



# JOURNAL

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# The Journal of Ministry & Theology

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## *From the Editor's Desk*

Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure once again to devote this spring issue of the JMAT to the papers that were presented at the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) by traditional dispensationalists from across the country hosted by Calvary University, in Kansas City, MO. This year's theme covered the topic: Dispensationalism and Social Justice. These articles will enrich your mind and soul. Because of the importance of the topic and the amount of quality papers presented, the JMAT will run more of the CDH papers from this meeting in our fall 2020 issue.

The website for the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) can be found here: <https://dispensationalcouncil.org/>. It has a wealth of resources and news of upcoming conferences.

As we were working on this issue of the JMAT in early March we were unaware what life and ministry would look like in only a few short weeks. Like you, I am working on this piece at home at my new "office", a corner of my dining room table. During this unprecedented time priorities have shifted, life is uncertain, sickness and even death are real possibilities. We are practicing social distancing, wearing masks, staying home and missing one another. Living like this has driven me to Ps 46:1-2:

God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change  
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea (NASB)

At this most unique time we at the JMAT find our refuge in God and still seek to serve our Savior, and you, our reader. I look forward to hearing from you as you profit and enjoy this issue of the JMAT.



Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.  
Lead Editor

## **Ἐν ἀρχῇ with Mike Stallard, PhD, Executive Director for the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics**

Dr. Mark McGinniss

It was my pleasure to share a discussion that Mike and I had about this past year's CDH Conference hosted at Calvary University in Kansas City, MO, September 18-19, 2019.

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**MARK:** What was the reason that the CDH chose social justice and race as its theme for 2019? What were you hoping to accomplish?

**MIKE:** The Steering Committee gravitated to this issue for several reasons. First, it is a major emphasis among evangelicals. In fact, social justice and race have been growing as a concern for decades among those who claim to be born-again believers, especially the younger generations.

Second, my own personal thoughts move in that direction due to my passion for urban outreach and my work for the Friends of Israel. I consider anti-Semitism to be the number one social justice issue in the world. We must stand against such evil thinking that has come to affect our theology. That is why I did my own paper for the Council on anti-Semitism and Palestinian Liberation Theology.

Third, I was in a debate in this area over two decades ago. It was time, in my opinion, to see where more traditional dispensationalists line up on this issue. As I suspected, we were all over the map on the question. I do not believe there is a consensus on some of the specific issues. We need to keep talking to one another about these things.

**MARK:** What are a few contributions that dispensationalism can make to the conversation concerning social justice?

**MIKE:** First, I think most of us came to the conclusion that we preferred the term “biblical justice” to “social justice” to talk about the issues. The term “social justice” has been hijacked by the far left in political discourse and now carries with it a lot of baggage that may or may not fit into our theology based on the particular issue being discussed. Consequently, it is much more productive to view the issues in biblical perspective with biblical language rather than use the language of modern socialization.

Second, I think dispensationalists help the church to see that the Great Commission is still the major focus of biblical ministry, although we certainly believe we should love people in appropriate social engagement along biblical lines along the way. Reaching and teaching is still at the heart of a Christian’s mission in the world.

Third, I think dispensationalism helps to prevent Christian social justice warriors from stealing the doctrine of the kingdom from us. Much of the language we hear on that side sounds like rehashed postmillennial visions or over-the-top inaugurated eschatology that keeps us from the proper balance of focusing on the future as one key way to live in the present (see 1 Peter 1:13 in context). We need to make sure that the social justice focus of today does not stifle our biblical eschatology.

**MARK:** Based on the papers presented, how would you like to see the church respond to the issue of social justice?

**MIKE:** First, the articles covered the whole range of biblical literature. I was pleased that many Old Testament sections were covered including Genesis, the Torah, and the entire Old Testament. We also had many New Testament presentations as well as theological formulations. In addition, some church history perspectives emerged. The wide range should be duplicated to some degree in church ministry, especially in pastoral preaching and teaching. No part of the Bible should escape our attention as we apply God’s revelation to our lives on the pertinent areas. While dispensationalists do not believe the Old Testament is a rule of life for church saints, we do believe it is a treasure trove of wisdom application for issues that we face. Second, it seems to me that aggressive evangelism and church

planting should be part of our thinking and practice. At least two articles addressed missions and the gospel directly while many others touched upon it in relation to other issues. Invariably, social changes occur in the lives of most people who come to faith in Christ and get involved in strong, viable local churches.

Second, dispensationalists should not be afraid to focus on sound doctrine. We don't argue the finer points of the panorama of the ages to win arguments but to understand the whole counsel of God and create a complete Christian worldview by which we live. Our discussions helped us to understand that doctrinal formulations are still important while we press upon the issues of biblical justice in real life.

Third, we should not be afraid to do ministries of compassion. Almost all of us support this idea. There are disagreements about whether the impetus ought to be for individual believers or for local churches, what the priority list is for compassion ministries, etc. It is my judgment that ministries of compassion should not be just for the sake of outreach (although that is quite natural) but also because all people are made in the image of God and worth pursuing as whole individuals. Also the love ethic is taught in every dispensation. Dispensationalists must be known for their love for people in evangelism, sound doctrine, and caring ministries.

Fourth, dispensationalists must remain in the forefront in taking a stand against anti-Semitism in the world as we affirm our doctrinal commitment to a national future for Israel. This correlates well with our dispensational belief in Zionism and our love for the Jewish people.

**MARK:** What is the theme, dates and location for the 2020 CDH?

**MIKE:** For 2020, we are doing a follow-up to the 2019 discussions. The theme is "Dispensationalism, Politics, and Culture," an interesting topic in a volatile election year. The

dates for this year's Council are September 16-17, 2020.<sup>1</sup> The Council will be held at the **Crowne Plaza Hotel Conference Center, Claymont, Delaware (Philadelphia Area)**

**MARK:** I would like to thank Mike for sharing the background to these articles. I know our readers will have a deeper appreciation as they delve into these timely and much needed resources for the church.

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<sup>1</sup> COVID Update: **We are still planning to have the conference. If anything changes due to restrictions caused by the coronavirus, you can find information on the Council website at [dispensationalcouncil.org](http://dispensationalcouncil.org).**

# Polishing Brass on a Sinking Ship: Toward a Traditional Dispensationalist Philosophy of the Church and Cultural Engagement

Scott Aniol

**Abstract:** Despite the rhetorical extremes of some dispensationalists, dispensational premillennialism does not necessitate withdrawal from cultural engagement; rather, it actually provides a theological basis for equipping Christians as they are active in society. After exploring the underlying rationale for common portrayals of traditional dispensationalism as culturally impotent and briefly summarizing the alternative evangelical philosophy of cultural transformationalism, the paper will present a traditional dispensational philosophy of the church and cultural engagement that resembles something like Reformed Two Kingdom theology and provides a very practical framework for preventing churches from losing their biblical mission while at the same time disciplining Christians to actively engage in cultural endeavors.

Key Words: Dispensationalism, cultural engagement, Two Kingdom Theology, church, Holy Spirit

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## Portrayals of Dispensationalists as Culturally Impotent

**D**ispensational premillennialists have long been charged with cultural retreat, characterized by J. Vernon McGee's infamous question to his radio audience, "Do you polish

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brass on a sinking ship?”<sup>2</sup> Dispensationalism has often been criticized as culturally impotent since the early days of its development. Historically, this criticism came from liberal social gospel advocates,<sup>3</sup> but it also came from theological conservatives. For example, an 1879 *Lutheran Quarterly* article claimed that premillennialists who deny “that Christ is enthroned, or that his kingdom is established, or that his church, with the Holy Spirit’s energy, is to convert the world, and asserting that the world will wax worse and worse until the second advent” have “such a gloomy view of things, and give such little encouragement for hearty labor.”<sup>4</sup> A later 1882 article suggested that an “evil fruit” of premillennialism was that “it takes away the very highest incentives to labor for the conversion of the world.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in 1958,<sup>6</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher wrote, “By its heightened supernaturalism, dispensationalism deliberately widened the gulf between Christianity and its environment, thus at once protecting its own faith and reducing the possibility of effective Christian influence on thought and society,”<sup>7</sup> and N. C. Kraus asserted that dispensationalism was open “to the charge of escapism and obscurantism.”<sup>8</sup> In 1972, David O. Moberg claimed that premillennialism “played a part in the Great Reversal that made

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Gary North, *Rapture Fever: Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), 100.

<sup>3</sup> “[Pessimistic belief in supernatural forces of cultural evil] will be confined to narrow circles, mostly of premillennialists” (Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1922], 86).

<sup>4</sup> C. A. Briggs, “Origin and History of Premillennialism,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (April 1879): 241, 244–45.

<sup>5</sup> J. I. Miller and A. M. Staunton, “Practical Objections to Chiliasm,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (April 1882): 161.

<sup>6</sup> Fewer examples can be found in the early twentieth-century, likely due to the World Wars, when the premillennialists predictions “came true.”

<sup>7</sup> Lefferts A. Loetscher, “Foreword,” in *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development*, by C. Norman Kraus (Richmond, VA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958), 7.

<sup>8</sup> N. C. Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, VA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958), 136.

evangelicals become aloof from active social involvement,”<sup>9</sup> and in 1979, Timothy Weber argued that [premillennialism] “broke the spirit of social concern which had played such a prominent role in early evangelicalism.”<sup>10</sup>

Complaints about the impact of dispensationalism on cultural engagement reached a climax with the rise of New Evangelicalism in the 1940s and 1950s. New Evangelicals tied their criticism of fundamentalists’ lack of attention to social matters directly to fundamentalism’s dispensationalism.<sup>11</sup> As Marsden notes, “Although the millenarian movement and the anti-modernist movement were by no means co-extensive, dispensationalism was nevertheless the most distinctive intellectual product of emerging fundamentalism and is the best indicator of one side of its basic assumptions.”<sup>12</sup> This was at the

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<sup>9</sup> David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 37. This volume was originally published in 1972 with the title *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott).

<sup>10</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 183.

<sup>11</sup> Russell Moore traces this development favorably in *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004). For examples of fundamentalist evaluation of this point, see Preston Mayes, “Fundamentalism and Social Involvement,” *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 29–64; Larry Oats, “Dispensationalism: A Basis for Ecclesiastical Separation,” *Maranatha Baptist Seminary Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 72–103; Mark Sidwell, “Fundamentalism and Cultural Engagement: The Historical Context” (Unpublished paper presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, 2015); Mark A. Snoeberger, “A Tale of Two Kingdoms: The Struggle for the Spirituality of the Church and the Genius of the Dispensational System,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 19 (2014): 53–71; Snoeberger, “Where’s the Love?: Understanding the Marginalization of Dispensational Theology” (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 44. Interestingly, as Marsden notes, the fundamentalism of the early twentieth-century included some who desired to “preserve Christian civilization” or transform culture; yet by the mid-twentieth-century dispensational premillennialism, along

core of Carl F. H. Henry's complaint in his 1947 *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* that fundamentalists lacked a necessary concern for social action, which he suggested resulted from dispensationalism's belief that the church in this age should be concerned "only with 'calling out' believers."<sup>13</sup> Henry indicated a similar sentiment later in his 1957 *Christian Personal Ethics*, in which he argued that dispensational theology "evaporates the present-day relevance of much of the ethics of Jesus."<sup>14</sup> He claimed that a so-called "postponement theory" of the kingdom of God that saw its coming as only future prevented fundamentalism from recognizing the church's responsibility toward society. Rather, Henry advocated for an "already/not yet" realized eschatology that rejected both postmillennial social gospel and premillennial social disengagement in affirming that "the kingdom is here, and that it is not here."<sup>15</sup>

Harold Ockenga similarly explained that New Evangelicalism differs from Fundamentalism "in its willingness to handle the social problems which the Fundamentalists evaded. . . . There need be no disagreement between the personal gospel and the social gospel."<sup>16</sup> He complained that dispensational fundamentalism "believed that conditions would grow worse and worse so that until Christ came again, the only effective application of the gospel could be to the individual."<sup>17</sup> Richard Quebedeaux later described fundamentalism "with its

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with its accompanying views regarding cultural engagement, largely dominated fundamentalism. See also Oats, "Dispensationalism: A Basis for Ecclesiastical Separation."

<sup>13</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Originally published in 1947, repr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 550–51.

<sup>15</sup> Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 48.

<sup>16</sup> Harold J. Ockenga, "Press Release on 'The New Evangelicalism,'" in *Be Ye Holy: The Call to Christian Separation*, by Fred Moritz (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1994), 117–18.

<sup>17</sup> Ockenga, "From Fundamentalism, Through New Evangelicalism, to Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 43.

dispensational pessimism about the human situation” as having “nothing to offer” culture.<sup>18</sup> Even D. A. Carson describes the “fundamentalist option” as one that “tended to withdraw from serious engagement with the broader culture,”<sup>19</sup> and Andy Crouch characterizes the fundamentalist posture as “condemning culture.”<sup>20</sup>

Ironically, the emergence of progressive dispensationalism came partially as a result of similar embarrassment over what figures such as Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising considered to be traditional dispensationalism’s lack of social engagement. Blaising and Bock argue that the church does have a responsibility to engage culture since “the church is a manifestation of the future kingdom.”<sup>21</sup> This understanding “gives the church a basis for an evangelical participation in the political and social affairs of this world”<sup>22</sup> that, in their view, it would not otherwise have.

