly related with

each other, one is a condition *sine qua non* of the other. Further, he discusses about two basic human rights: the right to be treated as a human being, and the right to seek and know the truth. Evidently, his discussion was triggered by the shameless abduction of the impeccable just because they clashed with someone in the government or in the Armed Forces. They were detained, tortured, murdered, and, in the words of Senator Salonga, some just simply “disappeared”. To make things worse than they already were, the massive annihilation remained concealed from the public. The people were deprived of their right to know the truth. Their cries were effectively stifled by manipulating the media to report only on events which would be favorable to the power-obsessed administration. Lastly, he attempts to draw the line between justice and forgiveness, carefully explaining that one is free to forgive those who may have personally hurt him, but for serious offenses and crimes which affect the whole community, these would be best left to the competence and probity of the courts.

The next section discloses Senator Salonga’s secrets on how to become an effective and cogent leader. He reveals that one must have a vision, or the capacity to know the problems in the society and perceive what must be necessarily done; competence, or the fitness to handle a particular task; hard work and perseverance, because one’s dreams will not be handed over on a silver platter; moral sense, or the sense of right and wrong, and a capacity for self-discipline; and lastly, service, the readiness or dedication to be of help to others.

In the sixth section of this book, he permits himself to reminisce about several episodes of his life, both blissful and depressing. He exhilarates in his fifty-nine years of marriage to his ‘Mahal’, Lydia. “In marriage, it takes two and the good Lord to be really happy, but it takes only one to ruin it,” he enthusiastically shares. He displays a high degree of respect not only to the holy sacrament of matrimony, but also to the inevitable occurrence of death. He pays tribute to some of his most cherished people including his brother Ben and wife Elong, who were pitilessly murdered; his best friend, former Chief Justice Pedro L. Yap, and Jaime Cardinal Sin.

He ends the book with a poem wherein he wonders whether he is too old to dream at 75. In that same poem, his *Mahal* answers him saying, “No dear, you’ll keep on dreaming up to the very end.” Indeed, one can never be too old to dream, to change and make a change.

In sum, Senator Salonga challenges the Filipino people to be active, rather than apathetic Christians. He emboldens them to make a difference in the society by beginning with their own families and organizations, one act of random kindness at a time. He assures them that they do not need to be public

officials or men in position to be able to serve others and the country.

He urges them to practice what they preach, so to speak. He tells them that they should not look at religion as a mere haven to which they could run when the world gets a little too noisy or when they get a bit jaded with their lives, instead, they should use their religion as an instrument to spread God's love and share the grace of the Holy Spirit to their fellowmen.

In the present times of crisis, the book calls not to criticize from a distance, but to directly participate in and contribute to the betterment of the society and the improvement of his life. Each individual can never stand alone, for indeed, no man is an island; it is in unity that a nation emerges stronger. One needs to be reminded that he needs power, not to bully the weak, but in order to promote justice and extend the arm of the law to those who are greatly oppressed; that one needs wealth, not to further widen the social hiatus between the rich and the poor, but to create more opportunities through which the less fortunate members of the community can mend their broken dreams.

Certainly, the real beauty of life can only be revealed, not by power or wealth alone, but by living a life according to God's will, nurtured by the love of families and friends, and cherished the most by none other than one's own self.