

Every Tribe, Tongue, People, and Nation: The Future of Race Relations and Social Justice Implications for Today

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Abstract: This study introduces several ideological diagnoses of social injustice with their respective prescriptions, illustrates the extent of the problem as expressed in racial disunity, outlines the solution expressed in biblical eschatology, and examines the hermeneutic legitimacy of contemporary application of the Sermon on the Mount and of its future aspects and the destinies implied for its citizens. The latter is considered in light of the “every tribe” inclusiveness found in passages like Genesis 12:3b and Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 16:10, and 17:15. The resulting focus on human relationships and ethnic diversity in the kingdom helps us consider the implications of that diversity for the present-day church and its interactions with society.

Key words: Social justice, Ecclesiastical Approach, Statist Approach, Dominionism, Sermon on the Mount, inclusiveness, eschatology

Introduction

Jesus’ presentation of the “kingdom of the heavens” in Matthew 5-7 was particularly intended for first-century Jewish people to understand that internal righteousness and not simply external adherence to moral code was necessary to enter that kingdom. In addition to demonstrating this key deficiency on the part of his listeners, his Sermon on the Mount further offers a model for the character of kingdom members and the culture of the kingdom, and thus has contemporary

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applications, since believers during the church age have been transferred (positionally) “to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13).² Although that kingdom currently has no (other) earthly expression in this age, it will one day come to earth in literal fulfillment of God’s kingdom promises in physical manifestation (hence, Matthew’s term “kingdom of the heavens”), thus the applicability of the Sermon for the present day is strengthened by the future certainty of kingdom-promise fulfillment. If it is appropriate to understand the Sermon on the Mount as having contemporary implications for character and ethics in general (because of the kingdom citizenship component of church-age believers), then future aspects of the kingdom and of the two intertwining destinies (heavenly and earthly) show a model of God’s design for the future of human relations.

This study introduces several ideological diagnoses of social injustice with their respective prescriptions, illustrates the extent of the problem as expressed in racial disunity, outlines the solution expressed in biblical eschatology, and examines the hermeneutic legitimacy of contemporary application of the Sermon on the Mount and of its future aspects and the destinies implied for its citizens, especially in light of the “every tribe” inclusiveness found in passages like Genesis 12:3b and Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 16:10; and 17:15. The resulting focus on human relationships and ethnic diversity in the kingdom helps us consider the implications of that diversity for the present-day church and its interactions with society, particularly on the topics of race and unity, with a view to candid and robust dialogue as we together pursue God’s design for his church.

Three Ideological Models for Social Justice

An oft-repeated description of social justice suggests that it “entails a ‘redistribution’ of resources from those who have

² All Scripture quotations are from the NASB (1995).

‘unjustly’ gained them to those who justly deserve them.”³ Some might accept a less specific attribution, that “social justice is really the capacity to organize with others to accomplish ends that benefit the whole community.”⁴ Still, in popular usage the term seems to most generally imply, “among other things, equality of the burdens, the advantages, and the opportunities of citizenship...social justice is intimately related to the concept of equality, and that the violation of it is intimately related to the concept of inequality.”⁵

Model 1 – An Ecclesiastical Approach:

The Amillennial Economic Mean Between Individualism and Collectivism

Probably first coined by Jesuit philosopher Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio in 1843,⁶ the term *social justice* for him represented the

Constitutional justice of a society, the justice that defends right order in the constitutional arrangements of the society. Its task at that juncture of history, he believed, was to defend the inherited rights of the existing powers, the Church and the aristocracy, against the rising tide of democratic equality.⁷

Taparelli opposed the capitalism of John Locke and Adam Smith because “he saw liberalism as a product of the Protestant Reformation, which exalted private judgment over the divine

³ Joe R. Feagin, “Social Justice and Sociology: Agendas for the Twenty-First Century” in *Critical Strategies for Social Research*, edited by William K. Carroll (Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2004), 32.

⁴ Michael Novak, “Social Justice: Not What You Think It Is,” *The Heritage Foundation*, December 29, 2009, <https://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/report/social-justice-not-what-you-think-it>.

⁵ G. J. Papageorgiou, “Social Values and Social Justice,” *Economic Geography* 56, no. 2 (April 1980): 110-19.

⁶ Thomas Patrick Burke, “The Origins of Social Justice: Taparelli d’Azeglio” in *Modern Age* 52, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 98.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

authority of the Roman Catholic Church and thereby replaced the Catholic sense of community with an emphasis on the self-interest of the isolated individual.”⁸ Still, Taparelli’s was not an economic core.

