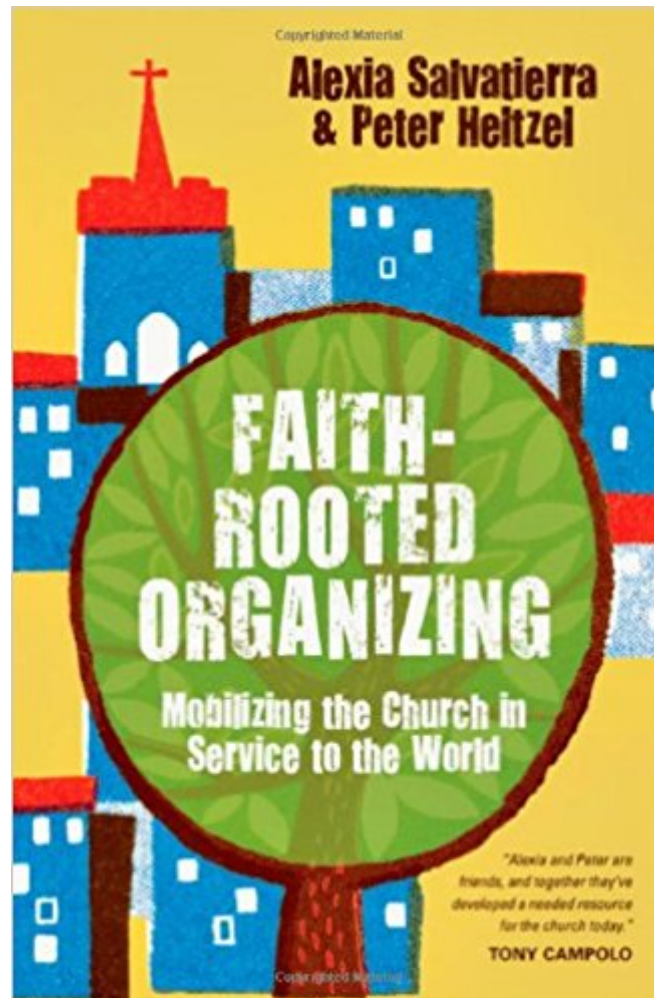


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Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing The Church In Service To The World



Synopsis

With so many injustices, small and great, across the world and right at our doorstep, what are people of faith to do? Since the 1930s, organizing movements for social justice in the U.S. have largely been built on assumptions that are secular origin—such as reliance on self-interest and having a common enemy as a motivator for change. But what if Christians were to shape their organizing around the implications of the truth that God is real and Jesus is risen? Alexia Salvatierra has developed a model of social action that is rooted in the values and convictions born of faith. Together with theologian Peter Heltzel, this model of "faith-rooted organizing" offers a path to meaningful social change that takes seriously the command to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

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Customer Reviews

"Faith-Rooted Organizing blends the voice of an evangelical-activist theologian in Heltzel with the homespun profundity of a seasoned pastor and campaign organizer in Salvatierra. The authors delight readers with complementary writing styles: Heltzel speaks through theological propositions, interpolated intermittently with jazz references and theological punch lines; Salvatierra communicates through proverbs, organizing anecdotes, poignant biblical passages, and narrative side notes. "The result is a well-argued and accessible text that should resonate from the seminary to the sanctuary." (Andrew Wilkes, Sojourners, August 2014)"This isn't a book about food pantries, soup kitchens and clothing drives. Rather, the authors show how the call of the prophets is still