Similar criticisms have appeared more recently. In 1997, Joel Carpenter described fundamentalism’s “premillennialist, futurist, dispensational theology” as an “alarmist, conspiratorial, and alienated outlook.”<sup>23</sup> Likewise, in his 2007 monograph, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel, and the Church*, Stephen Sizer summarizes the general sentiment of dispensationalism and culture:

Sadly, the mistaken idea of a secret rapture has generated a lot of bad theology. It is probably the reason why many Christians don’t seem to care about climate change or about

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974), 25.

<sup>19</sup> D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 209.

<sup>20</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 84–85.

<sup>21</sup> Darrell L. Bock and Craig Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), 286.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>23</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 249.

preserving diminishing supplies of natural resources. They are similarly not worried about the national debt, nuclear war, or world poverty, because they hope to be raptured to heaven and avoid suffering the consequences of the coming global holocaust.<sup>24</sup>

### **Theological Foundation of Cultural Transformationalism**

In contrast to what many evangelicals considered the “Christ Against Culture”<sup>25</sup> posture of traditional dispensationalists, the dominant perspective that has emerged and even come to be described by Russell Moore as “evangelical consensus” is cultural transformationalism, often described as Neo-Kuyperianism or Neo-Calvinism.<sup>26</sup> Although this perspective has characterized different traditions and has taken a variety of forms, several key underlying theological ideas remain consistent. As Moore notes, “Evangelical theology has emerged with a near consensus on the relationship between the kingdom and the church, along with remarkably similar concepts of how the church should relate to the world in the present age.”<sup>27</sup>

First cultural transformationalism is rooted in at least some form of “already/not yet” inaugurated eschatology. As Moore points out, this does not mean that all evangelicals agree on every aspect of eschatology but that most evangelicals at least believe that the church “maintains some continuity with Israel as the

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Sizer, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel, and the Church* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 136–37.

<sup>25</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951). While the taxonomy H. Richard Niebuhr presented in *Christ and Culture* is considerably limited in these discussions, his basic language and categories nonetheless remain helpful.

<sup>26</sup> Popular defenses of the transformationalist philosophy include Cornelius J. Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Michael Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 131.

people of God,” is “a new stage in the progress of redemption, brought about by the eschatological nature of the coming of Christ,” is “an initial manifestation of the kingdom,” and is “the focal point in the present age of the inaugurated reign of Christ as Davidic Messiah.”<sup>28</sup> As noted above, new evangelicals found “already/not yet” eschatology to be the necessary basis for early justification of their philosophy of cultural engagement. Important to note here is that Moore demonstrates that these beliefs are held by most evangelical covenantalists *and* progressive dispensationalists alike.

Second, evangelical transformationalism is based in the idea that God intends to redeem, not just elect individuals, but all creation, at least in part during the present age. “The Christian message,” Henry argued, “aims at a re-created society.”<sup>29</sup> Moore notes,

Just as Henry called for an “already/not yet” model of the kingdom of God that could transcend biblically the reductionistic debates that hinder the neo-evangelical hope for an engaged evangelical movement, he also led the way in calling for a full-orbed doctrine of salvation that concentrated the Christian focus on a world-and-life view that embraced all of life.<sup>30</sup>

Transformationalism’s philosophy of culture engagement is centered in soteriology, and thus language of cultural “redemption” is at its heart.

Third, transformationalism derives from the belief that God’s mission and the church’s mission are one and the same. Moore explains, “If the kingdom is to be understood as having a present reality, and that reality is essentially soteriological, then the kingdom agenda of evangelical theology must focus on the biblical fulcrum of these eschatological, salvific blessings: the church.”<sup>31</sup> The so-called *missio Dei*, the idea that God is a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>29</sup> Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 129.

sending God who desires to redeem all creation, is the basis for understanding the church's mission in transformationalist thinking. In essence, the Great Commission is simply a continuation for the present age of what they call the "cultural mandate" of Gen 1:28.<sup>32</sup> This is often framed in language of "Creation-Fall-Redemption," a description of both God's mission in history and the church's mission in culture. Christ is presently ruling all things as King, they argue, and it is part of the mission of the church to extend that rule into all spheres of society. They love to quote Abraham Kuyper's well-known statement, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"<sup>33</sup> in support of their view. Transformationalist Albert Wolters<sup>34</sup> argues, "Mankind, as God's representatives on earth, carry on where God left off."<sup>35</sup> He claims that the church's cultural production will climax one day in "a new heaven and a new earth" that will maintain an "essential continuity with our experience now."<sup>36</sup>

As such, cultural transformationalism insists that "the church *qua* church must engage the social and political structures because the church must counter the flawed assumptions of the world."<sup>37</sup> Because evangelical transformationalists believe the church to be an initial manifestation of the kingdom, they see a distinctive social mandate as inherent in the church's mission. Furthermore, transformationalists tend to minimize any distinction between the mission of the church as a gathered, organized institution and individual Christians in society.

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<sup>32</sup> See Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2015), 84.

<sup>33</sup> Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488 (emphasis original).

<sup>34</sup> Moore quotes Wolters approvingly in *The Kingdom of Christ*, 244n214.

<sup>35</sup> Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 139.

## A Traditional Dispensational Philosophy of the Church and Cultural Engagement

Having presented a brief survey of criticism of traditional dispensationalists as culturally disengaged and a description of the alternative transformationalist perspective, I will now sketch an approach to cultural engagement that is rooted in core ideas at the heart of traditional dispensationalism. I use the term “traditional” dispensationalism here deliberately, to distinguish this set of beliefs from those of progressive dispensationalism, for reasons apparent above.

The only traditional dispensationalist to my knowledge that has offered a fully robust philosophy of cultural engagement tied directly to dispensational tenets is Charles Ryrie. Ryrie delivered a series of lectures on social ethics at Grace Theological Seminary in 1976, which were published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* the following year.<sup>38</sup> Ryrie expanded upon these lectures in his 1982 book, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility*,<sup>39</sup> later republished in 2008 as *The Christian and Social Responsibility*.<sup>40</sup> However, both Alva J. McClain and Michael J. Vlach also explicitly address the issue in their respective treatises on the kingdom of God.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Rolland McCune responds to the New Evangelical transformationalist perspective from within his

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part I: Theological Perspectives on Social Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 533 (January 1977): 33–44; Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part II: Old Testament Perspectives on Social Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 534 (April 1977): 114–22; Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part III: Christ’s Teachings on Social Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 535 (July 1977): 215–27; Ryrie, “Perspectives on Social Ethics, Part IV: Apostolic Perspectives on Social Ethics,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 536 (October 1977): 314–28.

<sup>39</sup> Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Ryrie, *The Christian and Social Responsibility* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959); Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017).



traditional dispensational framework in *Promise Unfulfilled*,<sup>42</sup> and he articulates several key principles for a dispensational philosophy of culture in his three volume *Systematic Theology*.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Mark Snoeberger has recently treated the matter from several different perspectives,<sup>44</sup> suggesting that a philosophy for cultural engagement that avoids both the extremes of cultural withdrawal and cultural transformationalism “has as its greatest potentiality for biblical development the fertile soil of traditional dispensational thought.”<sup>45</sup> It is from these and others who share core beliefs that I will draw in summarizing the implications of traditional dispensational thought on philosophy of cultural engagement.

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<sup>42</sup> Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God and Angels* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009); McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 2: The Doctrines of Man, Sin, Christ, and the Holy Spirit* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Snoeberger, “Noetic Sin, Neutrality, and Contextualization: How Culture Receives the Gospel,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 345–78; Snoeberger, “D. A. Carson’s Christ and Culture Revisited: A Reflection and a Response,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 13 (2008): 93–107; Snoeberger, “History, Ecclesiology, and Mission, Or, Are We Missing Some Options Here?” (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2010), <http://www.dbts.edu/pdf/macp/2010/Snoeberger,%20History%20Ecclesiology%20and%20Mission.pdf>; Snoeberger, “Where’s the Love?” Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2012, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NcRScdP7v1mtxWNYs1gwCtcE0ZsVcPJ4/view>; Snoeberger, “A Tale of Two Kingdoms,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 19 (2014): 53–71.

<sup>45</sup> Snoeberger, “History, Ecclesiology, and Mission,” 10–11.

## *Two Kingdoms*

First, the traditional dispensationalist belief that “kingdom” language in Scripture takes two distinct forms within God’s plan in history impacts a dispensational theology of culture.<sup>46</sup> There is one clear sense in which the Bible refers to a kingdom that is eternal (e.g., Ps 145:13) and universal in scope (e.g., Ps 103:19). On the other hand, there is another clear sense in which the Bible describes a kingdom that is entirely future (e.g., Dan 2:44) and localized (e.g., Isa 24:23). This reveals what McClain calls “two kingdoms” over which God rules and accomplishes his purposes on earth.<sup>47</sup> The first is the “universal kingdom,” God’s sovereign superintendence over all things, including creation and human institutions, cultures, and societies, which God governs through “natural law.”<sup>48</sup> The second is the “mediatorial kingdom,” “God’s rule on the earth through man who acts as God’s representative.”<sup>49</sup> While these two kingdoms are to be distinguished, McClain insists “in thinking of them as *two aspects* or phases of the one rule of our sovereign God.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, dispensationalists agree with Kuyper’s claim that the Son of God rules over all; where they would differ is that the Son rules all things in his role as Creator and Sovereign, not yet in his role as Redeemer.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Although some older dispensationalists attempted to explain this distinction between two kingdoms as one with clear lexical delineation (i.e., “kingdom of God” vs. “kingdom of Heaven”), most recent dispensationalists argue this theologically and see no absolute distinction between terms used in Scripture. See R. Bruce Compton, “The ‘Kingdom of Heaven/God’ and the Church: A Case Study in Hermeneutics and Theology” (Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-America Conference on Preaching, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 21 (emphasis original).

<sup>51</sup> McClain explicitly asserts that God’s rule over the universal kingdom is through the Son (*ibid.*, 31–34). Interestingly, John Calvin articulated this in the same way dispensationalists do, arguing that the Son of God’s rule existed as a dual mediatorship in which he ruled all things in his role as Creator and exercised spiritual rule over the church in his role as Redeemer

Traditional dispensationalists recognize that God's first expression of the relationship between humans and creation was in the dominion mandate<sup>52</sup> of Genesis 1:26–28 in which, as Vlach notes, man, as an image-bearer of God, “is now positioned and equipped to rule and subdue the earth on God's behalf,”<sup>53</sup> a role McClain asserts “was regal in character.”<sup>54</sup> “This mandate,” explains McCune, “underwrites true science, technology, and the necessity to develop a God-glorifying culture; in other words, this action of *subduing* denotes a conscious effort to discover the secrets and treasures of creation for the enrichment of humans to the glory of God.”<sup>55</sup> Importantly for the present discussion, this rule was given to all humanity. As McCune explains, “The pre-fall ‘dominion mandate’ of Gen 1:28 . . . is given to all men as human beings, not only to men as believers or covenant keepers; i.e., *all* people are to ‘subdue’ the earth for the benefit of mankind to the glory of God.”<sup>56</sup> Responsibilities given to Adam and Eve in conjunction with this rule over the earth also included abstaining from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Theoretically, had Adam and Eve obeyed this mandate, they would have been confirmed in holiness, and mankind would have continued to perfectly rule the natural world as mediators of God's universal rule. However, Adam's disobedience brought a curse upon humankind and all creation. This curse did not end the universal rule of God over all things as Creator, but with regard to the mediatorial kingdom, it “introduced into the stream of human history a hiatus which to the present hour has not at any time been wholly remedied”;<sup>57</sup> indeed, “the storyline after

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(John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], 1.13.7; 2.12.6).

<sup>52</sup> Dispensationalists call this the “domination mandate” (McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 42–44; McCune, *Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 2*, 33), “kingdom mandate” (Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 63), or sometimes “creation mandate” (*ibid.*, 458).

<sup>53</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 60.

<sup>54</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> McCune, *A Systematic Theology: Volume 2*, 33–34 (emphasis original).

<sup>56</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 261.