Though building on Taparelli’s foundation, Pope Pius XI focused almost exclusively on the economic aspects of social justice, a term which soon came to represent “a new kind of virtue (or habit) necessary for post-agrarian societies.”⁹ From within this anti-individualistic stream of economic theory, Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*¹⁰ epitomized the social justice mandate for the Roman Catholic Church. The encyclical sought to address “that difficult problem of human relations called ‘the social question,’”¹¹ and along with Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *On the Condition of Workers*, proposed “a true Catholic social science.”¹² Quoting Leo XIII, Pius XI reaffirms that, the Church “strives not only to instruct the mind, but to regulate by her precepts the life and morals of individuals, and that ameliorates the condition of the workers through her numerous and beneficent institutions.”¹³

Pius XI combats the “twin rocks of shipwreck,”¹⁴ namely *individualism*, which he suggests is fostered when the social and collective aspects of property ownership are ignored, and *collectivism*, on the other hand, which thrives when personal property rights are minimized. To strike the necessary balance, he reminds the reader that, “there resides in Us the right and duty to pronounce with supreme authority upon social and economic matters.”¹⁵ In this Pius XI distinguishes the Catholic doctrine of social justice from its secular counterpart (socialism): because

⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁹ Novak, “Social Justice.”

¹⁰ Penned by Oswald von Nell-Bruening S.J.

¹¹ Pope Pius XI “*Quadragesimo Anno*” 1931, 2, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.

¹² Ibid., 20.

¹³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

“man is older than the State,”¹⁶ the state does not have the right to define or infringe upon property rights. Rather those authorities reside with the Church. Pius XI emphasizes that

the deposit of truth that God committed to Us and the grave duty of disseminating and interpreting the whole moral law, and of urging it in season and out of season, *bring under and subject to Our supreme jurisdiction not only social order but economic activities themselves.*¹⁷

The Church, by virtue of the cultural mandate, has jurisdiction beyond that of the state.

Pius XI asserted that not only was the state insufficient for handling such challenges, the free market also lacked the capacity to properly regulate society, as he made clear in stating that “right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching.”¹⁸ On the basis of natural law, then, neither the state, nor an entirely free market were fitted to govern society, but only the Church had divinely appropriated access and the mandate to provide the hermeneutic underpinnings necessary for the proper economic ordering of society. “Christian social philosophy, must be kept in mind regarding ownership and labor and their association together, and must be put into actual practice.”¹⁹

This practice and right ordering avoid the two great errors of individualism and the capitalism that fosters it, and collectivism and the brand of socialism leading to communism that solidifies it. Pius XI prescribes a kinder, gentler sort of socialism that “inclines toward and in a certain measure approaches the truths which Christian tradition has always held sacred,”²⁰ but he is careful not to prescribe socialism in its pure sense, warning that

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Ibid., 88.

¹⁹ Ibid., 110.

²⁰ Ibid., 113.

“Socialism, if it remains truly Socialism, even after it has yielded to truth and justice on the points which we have mentioned, cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church because its concept of society itself is utterly foreign to Christian truth.”²¹ Specifically, the deficiency is evident in that socialism “affirms that human association has been instituted for the sake of material advantage alone.”²² Consequently, Pius XI concludes that “no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist,”²³ and exhorts readers not to “permit the children of this world to appear wiser in their generation than we who by the Divine Goodness are the children of the light.”²⁴ The solution for inequality and oppression is to be found not in either economic system of capitalism nor socialism/communism, but in Christian truth as disseminated and interpreted by the Catholic Church.

Model 2 – The Statist Approach:

Collectivist Abolition of Free Trade as the Economic Messiah

In the Preface to the 1888 English edition of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Frederick Engels introduces the fundamental proposition of communism as follows:

That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which it is built up, and from that which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; That the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the

²¹ Ibid., 117.

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ Ibid., 120.

²⁴ Ibid., 146.

bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles.²⁵

For Marx and Engels, social justice (even though they do not use the term in the document, as it had not yet come into vogue) hinged on resolving class struggle, which meant reforming the economic engines of inequality, primarily, by eliminating distinctions through the implemented communist ideal. While socialism was not philosophically dissimilar from Marx's and Engels's communism, they viewed socialism as a middle-class enterprise and communism as a working-class effort. Thus, communism would be more efficacious in actually bringing about change.²⁶

Economics, and capitalism specifically, is asserted to be a catalyst for destructive societal forces. Marx and Engels posit a better economic model as the solution. Karl Polanyi asserted that “to allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and the natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.”²⁷ Feagin expresses four significant deficiencies in capitalist economies and societies.²⁸ Problem #1: Capitalism transfers wealth from the poor and working classes to the rich and affluent social classes: “in most countries great income and wealth inequalities create major related injustices, including sharp differentials in hunger, housing, life satisfaction, life expectancy, and political power.”²⁹ Problem #2: Capitalism (through the exploitation of transnational corporations) brings disruption and marginalization to many. Problem #3: Capitalism takes a heavy toll on the environment. Problem #4: Capitalism fosters racial and ethnic inequality and oppression, homophobia,

²⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Preface to the 1888 English Edition, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1, (Moscow, Russia: Progress Publishers, 1969, 98-137), 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Quoted in Feagin, “Social Justice and Sociology,” 29.

²⁸ Ibid., 30-32.