among us and how the teachings of Jesus can impact the whole of society. . . . [H]elps us see the power of hospitality and the need for congregations to work in their communities toward hope, wholeness and justice." (Todd Outcalt, YouthWorker Journal, March/April 2014)"Organizing is an old tradition, but for years there was a mindset that it is all about self-interest and manipulating power, whatever the collateral damage. Peter and Alexia bring us to a new/ancient place, social justice with sleeves rolled up, grounded in organizing for good as the deepest expression of faith. Faith-Rooted Organizing weaves Scripture with practice and the prophetic voice with practical steps, presenting organizing as a spiritual act of partnering with God in repairing the world." (David M. Elcott, Taub Professor of Practice in Public Service and Leadership, Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service, New York University)"Too much theology today is written in words rather than deeds. But God sent his Word as a doing verb, and Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel teach and show what it means to share in the doing." (Peter Ochs, Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies, University of Virginia)"Inspired by Gandhi, King, Chavez and the work of past and present-day faith-rooted organizers, Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel have taken their visions and written them down. Salvatierra illuminates the spiritual principles that guided the civil rights and farmworkers movements. Heltzel helps us understand how this work is not only about justice in this world, it is the work of the gospel itself. This book is a gift to the church and the world. Definitely required reading for any congregation that wants to put their faith into action in today's world." (Lisa Sharon Harper, director of mobilizing, Sojourners, and author of Evangelical Does Not Equal Republican . . . or Democrat and Left, Right and Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics)"Faith-rooted organizing is big on faithfulness, hanging in there, building relationships, training leaders, changing social structures and asking what it means to follow Jesus in today's world. It thus combines the best aspects of resource mobilization theory with what is now ubiquitously called 'framing,' and in this superb book by Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel, two leading Christian organizers give us a compelling account of what works and what doesn't." (Gary Dorrien, author of Economy, Difference, Empire: Social Ethics for Social Justice)"On a cold February night some years ago I experienced a rite of passage in my understanding of mission. Two thousand followers of Jesus created a table in the midst of creation. They met with the mayor of New York City to negotiate issues like crime, drugs, jobs and affordable housing as they struggled to reroot the life and mission of their congregations in their communities. I saw the power and effectiveness of community organizing come alive. I saw the Nehemiah Project literally rebuild burned-out neighborhoods around our congregations with thousands of units of affordable housing. "The arts of community organizing have come a long way since the scuffling days of Saul Alinsky and the Back of the Yards

organization in Chicago. For me, over the years, connecting with organizing networks has been life giving and game changing. The arts of listening, power analysis and leadership development have undergirded my ministry as parish pastor, bishop and now denominational executive. "In writing Faith-Rooted Organizing Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel have made an immense contribution to the maturing of the community-organizing tradition in relationship to the mission of the Christian gospel. They begin where people of faith live: in the biblical drama, their local faith communities, their daily walk with Jesus. This book makes organizing accessible to evangelical Christians, and provides renewal and deep grounding for all spiritual journeys. "For example, sometimes Christians encounter community organizing through the lens of power, and they struggle to see its resonance with Christian ethics. The chapter on 'serpent power' and 'dove power,' speaking of power from within the depths of the Christian narrative, is both realistic and hopeful. All through the book I got the sense of an attempt not to make organizing palatable to evangelical Christians but instead to help bring out the great gifts that Christians contribute to any effort to rebuild a just world. The perspective of 'the least of these' always keeps faith-rooted organizing rooted in the perspective of Jesus. "Faith-Rooted Organizing is steeped in real-life experience. Many stories make the concepts come alive. And the book is a love letter from Alexia and Peter to an emerging generation seeking to follow Jesus in lives that matter." (Stephen Paul Bouman, executive director, Congregational and Synodical Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)"A superb integration of biblical faith and community organizing. This book is both an excellent manual and a vast feast of delightful, empowering stories. A must-read for anyone interested in empowering people to work for justice." (Ronald J. Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action)"Martin Buber said that the opposite of slavery is not freedom, but community. Such a beloved community is grounded in justice and radical hospitality. Now how do we engage the powers in the struggle for community? Many thanks to Alexia, Peter and InterVarsity Press for gifting the organizing community with this book." (Phillip Lawson, pastor emeritus, Easter Hill United Methodist Church)"It's tempting to look at all the problems in the world, throw our hands up at God and say, 'Why don't you do something?' When we ask that, we often hear God say back, 'I did something. I made you.' Throughout history, the movements that have changed the world for good have been divine conspiracies, holy collaborations between God and people. For some reason, God doesn't want to change the world without us. Sometimes we are waiting on God, and God is waiting on us. When we ask God to move a mountain, God might give us a shovel. In this book, Peter and Alexia remind us that faith has to have feet--the good news needs to become flesh. The gospel is not just about ideas, it's about action--Jesus does not just offer us a presentation of ideas but an invitation to join a