<sup>57</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 43.

the fall of man in Genesis 3 will be the process by which God restores man to the kingdom mandate of Gen 1:26–28.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, atonement and redemption were now necessary as a condition in the perfect kingdom on earth. The protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 is God’s redemptive promise that one day a seed of the woman would emerge from his confrontation with the serpent victorious, thus qualifying him as the perfect mediator between God and man, earning him the right to rule as Adam had failed to do and providing the necessary atonement for entrance into the kingdom.<sup>59</sup>

Yet because there remained no perfect mediator to rule the natural world on God’s behalf, both mankind and nature quickly fell away from God’s purposes. Therefore, God judged the earth and then established a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and indeed “every living creature” (Gen 9:1–11), that repeated many of the same language as the dominion mandate but added additional measures that would “preserve the stability of nature.”<sup>60</sup> This covenant offers no new redemptive revelation with respect to the mediatorial kingdom; rather, it is in this covenant that God created an earthly institution as a “form of control upon the lawless impulses of men”: human government.<sup>61</sup> Again, this responsibility to govern the world and its people is given, not specifically to God’s redeemed people as such, but rather to mankind in general. Therefore, as McClain notes, this earthly institution consists of “human rulers who, whether they acknowledge [God] or not, are nevertheless ‘ordained by God’ as ‘ministers’ of his.”<sup>62</sup>

Having established human government through which God would providentially rule his universal kingdom, God formed his mediatorial kingdom on earth within the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Moses was its first mediator, and in this role he both “represented Jehovah toward the people” and “represented the

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<sup>58</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 546.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

people of Israel toward God.”<sup>63</sup> This kingdom united spiritual qualifications with moral and civil, which “produced effects which extended into numerous other realms,” such as were outlined in the law of Moses.<sup>64</sup> As McCune explains, “In ancient Israel the civil and religious arenas were combined in the theocratic polity, in effect a *union* of church and state. The Law governed every aspect of the people’s lives including the social sphere.”<sup>65</sup> Israel’s mediators continued through the judges and kings of Israel, but since no mediator was able to perfectly fulfill his God given responsibilities, “the mediatorial kingdom of Israel was officially terminated by the departure of the Shekinah-Glory” from the Temple, recorded in Ezekiel 11.<sup>66</sup>

Christ’s first coming never brings with it the same union of the civil and spiritual that existed in Israel’s mediatorial kingdom, although his incarnation, life, and death both qualified him as the perfect mediator of God’s mediatorial kingdom and accomplished the means of redeeming a people who would comprise the citizenship of that kingdom. Vlach insists, “Jesus’ assumption of the Davidic throne on earth is still future (see Matt 19:28; 25:31), yet his authority to rule as Messiah is granted to him. The authority to rule will culminate in a kingdom reign.”<sup>67</sup> Although Christ has accomplished redemption for his people, the restoration of all things—including creation and culture—will not take place until the coming of his kingdom. In other words, since the mediatorial kingdom will not again be established on earth until after the second coming of Jesus Christ, the union of socio-cultural spheres and the redemptive sphere will not take place until the millennial kingdom. Vlach summarizes the future union of the two kingdoms well: “When the ultimate Mediator, Jesus, successfully reigns over the earth, the mediatorial

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 57–58.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>65</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

<sup>66</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 126. Cf. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 194–96. See also J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God’s Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995), 162.

<sup>67</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 398.

kingdom will be brought into conformity with God's universal kingdom (see 1 Cor 15:24, 28). And God's will on earth will be done as it is in heaven (see Matt 6:10)."<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the first important tenet of traditional dispensationalism that impacts its philosophy of cultural engagement is recognition that God works differently in sovereignly ruling over all things through natural law and human institutions on the one hand, and in his intention to establish his mediatorial kingdom on earth. No union between the two will exist until Jesus comes again.

### *The Spiritual Nature of the Church*

Second, traditional dispensationalism's understanding of the NT church's relationship to these two kingdoms is essential to its philosophy of cultural engagement. Traditional dispensationalism explicitly emphasizes what is sometimes called the spirituality of the church.<sup>69</sup> This doctrine teaches that the church as an institution is related only to the redemptive sphere of God's rule and therefore must directly engage only in purely spiritual matters and not in political or social issues, which are the responsibility of other secular institutions. "The church's primary responsibility in this age," argues Vlach, "is gospel proclamation and making disciples. . . . The church's mission is not cultural or societal transformation."<sup>70</sup> Important to this doctrine is distinguishing between the church as institution and individual Christians in society.<sup>71</sup> McCune insists, "No social

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>69</sup> For an explanation of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church and a brief historical survey of its practice, particularly within dispensationalism, see Snoeberger, "Tale of Two Kingdoms." Moore explicitly rejects this application of the spirituality of the church (Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 167–68).

<sup>70</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 541.

<sup>71</sup> Ironically, Abraham Kuyper argued this very sort of distinction by differentiating between the church as institution (which is limited to specific ecclesiastical matters) and the church as organism (which encompasses all of life for the Christian and extends to any sphere in which he finds himself) (Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 194–99).

program is given in Scripture for the institutional church in relation to civil society in general.”<sup>72</sup> Individual Christians, however, as members of the universal kingdom of God, participate in various societal institutions. Cultural matters, as part of the universal kingdom of God, have been designated by God as falling under the superintendence of earthly institutions such as government and family, of which individual Christians are participants, rather than the church as an institution.

Although certainly in no way unique to traditional dispensationalism, as Mark Snoeberger suggests, the spirituality of the church was at the heart of early dispensationalism. In fact, Snoeberger convincingly argues that “the eschatological notions of premillennialism and pretribulationism are *implications* of the dispensational system and not the *cause*. The historical *cause* for the birth of dispensationalism was strict subscription to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.”<sup>73</sup> Early dispensationalists were attempting to “recover a more modest goal of ecclesiology in the face of a church obsessed with cultural activism.”<sup>74</sup>

McClain articulates the problem with losing this doctrine as a result of equating the kingdom and the church:

The identification of the kingdom with the church has led historically to ecclesiastical policies and programs which . . . have been far removed from the original simplicity of the New Testament *ekklesia*. . . . Thus the church loses its “pilgrim” character and the sharp edge of its divinely commissioned “witness” is blunted. It becomes an *ekklesia* which is not only in the world, but also *of* the world.<sup>75</sup>

Instead, Ryrie argues that “the commission to the church is to preach [the] good news and to teach the Word,” not to “effect worldwide justice.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 259.

<sup>73</sup> Snoeberger, “A Tale of Two Kingdoms,” 65 (emphasis original).

<sup>74</sup> Snoeberger, “Where’s the Love?,” 2.

<sup>75</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 438–39 (emphasis original).

<sup>76</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 19.

Consequently, traditional dispensationalism also denies that God's mission and the church's mission are the same. According to dispensationalists, God's mission is to bring himself glory through creation, the judgment of sin, and the redemption of his elect, culminating in his "rule of loving sovereignty and fellowship with human beings in his image and dwelling with them forever."<sup>77</sup> The church takes part in this mission through making disciples, but this role is but one smaller part of God's larger agenda. Some dispensationalists even affirm God's desire to restore all creation. For example, Vlach insists that "God does not abandon his creation—he will restore it."<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, God will accomplish this with the creation of the new heavens and new earth; the church has no direct responsibility to redeem anything.<sup>79</sup>

### *Discipling Dual Citizens*

Third, although the spirituality of the church means that the church does not have a direct role in external cultural affairs, traditional dispensationalists do highlight a secondary role directly tied to the church's mission of making disciples. While the church *as* church has no social responsibility outside of itself, this does not mean that Christians must refrain from involvement in cultural spheres. According to McCune, "a church saint lives in two separate spheres, the church and the state,"<sup>80</sup> and as such, individual Christians are "dual citizens" who can and should engage in politics, arts, education, law enforcement, science, and other cultural activities. However, "this is in their capacity as citizens of earth," not as "the church."<sup>81</sup> This is why Ryrie's

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<sup>77</sup> McCune, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 14. Ryrie notably disagrees with this perspective, insisting that "holistic redemption can easily lead to placing unbalanced, if not wrong, priorities on political action, social agendas, and improving the structures of society" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. & exp. ed. [Chicago, IL: Moody, 1995], 176).

<sup>79</sup> A possible exception is found in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5—"redeeming the time," but this command does not appear relevant to the present discussion.

<sup>80</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.



treatment of the subject discusses specifically *the Christian* and social responsibility, not *the church* and social responsibility.

Yet an individual Christian's role in society is not connected in any direct way to God's plan to establish his mediatorial kingdom on earth and restore all things. Further, when a Christian acts in society, it is not out of a motivation to fulfill the "cultural mandate"; as Vlach argues, only "the 'Son of Man,' and 'Last Adam' (see 1 Cor 15:45) can fulfill the kingdom mandate originally tasked to Adam. He can represent man and do for mankind what mankind on his own cannot do,"<sup>82</sup> and this will occur in the future kingdom "after his present session at the right hand of the Father."<sup>83</sup>

Rather, from a dispensational perspective, Christians should consider their lives in general society on the basis of the following biblical principles. First, the Bible commands Christians to live holy lives (e.g. 1 Pet 1:15). Ryrie calls this the "top of the list" when considering an agenda for Christians and social responsibility.<sup>84</sup> Second, the Bible gives specific commands regarding how Christians should live in their various human vocations such as husbands, wives, parents, children, employers, and employees (Eph 5:15–6:9; Col 3:18–4:6). Third, all Christians have some responsibilities toward society, such as submitting to governmental authority (Rom 13:1–7) and rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's (Matt 22:21). Fourth, Christians should consider how their beliefs and relationship with God necessarily affect other aspects of human life in society. Vlach summarizes, "Although such [societal] matters are not the church's emphasis in this age, Christians are called to apply their Christian worldview to every aspect of the environment. Thus, Christians can be involved in all aspects of culture including music, the arts, architecture, agriculture, politics, education, sports, etc. for the glory of God."<sup>85</sup> Fifth,

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<sup>82</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 546–47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 458. Vlach also affirms that when Jesus fulfills the dominion mandate in the kingdom, he will also "empower those who belong to him to do so" as he shares his rule with them.

<sup>84</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 93.

<sup>85</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 541.

Ryrie emphasizes the *imago Dei* and “oneness or solidarity” of humanity as a basis for which Christians do good in society.<sup>86</sup> He reminds believers that, despite the fact that the church’s “social” responsibility is primarily inward, Christians are nevertheless commanded in the New Testament to “do good unto all men” (Gal 6:10), and this is a motivation for any social action in which individual Christians take part.<sup>87</sup> Sixth, part of the motivation given in Scripture for Christians living good lives in the world is witness. This is behind Christ’s description of his followers as “the light of the world.” He admonishes them, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:14–16).

Yet this is also why the church’s task of making disciples does have a secondary role in cultural engagement; the church should instruct believers in what it means to live Christianly in their various spheres. Part of what it means to fulfill the Great Commission is to teach Christians how to live out the implications of their relationship with God and how to obey the Great Commandment through being holy, active citizens in the society for the good of their fellow humans. Dispensationalists also stress the church’s responsibility to care for its own, even materially. McCune suggests, “The New Testament teaches the benevolence of the local church to its own members; it does not portray the church as the God-appointed watchdog over the social welfare of the world at large.”<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Ryrie insists that “the church’s social responsibilities are primarily directed toward the body.”<sup>89</sup> Further, the church should also speak to relevant moral issues under attack in society as part of discipling Christians to know how they should live in that society. However, churches may not speak beyond Scripture; may not require of their people what Scripture does not require; should motivate Christian views of education, the arts, politics, or social matters in terms of sanctification rather than redemption or eschatology; and should not in any official capacity meddle in civic affairs. Instead of

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<sup>86</sup> Ryrie, “Perspectives, Part I,” 39.

<sup>87</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 38.

<sup>88</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 261.

<sup>89</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 37.

motivating Christians to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in their roles within the universal kingdom of God in soteriological or eschatological terms like “cultural redemption,” “cultural transformation,” or “kingdom work,” dispensationalists teach that Christian social responsibility is rooted in the sanctification of Christians.

### *Restraint*

Fourth, the ministry of the Holy Spirit during the church age is key to a dispensational philosophy of cultural engagement. Dispensationalists consider the period between Pentecost and the rapture as “a time of special ministry by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>90</sup> While the Holy Spirit is active in all ages through the miracle of regeneration, he is active in the world through the church in a manner unique to the church age, a key argument in defense of a pre-tribulation rapture. This unique ministry of the Holy Spirit will commence again once Christ is physically present on earth during the millennial kingdom.<sup>91</sup>

On this understanding of the Holy Spirit’s unique work through the church from Pentecost to the rapture of the church, rather than categorizing the church’s role in society as one of “redemption,” a traditional dispensational perspective would see such a role as one of “restraint” through the indwelling ministry of Holy Spirit in the church (2 Thess 2:6–7).<sup>92</sup> This also relates to Christ’s description of his followers as “the salt of the earth,” those who, through living in “peace with one another,” can serve to preserve righteousness in the world (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:50).

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<sup>90</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 375.

<sup>91</sup> As stated by McClain, “On the basis of Christ’s finished work, the Spirit’s ministry becomes possible, not only in the age of Christ’s absence, but also during his bodily presence in the coming age of the kingdom” (ibid., 376).

<sup>92</sup> For dispensationalist interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, see McCune, *Systematic Theology: Volume 2*, 298; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing, 1991), 99–102; Robert L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 324–25; John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 231.