²⁹ Ibid., 30.

and other inequities. Racial divides are perceived as an economic problem, with economic solutions as the cure.

The specific problem diagnosed in the *Manifesto* is the systematic bourgeoisie abuse of the working class (proletariat) in “shameless, direct, brutal exploitation”³⁰ primarily through the “single unconscionable freedom – Free Trade.”³¹ Only the proletariat has the capability to end the ongoing economic cycle through revolution. The other classes—like the lower middle class—“decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry.”³² Marx and Engels viewed the lower middle class not as revolutionary enough to bring lasting change, but rather motivated in their own fight against the bourgeoisie “to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative...reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history.”³³ Only the proletariat has the capacity for effective revolution, for it is their labor that has been commodified as the capital which greases the economic wheels of a free market that benefits the bourgeoisie to the detriment of all else. As Marx and Engels seek to inspire the working class to revolution and a new economic model (communism), they prophecy that “the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”³⁴

One critical means for the resolution of class struggle is the abolition of private property, for communism “deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriations.”³⁵ In short, if anyone can own property, it will be the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie have always oppressed the proletariat by capitalizing the labor of the proletariat in order to get property. Since the proletariat rarely ever get property anyway, if there is no ownership of property at

³⁰ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 20.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

all, then the bourgeoisie cannot oppress the proletariat, and the proletariat have not lost anything, plus then they would be free from oppression.

Beyond the abolition of property, Marx and Engels want to abolish the family by replacing “home education with social.”³⁶ The refined educational model “seek[s] to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class.”³⁷ Ultimately, this protects proletariat children from being “transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.”³⁸ Further developments of communism include the abolition of national differences and nationalism (in favor of the partisanship of communism),³⁹ in seeking to eliminate oppression of the ruling class through ideas, religion is abolished: “The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.”⁴⁰ Eternal truths, religion, and morality are traded in as part of traditional, patriarchal, ruling class societal norms that must be removed if there is to be revolution suitable for installing lasting equality. Thus, if the working class unite (in the communist ideal), as prescribed, then “in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”⁴¹

Marx’s and Engels’s prescription of communism as the economic remedy for inequality and oppression demands that the state set boundaries and ultimately manage the ownership of property, effectually eliminating individualism. The Catholic response to that concept, from Leo XIII and Pius XI, is the assertion that the state could claim no right to take such sweeping oversight. Both the secular and the ecclesiastical, however, agreed that individualism was not a viable solution, and was in

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 25.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

fact a common enemy. These two models, Marx's and Engels's secular and the Catholic non-secular models, while sharing a mutual distaste for individualism, are rooted in competing views of human nature and of authority itself. These two models have pursued, to date, mutually exclusive political power in order to exact the kinds of societal evolution necessary to achieve their respective ends. The paths to social justice for these two models scarcely intersect, but they are remarkably intertwined in iterations of Liberation Theology.

Model 3 – The Liberation Theology Synthesis: Postmillennial Dominionism

Gustavo Gutiérrez is credited with originating the term Liberation Theology, in his 1971 publication, *Teología de la liberación*. Gutiérrez defines theology as “a critical reflection on the Church's presence and activity in the world, in the light of revelation,”⁴² adding,

Theology is reflection, a critical attitude. First comes the commitment to charity, to service. Theology comes "later." It is second. *The Church's pastoral action is not arrived at as a conclusion from theological premises*. Theology does not lead to pastoral activity, but is rather a reflection on it.⁴³

For Gutiérrez, theology is not the product of exegetical analysis, but rather is much more broadly construed—this in part reflects a logical expression of the Catholic hermeneutic of interpreting the Bible according to the tradition of the Church.⁴⁴ Theology is active, and a “variable understanding,”⁴⁵ addressing the needs of the moment.

In Gutiérrez's estimation, liberation has three components: “the political liberation of oppressed peoples and social classes; man's liberation in the course of history; and liberation from sin

⁴² Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Notes for a Theology of Liberation,” *Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (May 1970): 244.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 244-45 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 113.

⁴⁵ Gutiérrez, “Notes,” 244.

as condition of a life of communion of all men with the Lord.”⁴⁶ The mandate for liberation of the oppressed is rooted in a theological extrapolation of redemption by way of the Catholic Church-tradition hermeneutic. The “redemptive work embraces every dimension of human existence.”⁴⁷ Consequently, liberation becomes *part* of theology, with an “eschatological hope”⁴⁸ of social revolution.

The dominionist premise provides the means for achieving that eschatological hope, as Gutiérrez posits,

Mastering the earth, as Genesis bids him do, is a work of salvation, meant to produce its plenitude. To work, to transform this world, is to save...It means participating fully in the salvific process that affects the whole man.⁴⁹

Not only is Christ “the Saviour who, by liberating us from sin, liberates us from the very root of social injustice,”⁵⁰ but humanity, by way of the dominion mandate is co-participant in that salvific enterprise.