movement. As you read it, keep your eyes open for ways you might be called to become a part of the change we all want to see in the world." (Shane Claiborne, activist and author, www.thesimpleway.org) "As a growing segment of the church reawakens to its calling to 'do justice' in our world, Faith-Rooted Organizing will be an indispensable manual for the justice movement. Implementing a beautiful blend of holistic theology, relevant stories and practical wisdom, Alexia and Peter's book clearly illustrates the unique role that Christians have in strategically, prophetically and collaboratively challenging unjust systems and pursuing the common good." (Josh Harper, national director of Urban Projects, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship) "Faith-Rooted Organizing helpfully reimagines theological education through the lens of movements for social change. The worship services all over the world each Sunday morning are also opportunities for both church members and nonmembers alike to work together for a more just, equitable and sustainable world. Salvatierra and Heltzel persuasively, provocatively show how organizing can strengthen both Christian churches and the wider communities they are called to serve." (Matthew Myer Boulton, president and professor of theology, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana) "Alexia and Peter are friends, and together they've developed a needed resource for the church today. In my lifetime organizing has never been more important and more effective than it is right now. But it's not enough to base our organizing in faith, it needs to be rooted deep down, and that's exactly what Alexia and Peter do. They take the reader step by step through how to effectively discern, recruit and follow through when organizing. They're pioneers! This book is a must-read for all in the church today who are concerned about their schools, towns, states and nation--and want to do something about it!" (Tony Campolo, founder of Red Letter Christians and professor emeritus, Eastern University) "Proof-texters beware: this book won't bless your biases with conveniently misquoted Bible verses. This book insists that the Calvary-shaped power that raised Christ from the grave enables us all to see through the eyes of the last, the lost and the least. Faith-Rooted Organizing is strictly for those who long to organize in ways that witness to God's new world of love." (Jarrod McKenna, Australian Peace Award recipient, First Home Project cofounder and World Vision Australia's Advisor on Faith & Activism) "Through the prophet Micah, God calls us to both 'act justly and love mercy.' These are more than personal admonishments. They often require addressing the structures and corrupt systems that oppress the poor, the marginalized and the hidden. I'm grateful that Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel have given us a way forward, rooted in Scripture, to help us act justly to 'proclaim freedom for the captives and . . . release the oppressed.'" (Richard Stearns, president of World Vision US and author of *Unfinished: Believing Is Only the Beginning*) "As one whose life and faith was greatly influenced by farmworker struggles and community organizing in

the Central Valley of California, I found Faith-Rooted Organizing a thought-provoking and inspiring read. Not for the casual reader, the book provides a comprehensive and in-depth survey of community organizing in the faith-based context. By deftly weaving together compelling personal stories, solid theological interpretation and practical organizational expressions, Alexia and Peter have written what could very well become the go-to resource for any leader or organization hoping to faithfully and effectively answer the call to faith-based organizing." (Bruce Reyes-Chow, author of *But I Don't See You as Asian: Curating Conversations About Race*) "I have been a coconspirator with both Alexia and Peter for a number of years. The two of them embody justice and activism in Christ akin to a superhero dynamic duo! The depth of knowledge and scholarship this volume brings to our awareness, combined with both authors' lifetimes of grass-rooted involvement, means Faith-Rooted Organizing will likely become the handbook for those who want to actually do faith-based action. Peter and Alexia's firmly grounded scholarship and the important background information given in plain language is simply value added. This book is written by doers for doers. If you wish to make a change, there is no higher praise!" (Randy Woodley, Distinguished Associate Professor of Faith and Culture, Director of Intercultural and Indigenous Studies, George Fox University and Seminary) "Although Jesus was both preacher and organizer, only recently have Christians begun to reclaim the task of organizing. As movements for justice engage the vast injustices of our time, it is refreshing to see people of faith reclaiming their traditions in order to see more clearly and act more courageously. These two authors take us through a range of traditions and models, with an eye toward the liberating work of God." (Joerg Rieger, Wendland-Cook Professor of Constructive Theology, Perkins School of Theology) "Alexia and Peter's timely book not only demystifies faith-rooted advocacy and activism but centers it squarely in deep theology, the nature of the local church and the call of Christian discipleship. This will serve as an important guide for everyone seeking to translate compassion and conviction into effective community organizing and servant justice." (Ken Wytsma, president of Kilns College and author of *Pursuing Justice*)

Rev. Alexia Salvatierra is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She also serves as a consultant for a variety of organizations, including World Vision USA/World Vision International/Women of Vision, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the Christian Community Development Association the Womens’ Donor Network, Auburn Theological Seminary, Interfaith Worker Justice, PICO and Sojourners. She is adjunct faculty at the New York Theological Seminary and Biola University, and for over eleven years she was the executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). Peter Heltzel (PhD, Boston University) is Associate

Professor of Theology and Director of the Micah Institute at New York Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* and *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race and American Politics*. In addition to writing for *USA Today*, *Books & Culture*, and *Sojourners*, Heltzel has published numerous articles in journals, such as *Political Theology*, *Princeton Theological Review* and *Scottish Journal of Theology*. An ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), he serves as Assistant Pastor of Evangelism at Park Avenue Christian Church. Heltzel has a deep commitment to the power of words and music, to social justice and to a global movement of radical change and collective activism. This passion was honored when he was awarded the 2014 Nelson Mandela Community Activist Award for his ongoing work to make a difference in New York City. Heltzel serves as director of the Micah Institute, which seeks to educate New York City faith leaders on issues of social and economic justice, to equip leaders to serve as change agents for social transformation and movement-building, and to act as a powerful coalition of organizers and advocates transforming New York City. He also serves on the Metro Commission on the Ministry and the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Team of the Northeastern Region, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Heltzel lives in Harlem with his wife, mezzo-soprano Sarah Heltzel.