Ryrie observes, “To be salt in this world means to give life, preserving influence, stability, and holiness to this world.”<sup>93</sup> With this perspective, the church will no doubt have influence on broader culture to one degree or another. But as McCune notes, “The church influences the state through the regenerated lives of the saints acting as individual Christian citizens in civil society and not as people ecclesially structured in a corporate body.”<sup>94</sup> Rather than this being a particular political strategy or set of cultural programs, this kind of restraint or preservation is accomplished by churches discipling believers to live Spirit-controlled lives and Christians submitting to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in every aspect of life and simply living as separated Christians in society. In this way, Christians are salt and light, helping through example and act to restrain human depravity in the surrounding culture. They are participating as citizens in the human institutions created by God in Genesis 9 for the purpose of ordering the natural world and providing restraints upon human sinfulness, not accomplishing “redemptive kingdom work.” As McCune notes,

Whatever beneficial cultural impact an individual Christian may have is a by-product of his sanctification and implementation of Christian principles in his social milieu. Christians do not have biblical warrant to bring into the organized church programs and schemes of sociopolitical involvement in the name of “service.”<sup>95</sup>

### ***The Physical Nature of the Future Millennial Kingdom***

Finally, traditional dispensationalists teach that, although the millennial kingdom is entirely future, it will be an earthly, physical kingdom. This implies that physical, cultural activities matter and why, as McClain explains, “There was a social element in our Lord’s message of the kingdom.”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, since there is continuity between this present age and the future

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<sup>93</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 262.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>96</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 289.

millennial kingdom, “Life here and now, in spite of the tragedy of sin, is nevertheless something worth-while; and therefore all efforts to make it better are also worth-while. All the true values of human life will be preserved and carried over into the coming kingdom; nothing worth-while will be lost.”<sup>97</sup> Vlach agrees: “Man was created to interact with his environment, including culture. He will continue to do so in the kingdom of God in a holistic manner. This involves international harmony, tranquility in the animal kingdom, planting of vineyards, and the building of houses.”<sup>98</sup> This is because it is God’s intention to restore not just individuals, but all creation. “This restoration of all creation,” according to Vlach, “includes the planet, animal kingdom, agriculture, architecture, and all God-honoring cultural pursuits (Isa 11; 65:17–25).”<sup>99</sup> He explains that “not only does Jesus’ death atone for the sins of God’s image-bearers, it is the basis for the reconciliation of all things in his kingdom.”<sup>100</sup>

Yet what an entirely “not yet” understanding of the kingdom does insist is that, while cultural pursuits are valuable, motivation for such is never founded upon desire to “redeem culture” or anticipation of large-scale cultural transformation. McCune explains, “The church is not the kingdom and cannot participate in any social proposals attributable to the kingdom, and for this reason there can be no tenable sociopolitical kingdom advancement by the church in the present age.”<sup>101</sup> Ryrie agrees when he insists that “promoting kingdom righteousness in the present time is not the mandate of the church, though progressives make it so.”<sup>102</sup> He warns that “people get sidetracked when they attempt to impose kingdom ethics on the world today without the physical presence of the King.”<sup>103</sup> Instead, the church’s responsibility is discipleship: “The

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 531.

<sup>98</sup> Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 16.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 536.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>101</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 264.

<sup>102</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 176.

<sup>103</sup> Ryrie, *Christian and Social Responsibility*, 16.

changing of individuals, not institutions, is primary,” insists Ryrie.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, even if God intends to restore all things, this is not happening during the present age, and the church has no role in such restoration. Instead, traditional dispensationalists make much of the fact that the NT promises this age will continue to grow, in the words of John Walvoord, “increasingly wicked as the age progresses” (2 Tim 3:13), and thus although cultural pursuits are worthy, “the premillennial view . . . presents no commands to improve society as a whole.”<sup>105</sup> Yet, this pessimism about the trajectory of the world’s systems in this age is balanced with an optimism in the power of the gospel to change lives and the reality of Christ’s coming again to set up his kingdom on the earth. Only Christ can accomplish societal transformation.

### Conclusion

What the foregoing has demonstrated is that traditional dispensationalism’s core theological commitments provide a basis for a rather robust philosophy of cultural engagement, which could be summarized as follows:

1. God has established two kingdoms. The first is his sovereign rule over all things by means of natural law and mediated through human institutions that he has ordained. The second is a future kingdom on earth wherein he will rule his people by means of his Word and mediated through the physical presence of his Son, the man Christ Jesus.
2. Christians are citizens of both of these kingdoms. As citizens of the universal kingdom, they should live holy lives, demonstrate kindness toward all people, and apply what it means to be a Christian in whatever cultural sphere God has called them. As citizens of the future kingdom, Christians should proclaim the good news of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>105</sup> Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959), 134.

Jesus Christ, working toward gathering more into that citizenship.

3. The church has a unique and focused spiritual mission of making disciples, which includes equipping them to live Christianly in their roles as citizens of this world. But the church should not directly involve itself formally in social, cultural, or political affairs and should not frame any discussion of cultural engagement in eschatological or soteriological terms.

In short, evangelical criticism of dispensationalists as hostile toward a biblical mandate of cultural engagement is a classic example of begging the question. Dispensationalists have not denied any role for Christians in society; the issue is that dispensationalists did not articulate Christianity and culture in the way New Evangelicals assumed was the correct posture. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* was a philosophy of cultural engagement in search of an eschatology; only later did George Ladd<sup>106</sup> and others develop such an "already/not yet" realized eschatology that fueled the New Evangelical strategy and has come to characterize Neo-Kuyperianism and what Russell Moore calls "a kingdom consensus" of modern evangelicalism.<sup>107</sup> As Joel Carpenter rightly observes, Ladd's *The Gospel of the Kingdom* was a deliberate attempt to "replace dispensationalism with an evangelical view of the kingdom of God and the end-times that was . . . more able to sustain evangelical social engagement."<sup>108</sup> The cart of social engagement came before the horse of "already/not yet" eschatology.

Further, I present this paper, not only in vindication of traditional dispensationalism, but out of a conviction that this perspective concerning the church and cultural engagement is most faithful to Scripture in that it protects the unique mission of the church to make disciples and avoids triumphalistic "kingdom" motivation so characteristic of evangelical

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<sup>106</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London, Great Britain: Paternoster Press, 1959).

<sup>107</sup> Moore, *Kingdom of Christ*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 195.

discussions of Christianity and culture today. Expanding the Great Commission to include more than simply making disciples almost always results in failure to fulfill the mission Christ gave to his church. Furthermore, most permutations of evangelical desire to “transform culture” are little more than claims that cultural forms are mostly neutral and adaptation of the world’s cultural forms, resulting in worldliness. As Andy Crouch has astutely observes, “The rise of interest in cultural transformation has been accompanied by a rise in cultural transformation of a different sort—the transformation of the church into the culture’s image.”<sup>109</sup>

The philosophy of cultural engagement stemming from traditional dispensationalism is more similar to Reformed Two Kingdom Theology<sup>110</sup> than Neo-Kuyperian Transformationalism. However, since Two Kingdom Theology also assumes an inaugurated eschatology and equates the kingdom of God with the church, I would suggest that a traditional dispensational philosophy of cultural engagement is what I described in *By the Waters of Babylon* as a “Sanctificationist” view of Christianity and culture, that is, a philosophy of culture firmly planted in the doctrine of sanctification rather than the kingdom and in the church’s mission to make disciples rather than redeeming the world.<sup>111</sup> In other words, a traditional dispensational philosophy of culture does not understand a church’s role toward culture to be in terms of cultural redemption, the *missio Dei*, “work for the kingdom,” the “cultural mandate,” or any missiological or eschatological motivation. Rather, dispensationalists view the church’s exclusive mission as one of discipling Christians to live sanctified lives in whatever cultural sphere to which God has called them. This is the extent of the church’s so-called “responsibility” toward culture, and anything more than this threatens to sideline the church’s central mission.

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<sup>109</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, 189.

<sup>110</sup> For a thorough treatment of this philosophy, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>111</sup> Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2015), 115–16.



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

Christopher Cone

**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

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## Introduction

**J**esus’ 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).<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the NASB (1995).

‘unjustly’ gained them to those who justly deserve them.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup>

### ***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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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>.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> *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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> From within this anti-individualistic stream of economic theory, Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*<sup>10</sup> 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,’”<sup>11</sup> and along with Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *On the Condition of Workers*, proposed “a true Catholic social science.”<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup>

Pius XI combats the “twin rocks of shipwreck,”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> In this Pius XI distinguishes the Catholic doctrine of social justice from its secular counterpart (socialism): because

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>9</sup> Novak, “Social Justice.”

<sup>10</sup> Penned by Oswald von Nell-Bruening S.J.

<sup>11</sup> 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](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 41.

“man is older than the State,”<sup>16</sup> 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.*<sup>17</sup>

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.”<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup>

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,”<sup>20</sup> but he is careful not to prescribe socialism in its pure sense, warning that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 41 (emphasis added).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically, the deficiency is evident in that socialism “affirms that human association has been instituted for the sake of material advantage alone.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, Pius XI concludes that “no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist,”<sup>23</sup> 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.”<sup>24</sup> 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

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup>

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.”<sup>27</sup> Feagin expresses four significant deficiencies in capitalist economies and societies.<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup> 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,

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<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Feagin, “Social Justice and Sociology,” 29.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>29</sup> 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”<sup>30</sup> primarily through the “single unconscionable freedom – Free Trade.”<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup>

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.”<sup>35</sup> 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

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<sup>30</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup> The refined educational model “seek[s] to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class.”<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, this protects proletariat children from being “transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.”<sup>38</sup> Further developments of communism include the abolition of national differences and nationalism (in favor of the partisanship of communism),<sup>39</sup> 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.”<sup>40</sup> 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.”<sup>41</sup>

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

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>41</sup> 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,”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> Theology is active, and a “variable understanding,”<sup>45</sup> 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

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

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-45 (emphasis added).

<sup>44</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Gutiérrez, “Notes,” 244.

as condition of a life of communion of all men with the Lord.”<sup>46</sup> 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.”<sup>47</sup> Consequently, liberation becomes *part* of theology, with an “eschatological hope”<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

Not only is Christ “the Saviour who, by liberating us from sin, liberates us from the very root of social injustice,”<sup>50</sup> 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

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>50</sup> 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).<sup>51</sup> 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?"<sup>52</sup> 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.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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.<sup>54</sup>

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:

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>54</sup> 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.”<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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.<sup>58</sup>

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

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> 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."<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> So the cleft between the white and black South grew...it never should have been; it was as inevitable as its results were pitiable.<sup>61</sup>

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

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

<sup>60</sup> Dubois, *Souls*, 25.

<sup>61</sup> *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.<sup>62</sup>

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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup>

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

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>64</sup> 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.*<sup>65</sup>

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

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<sup>65</sup> 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,<sup>66</sup> 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),

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<sup>66</sup> “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 (Ⲱ 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 (ἐστὶν) 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 (ἐστὶν) 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:<sup>67</sup>

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.<sup>68</sup>

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

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<sup>67</sup> 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/>.

<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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."<sup>70</sup> 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,"<sup>71</sup> 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."<sup>72</sup> 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

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<sup>69</sup> Hullinger, "Dispensational Approach."

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

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

<sup>72</sup> *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.<sup>73</sup>

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."<sup>74</sup> 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."<sup>75</sup> Yet even after return from exile, "the failure to practice social justice remains a central problem."<sup>76</sup> 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,"<sup>77</sup> and thus "a coming Davidic king...will

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

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

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 582.

perfectly represent the Lord by implementing social justice.”<sup>78</sup> 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*.<sup>79</sup>

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.”<sup>80</sup> 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.”<sup>81</sup> 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

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 643.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 685.

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

<sup>81</sup> 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,”<sup>82</sup> even continually waging war “to maintain this privilege,”<sup>83</sup> 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

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<sup>82</sup> Dubois, *Souls*, 208.

<sup>83</sup> 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.

# Integral Mission: Is Social Action Part of the Gospel?

Paul Barreca

**Abstract:** This paper evaluates the origin of Integral Mission and argues that the gospel is being redefined to require socio-economic engagement, something beyond its biblical definition. A review of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament demonstrates that although socio-economic injustices were widespread in first-century Rome, the Apostolic church did not establish programs to address social needs as a method for evangelism. Although societal changes may have been brought about by people whose lives were transformed by the gospel, societal change was not the reason that Christians shared the gospel. This paper seeks to elevate the biblical gospel because of its inherent power to change lives, while keeping it separate from human programs and social action, which, although important, are different endeavors.

**Key Words:** Integral Mission, gospel, social justice, compassion, evangelism

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## Introduction

Integral Mission is producing missionaries and mission movements that incorporate socio-economic engagement as an essential component of the gospel. This trend has become predominant in many churches, Christian universities, and missionary agencies. Hopefully no one, including this author,

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would argue against compassion as the duty of every Christian. Christians can and should practice biblical justice and respond with Christ-like compassion to the needs around them. The concern is there is a shift today toward socio-political engagement that appears to be driven more by cultural adaptation than theological alignment. This paper argues for a reflective pause to evaluate the origin of Integral Mission and to take a closer look at the biblical passages used to promote socio-political engagement as central to the presentation of the gospel. It is hoped that this evaluation will strengthen the evangelistic commitment of both the author and reader.