Inadequacy of the Three Models

Tracing these three streams through the lenses of Leo XIII and Pius XI, Marx and Engels, and Gutiérrez certainly constitutes no comprehensive analysis of the history of social justice (that would be far beyond the scope of this present work), but merely an *introduction of context for opposing foundations* of social justice in the contemporary Western mind. Further, this context-setting provides the helpful backdrop for the consideration of contemporary application of the Sermon on the Mount – a central theme of this project.

Still, these streams and their advocates were focused on equality in relation to economic underpinnings as governed either by the church, the state, or some combination of both. But each

⁴⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 255.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 256.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 257.

of these streams to date have proved deficient in their economic and political prescriptions, as they have not sufficiently addressed the root cause of the symptoms. Each of the three models diagnosed symptoms and prescribed solutions. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) asserted the faults of the extremes of individualism and collectivism, and prescribed an Aristotelian golden economic mean insured by the Church. Marxism asserted the evils of class struggle resulting from free trade and sought a statist economic control to extinguish any hint of oppression-inciting free trade. Liberation theology pinpointed the problem as failing to fulfill the dominion mandate and synthesized the RCC and Marxist prescriptions to seek a church-driven political revolution that would complete the liberation of the whole man. To this point, while encountering varying degrees of success, each of these prescriptions has failed to accomplish its stated goal, at least in part because the problems diagnosed were symptomatic and not causative. The root cause of injustice and oppression is neither economic nor political, but rather was rooted simply *in the devaluation of human life that naturally results from the spiritually bankrupt devaluing of the Creator*. With good reason Solomon asserted that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10).

The biblical record inextricably links the proper valuation of human life to the right perspective of and response to the Creator. Genesis 1:26-27 sets the linkage as the created origin of humanity and the image of God in humanity. Genesis 9:5-6 underscores the sacredness of human life based on that linkage. Romans 5:12 asserts the universal need and traces it back to Adam’s sin and the hereditary consequence for all of subsequent humanity, while 5:18 describes how God likewise provided for the resolution of that problem for all of humanity. John 3:16 and 12:32 explain how God has reached out to all humanity. God’s intention of delivering all of humanity is expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, and the universal accessibility to that deliverance is pronounced in Titus 2:11. Because of the love of God expressed and executed through his redemptive plan, Christians have a new ontological unity in Christ, explained in Ephesians 2:14-18. Consequently, as Galatians 6:10 expresses, believers are to prioritize brothers and

sisters in Christ, and *to do good to all*. That same love that God demonstrated for his created beings, believers are to show toward one another, as Philippians 2:1-11 indicates. Humanity is created in God's image, valued based on God's image in humans, saved because of God's grace, and expected to do good to one another as expressive and illustrative of his grace. Titus 3:1-7 lays out an application of this progression of thought: there is an ethical expectation (including showing consideration for all humanity), because once we were in need, and because of God's love for all, he saved us through Jesus Christ, making us heirs of eternal life, thus, there is an expectation based on our relationship to him, and because it is good for others:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men (Titus 3:1-8).

These passages are emblematic of the univocal biblical perspective that proper valuation of human life is rooted in proper valuation of the Creator, and that proper expression of that valuation in action cannot be unlinked from the epistemological premise that God has the right as the Creator to define reality and valuation itself—and that He has done so. Nor can orthodox expression of valuation in practice be unlinked from the metaphysical realities that God has revealed in Scripture. As John succinctly puts it, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates

his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).⁵¹ Position undergirds practice, and where there is faulty practice, there is neglect of positional truths.

A Case Study in Failure: Post-Civil War America and the Freedmen’s Bureau

For any who might opine that there is no contemporary need for resolution of events more than a century past, W. E. B. Dubois’s observations help to clarify the heartbreaking prominence of the “color line,” especially immediately following the Civil War. Dubois characterizes the era as representative of an ever-unasked question, “How does it feel to be a problem?”⁵² Dubois recognizes that during and from this time there was external perspective by those outside the black community that there was a problem to be resolved. Likewise, and perhaps consequently, there was internal perspective of individuals within the community that there was indeed a problem, and that problem, according to Dubois would create a painful rift for these men and women:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007; originally published 1903), 7.

Dubois understood this duality of oppositional cultures to create an unworkable situation in practice:

The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde – could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause...this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people, – has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.⁵³

Dubois measures this difficulty not as a momentary response to contemporary events, but rather as a deep seated consequence of a long enduring system of injustice and oppression. He observes in particular implications of the abuse of black women on the culture,

The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home.⁵⁴

Although the conditions that Dubois recounts were not swiftly developed, their contemporary import was undeniable and cut right to the very valuation of the black person in America. On the one hand, those outside the community viewed them as half-human, and thus undeserving of the privileges of personhood, and on the other hand, having no hope within the community, there was little to strive for. Dubois echoes the painful cries:

⁵³ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is vain; what need of education, since we must always cook and serve? And the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need of higher culture for half-men? Away with the black man's ballot, by force or fraud, – and behold the suicide of a race! Nevertheless, out of the evil came something of good, – the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes' social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress.”⁵⁵

While Dubois commendably finds some solace in that the pain of those times would help shape an approach to impacting culture, from a biblical perspective the wounds were simply abhorrent and incompatible with the divine expression of human valuation. It was not merely men and women who were violated: it was also their Creator.