This book by Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel arrived in my mailbox today and after spending the afternoon "deep browsing" it I am convinced it is a must read for any person of faith who really cares about making a difference - abandoning our myopic, navel-gazing focus on narcissistic spirituality, seeking to love (only) one another while the neighborhoods, the cities, the environment, and the world goes to hell. I'm not an "evangelical" any more, but this prophetic evangelical activism is one of the most promising developments in contemporary Christianity. Buy it. Read it. Give it away. Live it out.

In a day when the Heritage Foundation is working to reduce Christian social justice to acts of compassion and charity, while explicitly ignoring the broken systems that create injustice, the Evangelical community needs a biblically-rooted call to amplify the voices of people in poverty, on the margins or facing oppression - to re-member we are called to hurt with those who are hurting (1 Cor 12:26) - and to work together to bring systemic change in our communities. Rich in theology, Scripture, church history and moving stories, *Faith-Rooted Organizing* delivers the first must-read of 2014 for any Follower of Christ (or activists and organizers seeking to better understand what churches can bring to your efforts). I especially appreciate the notes Alexia writes to the next generation of leaders at the end of each chapter.

This is one of the best books I have ever read. There is no fluff, no pomp, just two down-to-earth human beings writing about their experiences organizing for social justice in churches and communities. Not only do they draw heavily on their own experience, but also on the Alinsky model, which is widely accepted (and used). They make tweaks here and there to create the faith-rooted model, which is adapted to be used in churches and other faith-based communities. Everything about this book is useful and wonderful: The success stories, the organizational strategies, motivational strategies, leadership instruction, use of language, everything you could possibly think of to organize for social justice is in this book. If you are a Christian and want to help people who are disadvantaged, I highly recommend "Faith-Rooted Organizing."

During the twentieth century, Evangelicalism removed itself from social justice related activities. Thankfully, we have gradually re-entered the realm of charity as our theology became less reactive and, slowly, are participating in community development. As our lives are becoming increasingly interconnected with the poor and as we learn to view our world from their disinherited positions, we are forced to recognize that the systems forming our society are unjust and in need of transformation. In this trajectory, Salvatierra and Heltzel seek to guide the Church in discerning the distinct ways our theology informs the tasks of organizing and advocating for justice. Faith-Rooted Organizing is in many ways written in conversation with Saul Alinsky's traditional organizing techniques, and is therefore a work of contextual missiology which insightfully critiques and affirms what the culture has already offered to the world of organizing (perhaps a modern day effort to transform the radical Saul into a redeemed Paul?). The best section of the book--thanks to their skill in addressing the subject in both its biblical and contemporary settings--is the author's exploration of shalom justice. Organizing must be directed toward some end. For Christians, that end is the biblical vision of shalom which characterizes the just systems and reconciled relationships of the Kingdom of God. Shalom is the marriage of "justice to peace and love" (34). As such, our methods for achieving justice must be consistent with our goals. Violence and self-interested power grabbing are not adequate Kingdom strategies for justice. Rather, we are to achieve transformation through creativity, relinquishing power to the "least of these," standing together as a community which embodies our yearnings for the broader world and by loving our enemies. Unfortunately, this is not an organizing text that can stand by itself. The strength of the book is its reconsideration of organizing tactics through the prism of the

Christian faith. However, precisely because it is a

reconsideration of power, it largely skips on providing basic how to's. For example, the authors mention "power mapping" in passing but do not equip the reader to power map before moving on to explore power from a Kingdom lens. Though some practical advice bleeds through their stories, the lack of concrete strategies is an unfortunate oversight that could have been easily corrected. That said, this is a fantastic book and is now essential reading for any Christian who wants to work with the oppressed to transform unjust power systems.

When authors do more than teach, encourage, or challenge, when they share deeply from personal experience both the bitter and the sweet, when they write from a loving desire to grow the capacities of all who commit to building a more beloved community, they inspire us once again to believe, to act, to become more at-one with our neighbors. I have recommended this book frequently to colleagues, neighbors, and family members. More now than ever, the silent screams for justice need to be heard and a response made with all the best that our roots in faith have fed us. It is time to bear better, sweeter fruit together.

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