### **Called to Compassion**

Jesus exemplified compassion. Although Christians may differ regarding the integration of social engagement into the gospel, there should be no debate concerning the compassion that Jesus demonstrated toward the poor and needy, nor the expectation that Christians today should act with compassion toward those in need.

English New Testaments have translated “compassion” from the Greek root word *σπλαγχνον*, which is used frequently in the Gospels to describe Christ’s attitude toward various individuals and groups of people. He showed compassion on the multitudes needing a shepherd (Matt 9:36), the mourning widow (Luke 7:31), the large crowd at the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34), the large crowd at the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:2), the boy with the evil spirit (Mark 9:22), and the two blind men as he was leaving Jericho (Matt 20:34). Volumes have been written on the meekness, gentleness, and love demonstrated by Jesus. As Christians are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Jesus, they will develop a heart of compassion and begin to act with compassion toward others, following John’s exhortation that “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6; see also Rom 8:29; 12:2; 13:14; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Col 3:10-12).

Regardless of one’s position concerning Integral Mission, every Christian should stand in agreement that the transformational character of Christ within a believer’s life should result in a heart of compassion. In a book that challenges

the shift toward a social justice gospel, Gary Gilley points out that all Christians should agree about compassion for the needy: “Make no mistake: that the people of God should be concerned about injustice and social issues that plague our world at large, and they should be model citizens who do good to those around them, is not in question and is not the issue.”<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to debate the necessity of compassion from believers toward the poor and needy nor is it to cast doubt on the intentions, godliness, or effectiveness of the large number of theologians, missionaries, and Christian institutions advancing the Integral Mission concept today. The question at hand is one of definition and the consequences of modifying the definition of the gospel to include the popular themes of social justice in contemporary culture.

Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison expressed this concern in *When Everything is Missions*:

Yet we are concerned that an uncritical use of words, and in particular a lack of shared definition for the words mission, missions, missionary, and missional, has led to a distortion of Jesus’ biblical mandate, ushered in an everything-is-missions paradigm, and moved missions from the initiation and oversight of local churches to make it the domain of individual believers responding to individualized callings.<sup>3</sup>

History is filled with excellent examples of Christians feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, building hospitals, and demonstrating the compassion of Jesus to a needy world. These practices are not in question, but rather, is there support from the Bible or early church practice to consider the gospel a blend of the spoken message about Christ and the acts of compassion demonstrated by ministers of the gospel?

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Gilley, *The Social Justice Primer: In Search of the Message and Mission of the Church* (Springfield, IL: Think on These Things Ministries, 2019), Kindle loc. 1238.

<sup>3</sup> Denny Ellison and Matthew Spitters, *When Everything is Missions* (BottomLine Media, Pioneers US, 2017), 22.



## A Brief Introduction to Integral Mission

Integral Mission(s), also referred to as “Holistic Mission(s),” emphasizes the incorporation of social action as an essential component of gospel proclamation. The Lausanne Movement posts the following definition of Integral Mission on their website: “Integral Mission can be defined as the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility.”<sup>4</sup> The Oxford dictionary defines dichotomy as “a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.”<sup>5</sup> The Lausanne definition of Integral Mission therefore considers evangelism and social action to be synonymous. If *evangelistic responsibility* means “sharing the gospel message” then equating it to *social responsibility* gives it a new meaning.

The terms “Integral Mission(s)” or “Holistic Mission(s)” are not always used to describe the contemporary emphasis on social action themes within the missions community. However, the influence of this philosophy is pronounced. Books advocating the integration of social action/social responsibility with gospel proclamation include *The Hole in our Gospel* (Richard Stearns, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), *Scatter* (Andrew Scott, Chicago, IL: Moody 2016), *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Rene Padilla, Argentina: Ediciones Kairos, 2004), *Simply Good News* (N. T. Wright, New York, NY: Harper One, 2017), *Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church* (Robert S. White and Colin Bell, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016) as well as books and articles by Shane Claiborne, Rick Warren, Jim Wallis, and Ruth Padilla DeBorst. The endorsement lists for these books include many well-known influencers, speakers, and personalities within the evangelical community including David

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<sup>4</sup> Ravi Jayakaran, *About Integral Mission*, Lausanne Movement, accessed August 3, 2019, [www.lausanne.org/networks/issues/integral-mission](http://www.lausanne.org/networks/issues/integral-mission).

<sup>5</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “dichotomy,” 2020, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/dichotomy>.

Platt and Louie Giglio (*Scatter*), Bill Hybels, Luci Swindol, Max Lucado, T. D. Jakes, Chuck Colson, John Ortberg, Tony Campolo, and Eugene Peterson (*The Hole in Our Gospel*).

The Lausanne conferences and the covenants that they produced were highly influential and advanced the concept of Integral Mission. Writing about the first Lausanne conference called by Billy Graham in 1974, John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher note, “The needs of the poor and the social implications of the gospel attracted much attention and comment at the conference.”<sup>6</sup> One of the seven key issues agreed upon at the conference was “the relationship of evangelism and social concern.”<sup>7</sup> This was a new concept from leaders who had previously been focused exclusively on world evangelization through the proclamation of the biblical gospel alone.

Integral Mission has its roots in the Liberation Theology of the Roman Catholic Church in Central and South America. Ron Sider, who wrote *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London, Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), was an early link between Latin American Liberation Theology of the 1970s and Evangelicalism in America. Gilley writes, “What Sider was advocating in the 1980s has become commonplace now, that is, many believe the gospel has both spiritual and social dimensions which are of equal importance.”<sup>8</sup>

Integral Mission proponents have a wide platform in many theologically conservative institutions involved in training and sending missionaries. Dallas Theological Seminary’s “World Evangelization Conference” featured Ruth Padilla DeBorst as the key-note speaker (March 5-8, 2019). DeBorst is a leading advocate for Integral Mission and contributed the essay “An

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<sup>6</sup>John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher, *Encountering the History of Missions from the Early Church to Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 309.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Gilley, *Social Justice Primer*, Kindle loc. 1036.

Integral Transformational Approach” in *The Mission of the Church—Five Views in Conversation*, edited by Craig Ott.<sup>9</sup>

Lancaster Bible College featured Dr. Michael Young-Suk Oh, Global Executive Director/CEO of the Lausanne Movement, as the main speaker for the Lancaster Bible College Missions Conference, February 11-15, 2019.<sup>10</sup>

Jim Wallis, founder and president of *Sojourners* and a leading proponent for Christian engagement in social justice causes, has been a frequent guest speaker at prominent evangelical schools and events. Mary Danielsen provides the following analysis of Jim Wallis’s popularity in evangelical circles:

Lest any think that Jim Wallis and his social gospel are not being warmly embraced by many within Protestant/evangelical Christianity, some of the places that have invited Jim Wallis to speak of the last half a decade or so include Wheaton College, the Mennonite Church USA, Cedarville University, and Willow Creek to name a few. What’s more, his books are found in countless Christian bookstores including the Southern Baptist Convention Resource branch, LifeWay; and his books are frequently used in Christian seminary and college courses. In addition, at least three traditional Christian publishing house—Baker Books, InterVarsity Press, and Zondervan—publish his books.<sup>11</sup>

### **Is Integral Mission Re-defining the Gospel?**

Whether Scripture defines the gospel as an integration of the message about Jesus and action to alleviate social injustices will be discussed later. However, before offering a critique, the assertion that Integral Mission proponents are re-defining the gospel needs to be established.

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<sup>9</sup> Ruth Padilla DeBorst, “An Integral Transformational Approach,” in *The Mission of the Church - Five Views in Conversation*, ed. Craig Ott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 41-67.

<sup>10</sup> “2019 Missions Conference Registration,” received by the author, December 21, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Danielsen, *The Dangerous Truth about the Social Justice Gospel*, [lighthouse Trails research.com/blog](https://www.lighthouse Trails research.com/blog), September 18, 2018, <https://www.lighthouse Trails research.com/blog/?p=28830>.

***Richard Stearns “The Hole in Our Gospel”***

Integral Mission advocates say that including social action as part of the gospel is a return to the true gospel proclaimed and modeled by Jesus. They put forward the idea that the gospel is incomplete when it is reduced to a proclamation of the truth about Jesus without associated action to remedy human suffering and injustices. Richard Stearns is critical of a message-only version of the gospel. He writes,

More and more, our view of the gospel has been narrowed to a simple transaction, marked by checking a box on a bingo card at some prayer breakfast, registering a decision for Christ, or coming forward during an altar call. I have to admit that my own view of evangelism, based on the Great Commission, amounted to just that for many years. It was about saving as many people from hell as possible—for the *next* life. It minimized any concern for those same people in *this* life. It wasn’t as important that they were poor or hungry or persecuted, or perhaps rich, greedy, and arrogant: we just had to get them to pray the “sinner’s prayer,” and then we’d move on the next potential convert...There is a real problem with this limited view of the kingdom of God: it is not the whole gospel.<sup>12</sup>

According to Stearns, the “whole gospel” includes something more than the proclamation leading to a “simple transaction.” Most would agree with his complaint against the type of ministry he describes and admits to having practiced. People are not born again because they pray “the sinner’s prayer,” unless that prayer reflects that they understand their own sinfulness and have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, as the remedy for their sin. Stearns has identified some real problems, namely manipulative and incomplete presentations of the gospel and evangelism without discipleship. The solution, however, is not to incorporate social action into the gospel but rather to return to the genuine gospel, a message sufficiently powerful to change lives without emotional manipulation. Stearns advocates for a

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 5 (*italics original*).

“whole gospel” that includes both the words of the gospel and works of humanitarianism. He rightly says that Christians who practice hit-and-run evangelism need to be exhorted to proclaim Christ clearly and to love their neighbor (Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39), serve those in need (Matt 10:43), and care for orphans and widows (Jas 1:27). However, Stearns goes much further than such exhortations. He adds a works component to the proclamation of the gospel itself that is not contained in the Bible.

### ***Lausanne Movement, The Manila Manifesto, 1989***

The second Lausanne conference held in Manila in 1989 produced the Manila Manifesto. Under the heading, “The Whole Gospel” is found the sub-point “The Gospel and Social Responsibility.” Part of that statement reads:

Yet Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its arrival by works of mercy and power. We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds. In a spirit of humility, we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped, and deliver the oppressed.<sup>13</sup>

The statement on “The Gospel and Social Responsibility” in the Manila Manifesto reflects a shift within the global community of evangelical leaders. Since the Manila Manifesto was published, Christian witness has been expanding from the proclamation of the gospel message to include socio-economic action in combination with that message. To be a part of the “Whole Gospel,” one is called to “minister to the sick, feed the hungry and care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped and deliver the oppressed.” Gary Gilley describes this as the “two-pronged” gospel: “...A two-prong gospel has arisen composed of both the Great Commission and the so-called Cultural Mandate.”<sup>14</sup> Historically, evangelism has been

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<sup>13</sup> Lausanne Movement, *The Manila Manifesto*, 1989, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto>.

<sup>14</sup> Gilley, *Social Justice Primer*, Kindle loc. 43.

understood to be the proclamation of the gospel message itself. As Gilley writes,

Everywhere true Christianity has gone it has benefited the society which it has touched. But historically, conservative Christianity has always seen social improvement as taking a backseat to the church's true calling of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples. It has never seen the social agenda as an end in itself—until now.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Micah Network, the Micah Declaration, 2001***

The Micah Network set out in 2001 to advance Integral Mission. Based on Micah 6:8, the group's objective is stated as follows:

Our definition of Integral Mission is taken from a consultation held in Oxford, United Kingdom, in September 2001, which resulted in The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission being produced. The introductory extract outlines the summarized definition of Integral Mission as follows:

Integral Mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in Integral Mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The phrase “social involvement has evangelistic consequences” is significant and will be discussed in greater detail.

### ***Lausanne Movement: The Cape Town Commitment 2010***

A central phrase from the Micah Declaration (2001) was incorporated into the most recent Lausanne covenant produced in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Kindle loc. 206.

<sup>16</sup> Micah Network, “Integral Mission,” 2019, <https://www.micahnetwork.org/integral-mission>.

Cape Town in 2010. Article 10, “We Love the Mission of God” states the following:

Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God...The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world...We affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and humankind, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ...The salvation we proclaim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. ‘Faith without works is dead.’ Integral Mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in Integral Mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.<sup>17</sup>

The Cape Town Commitment is built around a strong call to evangelism and engagement with all communities and people groups. Such a call is needed and commendable. However, it is at this point that the document takes a turn toward contemporary social engagement. After good theological development about the gospel, “socio-political involvement” is introduced without biblical example or instruction. While the key phrase “our proclamation has social consequences...and our social involvement has evangelistic consequences” is carefully worded, little attempt is made to demonstrate the biblical connection in uniting social action and evangelism. The Cape Town Commitment is more correct when it emphasizes that compassion

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<sup>17</sup> Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 2010, [https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#\\_ftnref55](https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#_ftnref55).

is the believer's duty. The NT does not confuse compassion or social involvement with the proclamation of the message, other than to urge believers that our behavior should be exemplary among the Gentiles (Titus 2:8; 1 Tim 5:14; 1 Pet 2:12, 15; 3:16).