Dubois further suggests that the

problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict.⁵⁶

The valuation problem that had caused rift between brothers and sisters had manifest unsurprisingly in a national rift that shipwrecked a country and its people.

But once that conflict formally ended, there were great questions to be answered. Dubois retold history from the perspective of those who now had no place in society, were not yet fully treated as fully human, but were no longer either treated simply as property. What should be done with thousands of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

newly emancipated people? Dubois describes the governmental process of dealing with the “problem:”

Thus did the United States government definitely assume charge of the emancipated Negro as the ward of the nation. It was a tremendous undertaking. Here at a stroke of the pen was erected a government of millions of men, – and not ordinary men either, but black men emasculated by a peculiarly complete system of slavery, centuries old; and now, suddenly, violently, they come into a new birthright, at a time of war and passion, in the midst of the stricken and embittered population of their former masters.⁵⁷

This new cultural birth was traumatic, and did not bring with it the resolution of the valuation problem.

Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation did not immediately provide its intended benefit. Dubois describes how the canyon grew between black and white post-Civil War, and how the government’s efforts to establish and administer the Freedmen’s Bureau was neither able to resolve some most basic problems, nor to ultimately quell enduring and growing racial tensions. As Dubois explains, the Bureau could do nothing other than fail:

In a time of perfect calm, amid willing neighbors and streaming wealth, the social uplifting of four million slaves to an assured and self-sustaining place in the body politic and economic would have been a herculean task; but when to the inherent difficulties of so delicate and nice a social operation were added the spite and hate of conflict, the hell of war; when suspicion and cruelty were rife, and gaunt Hunger wept beside Bereavement, – in such a case, the work of any instrument of social regeneration was in large part fore-doomed to failure.⁵⁸

Dubois’s concluding comment here illustrates the bigger reality in view; in the conditions symptomatic of a cursed and fallen creation, where the proper valuation of the Creator is not

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

in view, and consequently *there is no remaining basis for the proper valuation of human life*, it is unsurprising that any instrument of social regeneration would be met with failure.

It is evident that the momentous progress that was made with the Proclamation had been engaged, at least by Lincoln's words as "an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity...the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God."⁵⁹ That step of cultural progress was undertaken with the perspective of God as the Supreme Valuer, and thus the freeing of those He created *was* an act of justice. Still, that ontological acknowledgment did not change the hearts of men, nor their own individual perspectives on valuation. Dubois laments that

Slavery classed the black man and the ox together. And the Negro knew full well that, whatever their deeper convictions may have been, Southern men had fought with desperate energy to perpetuate this slavery under which the black masses, with half-articulate thought, had writhed and shivered.⁶⁰ So the cleft between the white and black South grew...it never should have been; it was as inevitable as its results were pitiable.⁶¹

Dubois reminds the reader that this was not merely a cultural phenomenon; *it was intensely personal*. Those that endured these times encountered dehumanizing torment to an incredible degree. Dubois reveals his own emotion at recounting the horrors, and explains with vivid clarity how both man and woman were scarred who lived through them:

It is doubly difficult to write of this period calmly, so intense was the feeling, so mighty the human passions that swayed and blinded men. Amid it all, two figures ever stand to typify that day to coming ages, – the one, a gray-haired gentleman, whose fathers

⁵⁹ Abraham Lincoln, "A Proclamation" January 1, 1863, viewed at <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>.

⁶⁰ Dubois, *Souls*, 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

had quit themselves like men, whose sons lay in nameless graves; who bowed to the evil of slavery because its abolition threatened untold ill to all; who stood at last, in the evening of life, a blighted, ruined form, with hate in his eyes; – and the other, a form hovering dark and mother-like, her awful face black with the mists of centuries, had aforesaid quailed at that white master’s command, had bent in love over the cradles of his sons and daughters, and closed in death the sunken eyes of his wife, – aye, too, at his behest had laid herself low to his lust, and borne a tawny man-child to the world, only to see her dark boy’s limbs scattered to the winds by midnight marauders riding after “cursed Niggers.” These were the saddest sights of that woful [*sic*] day; and no man clasped the hands of these two passing figures of the present-past; but, hating, they went to their long home, and, hating, their children’s children live today.⁶²

Although Dubois recognizes that the Freedmen’s Bureau saw success in the area of making education accessible (a victory that would have lasting impact), the Bureau was powerless to heal the scars Dubois exposes. Among other failures, the Bureau

failed to begin the establishment of good-will between ex-masters and freedmen, to guard its work wholly from paternalistic methods which discouraged self-reliance, and to carry out to any considerable extent its implied promises to furnish the freedmen with land.⁶³ Its successes were the result of hard work, supplemented by the aid of philanthropists and the eager striving of black men. Its failures were the result of bad local agents, the inherent difficulties of the work, and national neglect.⁶⁴

Dubois identifies particular failures as if they might one day be remedied for future efforts. But the biblicist might diagnose that those failures emanated from the same causative failures of every other economic and political enterprise designed to offset

⁶² Ibid., 26.

⁶³ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 29.

the symptoms of the spiritually dead human heart: while the policies changed, the hearts of men had not.

Despite its few successes, the numerous inadequacies of the Freedmen's Bureau illustrate the inherent deficiencies of governmental efforts to resolve deep-seated human problems. Whereas Leo XIII and Pius XI, Marx and Engels, and Gutiérrez proposed economic solutions that as of yet have not resolved the problem, post-Civil War conditions in America showed that governments simply are not equipped to address the issues that lead to the economic conditions that foster oppression. The problem is neither simply economic nor related to governance. The ongoing strife that Dubois exposed is rooted simply in how individuals view their Creator, themselves, and others.

In 1953 Dubois recognized that the color-line was symptomatic of an even greater problem:

I still think today as yesterday that the color-line is a great problem of this century. But today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and *that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race.*⁶⁵

Although Dubois does not diagnose the problem as related directly to valuation, when considering this tragic episode of history, interlocutors would benefit from seeing through the biblical lens, that all men being created equal is not the mere rhetoric of political calls to revolution, but is representative of the Divine valuation of all human life as originating in God and thus constituting only one race (Gen 1:27, 31), as bearing the image of God and thus bearing God-defined value (Gen 1:26-27, 9:6), as being reinforced in the prophetic hope of universal blessing covenanted by God to Abraham (Gen 12:3b), and in the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 208 (emphasis added).

eschatological assurance that God would purchase those to be blessed from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9).

Model 4 – The Matthew 5-7 Model and “Every Tribe” Inclusiveness

As Jesus began the public aspect of his earthly ministry, Matthew records him as proclaiming and saying, “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand” (Matt 4:17). He traveled throughout the cities and villages and proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 9:35) and was healing many, demonstrating the validity of his messianic claim (Luke 4:14-21). He acknowledges that part of his purpose for his sending was to accomplish that announcing of the kingdom (Luke 4:43). The Sermon on the Mount offers in ten sections principles related to the coming kingdom. In this message Jesus

- (1) outlines the coming rewards (beatitudes) of the kingdom in 5:1-12,
- (2) describes how one enters the kingdom in 5:13-20,
- (3) contrasts authentic, internal righteousness with insufficient external righteousness in 5:21-47,
- (4) underscores the standard – the perfection of God the Father in 5:48,
- (5) distinguishes between the pursuit and temporal rewards of external righteousness and the pursuit and eternal rewards of kingdom-quality righteousness in 6:1-18,
- (6) exhorts the pursuit of eternal rewards in 6:19-24,
- (7) encourages in 6:25-34 that in the pursuit of eternal reward there is present provision,
- (8) expounds in 7:1-14 the present character of kingdom-quality righteousness,
- (9) warns in 7:15-23 of the dangers of false fruit,
- (10) illustrates in 7:24-29 by contrast the wisdom of building on solid foundation versus building on sand.

In this Sermon is found a central and early portrait of the kingdom, and in this episode, Matthew records eight or nine direct mentions by Jesus of the kingdom, found in 5:3; 5:10; 5:19 (twice); 5:20; 6:10; 6:13 (in a textual variant); 6:33; and 7:21.

The 5:19 references relate to the abiding value of the law, with future implications extending to the eschatological messianic kingdom: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” In 5:20, Jesus first draws the explicit contrast between inauthentic appearances of righteousness and the internal righteousness that is necessary for entrance into the kingdom: “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” In 6:10, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, specifically to request that the kingdom of the heavens would come to earth as prophesied – a clear indication that it hadn’t yet come: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.” In a textual variant in the concluding portion of that same prayer,⁶⁶ Jesus models the request in 6:13, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]” (Matt 6:13). If authentic, this kingdom reference speaks of a present tense kingdom, but adds no earthly geographic implications to the revelation.

While the aforementioned passages (5:19; 5:20; 6:10; 6:13) give no specific indicators beyond a general futuristic idea of a coming earthly kingdom, the beatitudes-preamble of 5:3-12 is explicitly eschatological with only three exceptions. Six of the nine identify future blessings associated with current conditional responsibilities. They include being comforted (Matt 5:4),

⁶⁶ “Several late manuscripts (157 225 418) append a trinitarian ascription, ‘for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.’ The same expansion occurs also at the close of the Lord’s Prayer in the liturgy that is traditionally ascribed to St. John Chrysostom. The absence of any ascription [is evident] in early and important representatives of the Alexandrian (Ⲁ B), the Western (D and most of the Old Latin), and other (*f*) types of text...” (Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1994), 14).

inheriting the earth (Matt 5:5), being satisfied (Matt 5:6), receiving mercy (Matt 5:7), seeing God (Matt 5:8), and being called sons of God (Matt 5:9). The final of the beatitudes uses no verb, though it is still future looking, indicating the greatness of reward in heaven.