The Integral Mission perspective mistakes the command for personal compassion and good works for a mandate that the mission of the church is to develop social action programs. It is not that these things are wrong for a church to do; it is simply that there is no NT mandate for the local church to fulfill these duties in a corporate sense.

### *Cru 19 Connection Weekend*

This shift in how the gospel is presented in evangelical missions conversations can be found in the workshop topics at the Cru19 Connection Weekend. Several workshop topics and general sessions centered on social justice themes.<sup>18</sup> In a general session, Sandra Van Opstal focused on social justice themes in the United States such as the disproportionate prison population of African American men, white supremacy, and the detaining and return of illegal immigrants. She condemned the church's refusal to intervene on behalf of immigrants (presumably those who arrived in the United States illegally) by saying,

I cannot come to you today Cru and not speak where I stand. Watching the church sing their songs in stadiums all across the country, raise a banner for Jesus, and stay silent while we experience another holocaust, stay silent while churches send their mission trips to Guatemala and Honduras, to the very places where these people are coming from, and then stay silent when they show up in your neighborhood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cru19 Workshops, July 20, 2019, <https://www.cru.org/cru19/workshops/>. Workshops included "The Roots of Injustice," "Soul Care in a Racially Complex Society," and "Justice and Jesus."

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Van Opstal, Cru 19 General Session Address, July 20, 2019, <https://www.cru.org/cru19/archive/general-sessions/07-20-sandra-van-opstal/>, approximate location minute 21.



It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the legal, political, and humanitarian complexities associated with immigration waves entering the southern border of the U.S. Opstal does not address these complexities either, except to condemn all who fail to embrace her point of view. In a speech loosely connected to the book of Amos, Van Opstal said near the close of her speech, “We will disciple you and form you to be Christian activists.”<sup>20</sup> The connection between becoming a mature disciple and a Christian activist was not established in her speech.

### ***MOPS Admonition Concerning the Gospel***

Another example of a change in the way evangelical leaders speak about the gospel is MOPS CEO Mandy Arioto on an all-leader call, June 22, 2016. She explained the gospel in the following way:

We are people who are reclaiming the good news, who are walking out among the way of the one we follow, a man named Jesus, and bringing good news to hurting people. Eight million people are leaving the church every year and so we are taking serious responsibility for the fact that we need to be people who come bearing the good news, reclaiming the good news. And what is good news? *Good news is friends when you are lonely, it is food when you are hungry, it is kindness with no strings attached, it is food when your baby is sick.* Good news is Jesus. And it is the embarrassingly extravagant love of God.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Summary***

These examples illustrate the way some leaders in well-known Christian mission and outreach organizations are talking about the gospel. In books, articles, and conference sessions, the Integral Mission concept is being presented on a wide scale. Christians are being taught that social action is a part of what it means to proclaim the gospel.

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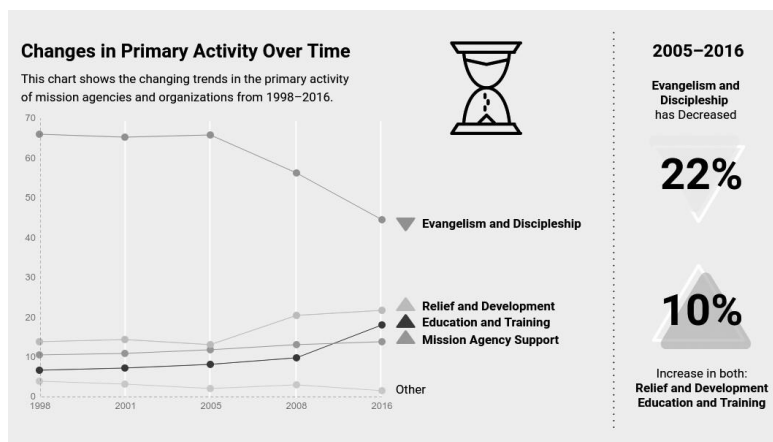
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mandy Arioto, “All Leader Call with Mandy.” *MOPS International*, [vimeo.com/179370370/9ac450e4b8?cjevent=405a5c48c29d11e983e201e50a24060c](https://vimeo.com/179370370/9ac450e4b8?cjevent=405a5c48c29d11e983e201e50a24060c), minute 7 (emphasis added).

## Declining Efforts in Global Evangelism and Discipleship

Is the Integral Mission approach as reflected in the books, articles, and organizations mentioned here a cause or an effect? Has this approach arisen *because of* general trends toward social justice among evangelicals, or has Integral Mission *created* a trend moving evangelical Christians toward social engagement themes? Although both are likely true, the result is that the evangelical church is widely embracing social engagement themes while at the same time reducing the emphasis on proclaiming the message of the cross.

One source indicates a shift in missionary emphasis away from evangelism and discipleship and toward relief/development, and education/training covering a span from 1998 to 2016. This shift corresponds to the time during which Christian leaders have promoted the Integral Mission concept. Using data from the North American Mission Handbook, Missio Nexus compiled the following charts:<sup>22</sup>



Used by Permission. Missio Nexus

The shift is notable for several reasons. First, the shift begins in 2005, shortly after the Micah Declaration (2001). Second, the shift is away from *evangelism/discipleship* and towards

<sup>22</sup> Missio Nexus. *Missiographics*, “Primary Activities of Mission Agencies-USA and Canada,” 2017. Used by Permission.

*education/training*, and *relief/development*. Third, the trend has not levelled off, at least through 2016. If this trend continues, it portends a tremendous decline in missionary efforts to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches.

### **Was Social Action Integrated into the Gospel by Jesus?**

An examination of some of the passages frequently referenced by Integral Mission proponents demonstrates that Jesus did not advocate the kind of social action promoted by many today.

#### ***Luke 4:18-19***

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19, ESV)

The inaugural announcement by Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue is often referenced to support social action as an integral part of the gospel. Ron Sider includes Luke 4:18-19 as one of several passages supporting his argument that "one of the central biblical doctrines is that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed."<sup>23</sup>

Richard Stearns includes an appeal from this passage under the heading "Jesus Had a Mission Statement."<sup>24</sup> He writes:

Proclaiming the whole gospel then, means much more than evangelism in the hopes that people will hear and respond to the good news of salvation by faith in Christ. It also encompasses tangible compassion for the sick and the poor, as well as biblical justice, efforts to right the wrongs that are so prevalent in our world.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ronald J Sider, "An Evangelical Theology of Liberation," *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (1980): 130-32.

<sup>24</sup> Stearns, *Hole in Our Gospel*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. There are many aspects of Stearns's book that are commendable. It is beyond the intention of this paper to provide a full analysis of *The Hole in Our Gospel*. Michael Stallard provides such an

Stearns and Sider were early influencers of today's social action proponents. Sider's article is helpful where he points out errors in Liberation Theology, even though he embraces many of its ideas. Stearns calls the church to consider the poor and to provide physical assistance alongside of gospel proclamation, something historically practiced in the Christian missions movement and strongly needed today. But Sider and Stearns both use Luke 4:18-19 as a mandate that the *mission* of the church is to care for the poor because that was Christ's mission. Such a position is without exegetical support.

Christ's public miracles provided sight for the blind, healing for the sick, and even resurrection from the dead, but the miracles themselves were not his ultimate purpose. As wonderful as they were to those who were blessed, their primary purpose was to validate Christ's identity as the Son of God and Messiah of Israel in order to gain a hearing for his message. If the purpose of Christ's incarnation was to heal the sick, then his mission was a failure, for there were many who were sick even after his resurrection. Those who were healed eventually succumbed to some later physical illness and died.

To claim that Christ was sent to reduce human physical suffering and that the mission of the church is to do the same misses the main point of this remarkable passage. Jesus' miracles proved that he was the Son of God. He made this clear when the disciples of John came to ask if he was indeed the Messiah:

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.' (Matt 11:2-5, ESV)

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analysis in his fair and thoughtful review in "Gospel Centeredness, Jesus, and Social Ethics," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 15 (Fall 2011): 5-24.

Jesus explains that his miracles served to bear witness that he was sent by God the Father: “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36, ESV).

The author of Hebrews also clarifies that the signs and wonders performed by Jesus bore witness to the truth of his message: “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ‘while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will’” (Heb 2:3-4, ESV).

Christ was compassionate toward the poor. His compassion provides an example for Christians to follow. But the greatest thing that Jesus did for the sick and the poor was to deliver them from their sins. His physical healing demonstrated that he had the power to do this as he made clear when he said, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Matt 9:6, ESV).

### ***The Commissioning of the Twelve, Matthew 10:5-42***

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.’ (Matt 10:5-8, ESV)

The Twelve were commissioned to invite Israel to receive Jesus as their Messiah. The commissioning strategy established by Jesus in this passage is not in force today. Jesus was offering the kingdom (verse 7), an offer that will ultimately be fulfilled when the righteous remnant of Israel welcome Jesus as their King at the end of the Great Tribulation (Zech 12:10; Rev 20:4). In Matthew 10, the Twelve were instructed to “proclaim the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (ESV) “Proclaim” is translated from the Greek κηρύσσω, “announce, make known” by a

herald.<sup>26</sup> This is the same word used frequently in the epistles to exhort Christians to “preach the gospel” (Acts 8:25; Rom 1:15). The NT epistles speak about preaching Christ (Acts 8:5; 1 Cor 1:23), preaching the gospel (Col 1:23), and preaching the word (2 Tim 2:4), among other commands. It is only in the Gospels and Acts where we find reference to preaching the kingdom of God.

This passage is not a call to believers today to raise the dead and heal the sick, nor should it be taken as an appeal to social action. Craig Bloomberg writes, “Verse 8 [of Matthew 10] has regularly been taken as support for modern medical missions as well; appropriate as these may be, they are not what Jesus envisions here.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37***

This parable is often cited to support the integration of social action into the gospel. Jesus shares this parable in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The lesson strikes directly at the heart of Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. Here we find the story of a victim—a man assaulted by robbers and left for dead. The example of the Samaritan is vitally important for us to follow today, but not in the way some social action apologists interpret this passage.

There is continuity in the parable of the Good Samaritan and Paul’s exhortation to do good to everyone “as we have opportunity” (Gal 6:10). There is no indication in the text that the Samaritan went out looking for someone to help. That was not the point of Jesus’ parable. Just as Paul instructs Christians in Galatians 6:10, the Samaritan was presented with an opportunity to “do good” (Gal 6:10). He did what we all should do when we see a need and have the means to meet it. He went

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<sup>26</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 431.

<sup>27</sup> Craig Bloomberg, *Matthew*, NAC vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 171.

into action while others passed by. The fact that he was a Samaritan only reinforced that we are all called to compassion without prejudice. As powerful and familiar as this parable is to us, it should not be interpreted as a call to churches to establish programs to address community needs. There is nothing wrong with such programs, as they may be a part of a church or an individual Christian or even a Christian organization responding to real community needs locally or internationally. But they should not be construed as something commanded in this text.

Many passages in the Gospels speak of Christ's healing and compassion. These passages provide insight into Christ's character. They testify to his authority and genuineness as the Son of God, but they do not characterize the essence of the gospel as including a combination of the gospel message and social action.

### **Was Social Action Integrated into the Gospel by the Apostolic Church?**

The Apostolic church does not provide an example of a church engaged in social action causes. Despite living during a time of great injustice, there is no evidence in the New Testament that the Apostolic church practiced anything resembling the type of social action suggested by Integral Mission proponents. Noting this absence of NT examples, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert write, "If you are looking for a picture of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for societal renewal, and strategies to serve the community in Jesus's name, you won't find them in Acts."<sup>28</sup>

There is much attention today to the "mission of the church." DeYoung and Gilbert address this in their book, *What is the Mission of the Church?*

It used to be that *mission* referred pretty narrowly to Christians sent out cross-culturally to convert non-Christians and plant churches. But now *mission* is understood much more broadly. Environmental

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<sup>28</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49.

stewardship is mission. Community renewal is mission. Blessing our neighbors is mission. Mission is here. Mission is there. Mission is everywhere. We are all missionaries.”<sup>29</sup>

Whatever difficulty there may be in defining “mission,” there should be little debate concerning the definition and usage of “gospel,” as the Greek *ευαγγελιον* is used 76 times in the New Testament. None of those references include a description of social action or suggest that compassion should be shown to non-believers as a component of the gospel.

Rather than a broad definition of the gospel encompassing social action, community projects, health care, and other noble causes, the NT usage of *ευαγγελιον* is narrow. The definition of the gospel is not elastic but specific and contained.

### ***1 Corinthians 15:1-3***

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1, 3, ESV).