The first of the beatitudes, on the other hand, in 5:3, speaks of a presently held blessing, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is (ἐστίν) the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). The penultimate beatitude likewise uses the same present tense phrasing in 5:10, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is (ἐστίν) the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). While Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom as *being near* (ἤγγικεν) (Matt 4:17), He presented its possession as *a current reality*. How one understands the Author’s usage of the present tense impacts the reader’s understanding of social implications of the Sermon on the Mount.

On this context, Chafer illustrates what Hullinger refers to as the *kingdom view* interpretation of the Sermon:⁶⁷

In this manifesto the King declares the essential character of the kingdom, the conduct which will be required in the kingdom, and the directions of entrance into the kingdom...When His kingdom was rejected and its realization delayed until the return of the King, the application of all Scripture which conditions life in the kingdom was delayed as well.⁶⁸

While through this lens the Sermon has secondary applications for today, the conditions are all future looking. In favor of a *disciple ethic* interpretation of the Sermon, Hullinger suggests

⁶⁷ Jerry Hullinger, “Is There a ‘Dispensational’ Approach to the Sermon on the Mount?” 1024 Project, 2/17/2014, <https://1024project.com/2014/02/17/is-there-a-dispensational-approach-to-the-sermon-on-the-mount/>.

⁶⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 Volumes (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:177-178.

it could be successfully argued that the invitation at the end of the sermon regarding the narrow road is not an invitation to salvation as it is often presented, but rather, an invitation to Jesus' disciples to embrace the ethic he has expounded.⁶⁹

Hullinger's assertion is not incompatible with Chafer's future-fulfillment understanding and it complements Ryrie's assertion that all of the Sermon "has relevance for today."⁷⁰ Although the future-looking beatitudes are evidence that Chafer is on the right theological track, the two that specifically address the kingdom in present tense terms indicate that there is more in view than simply the future physical arrival of the King in His kingdom.

George Eldon Ladd draws a similar conclusion in his assertion that "The Word of God *does* say that the Kingdom of God is a present spiritual reality,"⁷¹ but Ladd goes too far in assigning geography to that present reality as "an inner spiritual redemptive blessing...present and at work in the world."⁷² Ladd's already-not-yet theology is grounded in a geographically present (even if spiritual) manifestation of the kingdom within each believing individual. By contrast, Paul's instruction on the kingdom in the current age explicitly indicates different geographic parameters, as he reveals that God has "transferred *us* to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:17). It is evident that the kingdom does not change its location to the inner man, but rather the new creature is positionally transferred to the kingdom, hence, Paul's exhortation to

...keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with

⁶⁹ Hullinger, "Dispensational Approach."

⁷⁰ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1969), 108.

⁷¹ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col 3:1–4).

D. Martin Lloyd Jones takes Ladd’s geographical leap to its logical conclusion when he asserts that

the kingdom of God is in every true Christian. He reigns in the Church when she acknowledges Him truly. The kingdom has come, the kingdom is coming, the kingdom is yet to come. Now we must always bear that in mind. Whenever Christ is enthroned as King, the kingdom of God is come, so that, while we cannot say that He is ruling over all in the world at the present time, He is certainly ruling in that way in the hearts and lives of all His people.⁷³

If Christ is presently ruling on the throne, as is asserted by already-not-yet, amillennial, and postmillennial models, then the kingdom is here and should be expected to generate kingdom results.

Gentry and Wellum directly connect the biblical covenants to God’s plan for kingdom results in the form of social justice, characterizing Israel, “As a community in covenant relationship to Yahweh, they are called to mirror to the world the character of Yahweh in terms of social justice and to be a vehicle of blessing and salvation to the nations.”⁷⁴ After Israel’s failure to fulfill that calling, “The Lord will establish Zion as the people/place where all nations will seek his instruction for social justice.”⁷⁵ Yet even after return from exile, “the failure to practice social justice remains a central problem.”⁷⁶ Despite these failings, “both social justice and faithful loyal love are expressions of the character of Yahweh and of conduct expected in the covenant community where Yahweh is king,”⁷⁷ and thus “a coming Davidic king...will

⁷³ D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 16.

⁷⁴ Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 436.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 582.

perfectly represent the Lord by implementing social justice.”⁷⁸ That kingdom is manifest in the current church:

The *newness* of the church is a redemptive-historical newness, rooted in the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. In him, all of the previous covenants, which in type, shadow and prophetic announcement anticipated and foreshadowed him have now come to their *telos*.⁷⁹

The assertions by Gentry and Wellum underscore the practical appeal of already-not-yet, postmillennial, and amillennial interpretations of the Sermon. The ethical implications are further illustrated by David Jones’s kingdom-now assertion that, “As the kingdom of God grows, then the gospel gradually counteracts and corrects the effects of sin in the world through the process of restoration and reconciliation...the gospel is no less comprehensive than the fall.”⁸⁰ The realized eschatology interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount, with kingdom present both in time and space provide a compelling ethical foundation for contemporary social justice engagement and lend support to the economic and political ideologies espoused by Leo XIII and Pius XI, and Gutiérrez, and even Marx and Engels (atheism notwithstanding).

On the other hand, reading the Sermon and other kingdom passages of Matthew through the normative literal grammatical historical hermeneutic (LGH) helps the reader understand as did Toussaint, that, “The kingdom exists in the intercalation only in the sense that the sons of the kingdom are present. But strictly speaking the kingdom of the heavens...refers to the prophesied and coming kingdom on earth.”⁸¹ The exhortation of 6:33 is an important echo of 5:3 and 5:10, to that end, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 643.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 685.

⁸⁰ David Jones, *Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville: TN, B&H Academic, 2013), 64.

⁸¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 172.

added to you” (Matt 6:33). While there is a future tense promise (προσθεθήσεται), there is a present tense responsibility (ζητεῖτε). This supports the model Chafer and Ryrie advocated, and brings to focus an important principle: there is no theological necessity for realized eschatology in order to justify a vibrant sense of contemporary responsibility. The mandate to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness has nothing whatsoever with the timing of the actual coming of the kingdom. Jesus’ listeners were to be seeking that kingdom and its characteristic righteousness even when the kingdom wasn’t present in any fulfillment sense. Likewise, the Sermon’s final kingdom reference in 7:21 emphasizes the present tense responsibility (ποιῶν) for a future entering into (εἰσελεύσεται) the kingdom, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” The one doing his will in the present will enter the kingdom at some future point in time.

Conclusion

While realized eschatology models offer easy motivation for social justice because of their integral assertions that the kingdom is already here, the LGH derived understanding that eschatology has not been realized does not at all minimize present responsibility. In fact, such a perspective makes the responsibility perhaps even clearer. Rather than asserting some mystery form of the kingdom and claiming a tangible manifestation when there simply isn’t any, the mere fact that believers are actually citizens of a not-yet-here kingdom and that they are *told* to seek first the righteousness of that kingdom provides an explicit higher-order mandate.

When that kingdom is physically relocated to earth, then the promise of universal blessing through Abraham, given in Genesis 12:3b will be tangible reality. When that kingdom is physically relocated to earth, we will behold “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9). While this is a heavenly multitude in Revelation 7:9, their geography changes in Revelation 19. God’s original promise to Abraham and his covenant program expressed through the subsequent covenants is brought to

fruition in the reign of Jesus Christ at the arrival of his kingdom of the heavens *on earth* (hence, Matthew's verbiage), and the ushering in of eternity that soon follows.

If that certain kingdom future reflects an enduring unity of nation, tribe, people, and tongue, then in the present seeking the kingdom and its righteousness, we are building houses on the rock—a present activity with enduring result. If one enduring condition (even though not in any way brought on by our efforts) includes the unity of nation, tribe, people, and tongue, then our present activity should be characterized by things that reflect that eschatological progress. Biblical ethics in the church age corroborate this concept as believers are to honor all people (1 Pet 2:17), treating others as worthy of more honor than themselves (Phil 2:1-11). Believers are to do good to all, not only of the household of faith, though especially to those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Believers are “to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (Titus 3:2).

It is worth noting that among the reasons Paul offers for that last mandate, is that *we too were formerly enslaved* (Titus 3:3). Certainly, the enslavement to which Paul refers is not the kind which Dubois laments, but enslavement of any human derivation keeps us from living as our Creator designed. Should we not demonstrate the newness of thinking exemplified by Paul when he referred to Onesimus as no longer a slave, but a beloved brother (Phlm 16)? Paul expresses present-tense kingdom love when he exhorts Philemon to “accept [Onesimus] as me” (Phlm 17) and in so doing Philemon would be refreshing Paul's heart in Christ (Phlm 20).

If believers are “willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen,”⁸² even continually waging war “to maintain this privilege,”⁸³ as Dubois asserts, then how can they claim to be imitating Paul as he imitates Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1)? Are such injustices capable of being met with the ideologies of Marx and Engels, Leo XIII and Pius XI, and Gutiérrez? Or might we

⁸² Dubois, *Souls*, 208.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

recognize that Christ mandated, in the Sermon on the Mount, a future-looking perspective that had clear present-day applications? Might we fix our gaze on what Paul highlights, in Philippians 2:1-11, the example of Jesus Christ as modeling both the future-focus and the right-now striving? We do not need to manipulate hermeneutic methods, contrive theological fictions, nor seek economic and political saviors in order to advocate for a strong commitment to social justice (as defined by the Creator). While the particulars of *how* to best express and apply that commitment might be open to debate, that the Bible requires such a commitment in this present age of those who would follow Jesus is not.