After numerous warnings to the Corinthians about divisions in the church (chapter 3), sexual immorality (chapter 5), lawsuits against fellow Christians (chapter 6), and the abuse of the Lord’s Table (chapter 11), Paul addresses perhaps the most consequential matter facing the troubled church. Some in Corinth were denying the resurrection, the cornerstone of the gospel message (15:12-19). He begins his correction of the Corinthian error by clearly elaborating the content of the gospel:

- (1) Jesus died for our sins (15:3).
- (2) He was buried (15:4).
- (3) He was raised from the dead (15:4).
- (4) He appeared to others (15:5-9).

This passage provides a minimalist picture of the content of the gospel message. If social action is a part of the gospel, Paul

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18 (*italics original*).



withholds that information from the most straightforward explanation of the gospel in the New Testament.

### ***Acts 15:7***

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ‘Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’ (Acts 15:7, ESV)

The expansion of the gospel through Paul’s missionary activity raised a question among the Jewish church in Jerusalem concerning the core of the gospel message. At issue was whether the Gentiles needed to follow the commands of the law. The church council in Jerusalem was a significant event for clarification of the gospel message.

Peter delivers the council’s decision concerning the importance of the gospel message, unattached to any human effort. The phrase “the word of the gospel” indicates a spoken message that Peter faithfully declared to both Jews and Gentiles. The Jerusalem council could have included any number of social action programs as a means by which to satisfy the desires of the new Gentile believers or the established Jewish church, but they did not. Instead, they validated that the gospel is a word to be preached so that both Jew and Gentile could be saved.

### ***Galatians 1:11-3:1***

The Galatian Christians were quickly moving away from the gospel (1:6-9). Paul brings them back to the truth of the gospel, using the root word *ευαγγελιον* fifteen times in this epistle. Paul explains that the gospel has not come from human origin (1:11-12) and rehearses his presentation of the gospel to the church’s leaders in Jerusalem (2:14). He declares that the gospel brings about justification by faith (3:8). Indeed, it was the gospel that brought about Abraham’s justification. Paul’s gospel to the Gentiles is the same gospel Peter proclaimed as the Apostle to the Jews (2:7-9).

Paul speaks much about the gospel in Galatians, but he does not include anything about social action. One statement about the poor is found in Galatians 2:10: “Only, they asked us

to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” This was not a request from the Jerusalem council that Paul establish humanitarian works among the Gentiles. This related exclusively to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, a request Paul faithfully carried out by collecting a gift from the Macedonian churches to be brought to Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-26).

Timothy George explains the context of this request:

Paul and Barnabas were asked to remember “the poor,” a shorthand expression for “the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26). From its earliest days the Jerusalem church faced a condition of grinding poverty, as can be seen from the dispute over widows receiving sufficient food and the practice of sharing all things in common to care for the needy (Acts 4:32–35; 6:1–4).<sup>30</sup>

The extensive treatment of the gospel contained in Galatians does not include social action as a component that gospel.

### *Summary*

While numerous injustices existed in the first century, Paul did not address them or begin efforts to eradicate them.<sup>31</sup> As Gary Gilley writes,

There are no examples of early Christians attempting to transform or create culture or influence the political system in a direct way. Nor do we find them organizing programs to feed the hungry of the world or to right social injustices. Almost all of their

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC vol. 30 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 165.

<sup>31</sup> In Paul’s instruction to Philemon, he urges him to receive his runaway slave Onesimus back “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Phlm 16, ESV). Paul’s advocacy on behalf of Onesimus was astoundingly countercultural, but it falls short of a full treatise against slavery. Later generations of Christians would boldly speak out against the injustice of slavery, bringing about its end in Europe and America.

attention was on evangelizing the lost as well as the spiritual life and physical needs of the believing community.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that speaking about and participating in social causes was used to woo sinners to the gospel is not found in Scripture.

### **Practical Considerations About the Social Action Gospel**

It has been established that integrating social action into what it means to proclaim the gospel is not supported in Scripture. Christians are commanded to love their neighbor (Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14), practice compassion (Col 3:12), practice justice (Mic 6:8), and do good to all men (Gal 6:10). However, the compassion that we are commanded to show to all people is nowhere equated in Scripture with what it means to preach the gospel. The following practical considerations demonstrate the weakness of integrating social action as a part of what it means to proclaim the gospel.

#### ***Non-Christians also Practice Social Action***

If “our proclamation has social consequences...and our social involvement has evangelistic consequences,”<sup>33</sup> it has these consequences for Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, and atheists. The argument cuts both ways, making a case that in general, kindness and generosity reflect positively on all who practice these actions. Christians can and should respond to human needs both on a personal and corporate level, but compassion is not restricted to Christians, nor would anyone expect that it should be. The idea that people will be compelled to respond to the gospel because Christians have been kind ties the effectiveness of evangelism to the good works of a believer rather than to the power of the gospel itself.

#### ***A Christian’s Civic Responsibility***

It is right that all people should care about poverty, homelessness, disease, and injustice, both Christians and non-

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<sup>32</sup> Gilley, *Social Justice Primer*, Kindle loc. 620.

<sup>33</sup> Micah Network, “Integral Mission,” 2019 and Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 2010.

Christians. Many of the appeals put forth by Christian social action proponents should be embraced by all. As fellow human beings, Christians and non-Christians have a common interest in helping those who are disadvantaged. Who would not be moved with compassion for an ill child, a starving nation, or women captured as sex-slaves? There is no objection to showing compassion in any of these circumstances. Christians should stand up with all others to speak out and act with meaningful intervention because it is a part of their Christian duty as good citizens. Failure to do so is a violation of the Lord's command and gives the unsaved an opportunity to bring accusation against Jesus and his followers. In 1 Peter, the apostle urges Christians that living as the "people of God" requires them to maintain a good and honorable testimony in front of their non-believing neighbors: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12, ESV; see also Matt 5:16; Rom 13:1-4; Titus 2:8; 1 Pet 3:16).

### ***Theology or Political Ideology?***

Some of today's social justice themes are driven by leftist political ideology. Ron Sider, an early promoter, advocated themes originating from Liberation Theology, as noted earlier. Gary Gilley points out the extent of Sider's influence.

Sider has long been a bridge between Liberation Theology and evangelicalism. While not endorsing the darker sides of Liberation Theology, such as bloody revolutions and overthrowing of governments, he has accepted the socialistic features of the movement and has attempted to integrate them into the evangelical church in the West.<sup>34</sup>

Its connection with Liberation Theology brings many left-leaning themes into evangelical churches, colleges, and seminaries. Environmentalism, immigration policy, racial reconciliation, racial imbalance in the prison population, worker's rights, and other themes that have been prevalent in the

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<sup>34</sup> Gilley, *Social Justice Primer*, Kindle loc. 1030.

American Left are now becoming mainstream in the evangelical social justice movement, as well.

### ***Revealing Omissions***

Injustices not in line with left-leaning politics are seldom mentioned by evangelical social justice advocates. Injustices such as abortion, anti-Semitism, and the persecution of Christians take a back seat to the environment, sex-trafficking, water and food scarcity, AIDS, and other medical needs. As mentioned above, who is not moved with compassion by these things? Certainly, Christians should engage in helping in these situations, as should all people. However, such engagement is not the same as proclaiming the gospel. Ministries of compassion might possibly become a platform for presenting the gospel, but they do not themselves communicate the gospel. While compassion work could potentially open doors for evangelistic communication of the gospel message, the gospel itself must be preached. It is the gospel that liberates, not human endeavors.

### ***It is Easier to Dig Wells than it is to Share the Gospel***

Social action tends to be much easier than evangelism because those who walk in darkness are opposed to the light of the gospel (Matt 10:22; John 12:40; 2 Cor 4:4; 2 Tim 3:12). A Muslim community is unlikely to be offended by Christians who provide safe drinking water. But that same community may be greatly offended by Christians who share the gospel. The concern of this writer is that over time, Christians will resort to the path of least resistance, leading to what could be called “The Social Gospel 2.0.” Under the goal that “our social involvement has evangelistic consequences,” Christians are finding it very easy to omit the “proclamation” part and just trust social involvement to take care of the “evangelistic consequences.”

### ***The Lost Will Not be Saved Because Christians Do Good Deeds***

Duane Litfin expresses the following thought:

The belief that we can “preach the gospel” with our actions alone represents muddled thinking. However important our actions may

be (and they are very important indeed), and whatever else they may be doing (they serve a range of crucial functions), they are not “preaching the Gospel.” The Gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching it is inherently verbal behavior.<sup>35</sup>

Speaking directly to the question of Integral Mission he also writes,

Few would deny that the holistic mission of the church is the best possible platform for our verbal witness, and that our jaded generation will be more inclined to give us a hearing if we are living it out. (Indeed, the longest section of my new book, *Word versus Deed*, is devoted to the crucial role of our deeds.) But this does not permit us to hold the Gospel hostage to our shortcomings.<sup>36</sup>

Christians must not allow the truth of the gospel to be minimized or even lost simply because our post-modern generation is more moved by image and intention than by precise words explaining the vital historical facts of Jesus, and the necessity of faith in him alone.

### ***The Gospel is Powerful Even When the Messengers are Weak***

Christians are called to compassion, justice, and selfless love for others. Failure to follow these commands is pure disobedience. But can the gospel be believed when its messengers themselves are unjust oppressors? If the gospel is sufficiently powerful to provide all that is needed for a sinner to understand Christ’s work on his or her behalf and turn in faith to him, the answer is, “yes.” This is not an excuse for Christians to disobey the Lord but rather a reminder that the power is in the gospel message itself, not in the messenger (Rom 1:16-17; Matt

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<sup>35</sup> Duane Litfin, “You Can’t Preach the Gospel with Deeds: And Why It’s Important to Say So,” *Christianity Today*, May 30, 2012, 40. See his book on the same subject, Duane Litfin, *Word Versus Deed: Resetting the Scales to a Biblical Balance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Litfin, “You Can’t Preach,” 43.

16:18). This paradox is demonstrated by African slaves who in large numbers became devoted Christians during the American nineteenth century. Enslaving another human is one of the most violent examples of injustice. Professing Christians not only engaged in this wicked atrocity, but they attempted to justify it with the Bible. Yet despite the appalling injustices committed against slaves, many of them saw the true Christ and turned to him for spiritual deliverance. Eric Lincoln writes, “The black Christians who formed the historic black churches also knew implicitly that their understanding of Christianity, which was premised on the rock of antiracial discrimination, was more authentic than the Christianity practiced in white churches.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Only Jesus can Establish His Kingdom*

Social gospel advocates often use the vague and biblically imprecise statement that by practicing justice, we are “building the kingdom.” Though there are many things that Christians and churches should do to please and honor our Savior, they cannot build his kingdom. There is little room here to discuss an issue so broad, other than to say that the future kingdom belongs to Jesus and only he can establish it. Integral Mission advocates proclaim that by improving society, we can see the kingdom of God come to earth. Richard Stearns writes, “The whole Gospel is a vision for ushering in God’s kingdom—now, not in some future time, and here, on earth, not in some distant heaven.”<sup>38</sup> Ruth Padilla Deborst writes,

The good news of God’s reconciling purposes will reach into our world, mired as it is in corruption, injustice, violence, poverty, and the plunder of creation, if and when the followers of the wounded King allow the Spirit to weave them into a community of such radical discipleship that in all they are, all they do, and all they say they witness to God’s integral transformation until the kingdom comes in full.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), Kindle Edition, loc, 332.

<sup>38</sup> Stearns, *Hole in Our Gospel*, xxii.

<sup>39</sup> Deborst, “Integral Transformational Approach,” 64.

Even the most utopian, crime-free, justice-focused human community on earth cannot compare to the glories of Christ's future kingdom. Instead of ushering in Christ's kingdom, believers should see their activity in this world as filling Christ-like character while we walk in this world: "that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15, ESV). "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8, ESV).

Dispensationalists understand that the church will not bring about Christ's kingdom. As good citizens, Christians participate in society because God has ordained human government and because until their redemption is complete, they are both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth (Phil 3:20; 2 Cor 5:1; Eph 2:19).

God's plan does not culminate with the glorious triumph of the church over injustice. It culminates with Jesus executing justice upon a world in rebellion, as he invites his redeemed ones to share authority with him in his righteous kingdom.

### **An Appeal for Compassion without Redefining the Gospel**

It was stated at the outset that Christians are called to follow the example of Jesus and demonstrate compassion to those in need. But the demonstration of that compassion is not the same thing as proclaiming the gospel which is the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Integral Mission movement is redefining what it means to proclaim the gospel, something that should cause great concern for truth-loving Christians. The fact that many of its principles are drawn from the political left should be carefully evaluated so that Christians are not swept up by the philosophies of the day (Col 2:8).

This objection to redefining the gospel should not be interpreted as opposition to Christian compassion or efforts to speak against injustice or help those in need. The outworking of Christian compassion is powerful and beautifully diverse, just as diverse as the body of Christ. Galatians 6:10 provides an outline of how that compassion is focused.



*“So then, as we have opportunity...”* Wherever Christians see a need, they should seek to meet that need. Compassion is connected to the needs we encounter while living in a fallen world. Individual Christians, local churches and mission movements may be drawn to serve a variety of needs. This world will present no shortage of opportunities for Christians to selflessly love and serve others. Let the church do this with dedication and enthusiasm, but let the church proclaim the gospel.

*“Let us do good to everyone...”* There is no prejudice in how believers demonstrate compassion. Goodness should be shown to everyone regardless of spiritual condition. Where there is a human need, Christians are called to respond.

*“And especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* The primary recipients of Christian kindness are other Christians. Brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need should receive generous concern, prayer, and action from other portions of the body capable of rendering assistance. The first place to practice compassion is on behalf of fellow Christians suffering injustice, poverty, and persecution.

In a recent graduation lecture to the students at Bethlehem College and Seminary, John Piper gave a passionate and clear example of what it means to talk with biblical accuracy and deep tenderness about social involvement and the Christian’s responsibility to the world in which we live. His message “What Do Christians Care About (Most)?”<sup>40</sup> emphasized that Christians should think about social action and injustice differently than non-Christians because Christians are ultimately concerned with the injustices that we all have committed against God. He said,

Millions of Christians including many missionaries have convinced themselves that they are loving lost people by caring mostly about their suffering in this world and little about how they will spend eternity. It is unfortunate that some missionaries, who

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<sup>40</sup> John Piper, “What Do Christians Care about (Most)?”

Commencement address at Bethlehem College & Seminary, May 17, 2019, Minneapolis, [www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-do-christians-care-about-most](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-do-christians-care-about-most) (emphasis added).

are deeply committed to loving and helping people, are leaving out the most important part of Christian compassion—compassion for the eternal destiny of the people to whom they minister.

Three additional quotations from this address are worth considering. Piper continues,

Christians care about all injustice, especially injustice against God...The word “all” is intended to *prick the conscience of Christians*, who because of self-indulgence or fear, have dulled the capacity of their hearts to care about the injustices of the world and all the countless ways that people all over the world are treated by other people worse than they deserve.

“If you don’t care about all injustice, you’re striving in your heart against God.”

Christians care about all injustice, especially...injustice against God. The word “all” especially is intended to *call out unbelief among Christians*. It’s intended to call out practical unbelief of Christians for whom the injustices against humans ignite more passion in their hearts, in their mouths, than the global tragedy of injustice against God.

Although it has been shown that Integral Mission proponents equate social action with the proclamation of the gospel, Piper is more precise when he says, “If you don’t care about all injustice, you’re striving in your heart against God.” This is true and provides all the motivation that Christians need to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8, ESV).

Christians do not need to re-define the gospel in order to practice justice, kindness, and humility in the world. They simply need to obey God. In efforts to speak out against injustice and help a world in need, Christians must remember that it is the gospel that liberates. Biblical evangelism relies fully on the power of God and not the efforts of humans (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:17; 2:4-5; 2 Cor 4:7). The Scriptures remind Christians of this

power, and this power should be kept in clear focus as we seek to witness to a lost and dying world.

# Dispensational Thought as Motivation for Social Activism among Early Plymouth Brethren

James I. Fazio

**Abstract:** The goal of this paper is to highlight the influence of dispensational thought in motivating early Plymouth Brethren toward cross-cultural missionary outreach and social activism. This will be achieved by looking at some of the movement's founding members: Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853), Edward Cronin (1801–1882), and John Parnell (1805–1883), along with a handful of other early influences such as James Deck (1807–1884), George Müller (1805–1898), and Henry Craik (1805–1866). Despite their orientation towards religious separatism from the world and from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have earned a reputation for being among the most outward reaching affinity groups within Christianity. This paper will demonstrate how dispensational thought energized this orientation among early Plymouth Brethren.

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## Introduction

Over the past two centuries, the community of Christians known as the Plymouth Brethren have been known for several traits that stem from a strict adherence to a theologically conservative view of Scripture's authority and sufficiency as understood through a literalistic interpretation. This approach to Scripture has resulted in an orientation that could be generally described as evangelical, if not fundamentalist

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with several nuances, including a primitivist ecclesiology that maintains a low church orientation, a premillennial eschatology that is consistent with a dispensational understanding of Scripture, and a Calvinistic soteriology that emphasizes separatism from the world and other corrupting influences. It may also be added that the Brethren have become as well defined by what they stand against as what they stand for. In this way, they may be well characterized as anti-denominational, anti-creedal, anti-liturgical, and anti-clerical. Many of these named qualities are commonly recognized by those who possess even a scant familiarity with those who identify with the label Brethren. What is less immediately recognized is that among the most prominent contributions made by this community of dispensational-minded believers is the indelible mark they have left on the developing world through their unrivaled efforts in international and cross-cultural missionary outreach and a distinct zeal for social activism.

Some may be aware of the itinerate ministry of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) in Switzerland, throughout Europe, and in North America, including his original translation work of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments into English, French, and German. Less known are the efforts of his colleagues Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853) and Edward Cronin (1801–1882) who labored in India and Baghdad, or the ministry of John Parnell (1805–1883) in Mesopotamia, or James Deck (1807–1884) in New Zealand. Yet few are unfamiliar with the indefatigable charitable work of George Müller (1805–1898) and Henry Craik (1805–1866) in Bristol and the cross-cultural missionary activity of Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in China. For each of these Brethren whose names may be recognized stand myriads of others whose stories have not been memorialized. However, scarcely has any connection been made between their charitable efforts and their dispensational thought that drove them to dedicate their lives to carrying out the social demands of the gospel of Christ at home and to the remotest peoples of the earth. Therefore, it is the goal of this article to consider how dispensational thought served as motivation for social activism among early Plymouth Brethren and stimulated them to pursue

cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world.

### **The Plymouth Brethren's Legacy of Social Activism**

In a newly published book by Oxford University Press, one of the leading international scholars of new religious movements makes a valiant effort to demystify one of the more complex and generally misunderstood religious groups of our time, the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>2</sup> Though Massimo Introvigne's work has received mixed reviews, its value in painting an outsider's impression of the enduring presence and activity of this most peculiar people should not go without mention.<sup>3</sup> In the book, he takes note that for such a relatively obscure religious minority, the Plymouth Brethren's global impact is of no minor significance, being realized in countries across the globe. Moreover, he observes that their "charitable and humanitarian activities in favour of those who are not members of their community are as old as the Brethren themselves."<sup>4</sup> Though Introvigne fails to pay the pioneering efforts of Anthony Norris Groves and Edward Cronin more homage than a sentence or two, and entirely overlooks the work of men such as John Parnell and James Deck in the developing world, he at least gives a slight nod to the Lady Theodosia Powerscourt (1800–1836) who "was active in funding the schooling of local poor children in Ireland and supported several educational and charitable initiatives in favour of the poor of all denominations."<sup>5</sup> He likewise does not fail to mention the "Lieutenant John Blackmore [who] established two rescue houses for 'fallen girls' from the London streets in the 1850s, with the personal support of John Nelson

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<sup>2</sup> Massimo Introvigne, *The Plymouth Brethren* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Massimo Introvigne is professor of Sociology of Religions at Pontifical Salesian University in Torino, Italy, and managing director of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions). He is the author of nearly sixty books on religious minorities, including *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren*, 1–3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Darby.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Introvigne takes notice of several other efforts of early Plymouth Brethren who engaged in social and charitable endeavors, not the least of which includes the extraordinary labors of George Müller and Henry Craik who established homes to rescue orphans from Bristol’s cruel streets.<sup>7</sup> In the end, his book serves to cast a generally favorable light of the impact of the Brethren, eliciting the following response from one reader: “Far from just being a quaint outdated group, the Brethren are a most active community in our contemporary world.”<sup>8</sup> Anyone taking an impartial look at this religious minority would find Introvigne’s conclusions difficult to dispute: despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world, and moreover, from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have made an indelible impact on the world that is remarkably disproportionate to their numbers.

### **Dispensational Thought as Motivation for their Efforts**

In the following section, a brief sample of noteworthy efforts by early Plymouth Brethren will be offered to introduce the reader to some of the men listed above who pioneered cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world. However, it seems appropriate to first offer clarity concerning the specific claim of this paper. It may seem to some a bit of a stretch to draw a link between the missionary efforts of the early Plymouth Brethren and the dispensational thought which served to distinguish them. After all, numerous examples of other missionary-minded contemporaries could be cited who are not inclined toward nor should be associated with dispensational ideologies such as William Carey (1761–1834), Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), or David Livingstone (1818–1873). Therefore, the limitations of this claim should be made clear: for many of the early Plymouth Brethren, dispensational thought

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37–42.

<sup>8</sup> Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, professor of North American Literature and Civilization, University of Bordeaux, taken from the back cover dust jacket of Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren*.

served as a stimulus which compelled them to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts in the developing world.

In particular, the early Plymouth Brethren were noted for subscribing to several distinctly dispensational ideals, including:

(1) Dispensational bibliology as expressed in their predisposition to a theologically conservative view of Scripture's authority and sufficiency as understood through a literalistic interpretation.

(2) Dispensational ecclesiology demonstrated in a strong anti-clericalism accompanied by a high view of the shared priesthood that is common to all believers.

(3) Dispensational eschatology with a compelling expectation of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ to usher in the next age of his millennial kingdom upon earth.

(4) Dispensational pneumatology with its peculiar notion of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit in the present age among Christian believers and superintending their evangelistic efforts.

(5) Dispensational soteriology, expressed as it was, through a moderate Calvinistic soteriology that recognized God's sovereign election of believers was to be realized in concert with the energy of those whom he called, in keeping with the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles:

How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without one who preaches? and how shall they preach unless they have been sent? according as it is written, How beautiful the feet of them that announce glad tidings of peace, of them that announce glad tidings of good things! (Rom 10:14–15, DARBY)

Although it may be granted that non-dispensationalists hold to some of the above stated ideals,<sup>9</sup> nevertheless, these points serve

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, some non-dispensationalists may even affirm all five of the points offered above, and yet may persist in rejecting the “dispensational” label, though they cannot rightly maintain that they have not subscribed to dispensational thought, however unwittingly, surreptitiously, or otherwise.



to mark those doctrines, which emerge from a distinctly dispensational approach to Scripture. Moreover, each of these enumerated points could be cited as motivating factors for social activism among early Plymouth Brethren and served to stimulate them to pursue cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world. A brief survey of some of the more noteworthy efforts of early Plymouth Brethren will demonstrate this.

### **A Sample of Noteworthy Efforts of Early Plymouth Brethren**

As previously noted, the Plymouth Brethren have left a remarkable legacy of social activism both in the “home mission” and abroad. They are known for having channeled an inordinate amount of energy into cross-cultural missionary efforts throughout the developing world; more than one might expect their numbers could warrant. Since it is not possible to do justice to these efforts in such a small amount of space, here mention will be made of some of the earliest figures who might typically be regarded as founding members of the Plymouth Brethren.

It has been a matter of some disputation whether John Nelson Darby was, in fact, counted among the first coterie of like-minded Christians who broke bread together in Dublin in 1827.<sup>10</sup> However, what is quite certain was the presence and participation of Anthony Norris Groves, Edward Cronin, and John Parnell. Like Darby, each of these three men dispatched from the British Isles within just a few short years after their initial gathering to break bread in Dublin around 1827–28. However, whereas Darby’s itinerant ministry carried him through western Europe, and particularly to settle down in French-speaking Switzerland, between the years of 1837–1843, each of these other three men embarked on cross-cultural missionary endeavors which carried

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<sup>10</sup> Introigne, *Plymouth Brethren*, 29; Cf. Willian Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 17–21; Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren* (London, UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1967), 44–46; Donald Harman Akenson, *Discovering the End of Time: Irish Evangelicals in the Age of Daniel O’Connell*, (Chicago, IL: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 271–73.

them to developing countries such as India, Baghdad, and Mesopotamia.

### *Anthony Norris Groves*

In 1829, ten years before David Livingstone first set off for Africa, Anthony Norris Groves arrived in the heart of the Muslim world with his wife and two young sons to “establish what was to become the first Protestant mission to Arabic-speaking Muslims.”<sup>11</sup> Groves was a dentist by trade, with a lucrative practice in Plymouth, England. He was sufficiently well-established, financially, to embark on a mission to the Muslim world that would never yield him any earthly remuneration. The presence of this gentle European family in Baghdad was every bit as startling and perplexing to the indigenous peoples of that day as it comes across to readers of the present day. Secular Irish historian and Brethren-critic Donald Akenson, has offered the following remark:

The earliest Brethren were not a link in some undocumentable skein of sackcloth-wearing dissidents, but rather a new phenomenon, a group of privileged members of a First World cohort who gave themselves over to an attempt to redeem various

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2004), 13. Dann has produced some of the most impressive biographical research on Anthony Norris Groves, stemming from his PhD research at the University of Liverpool. Besides the title referenced above, he has authored several other works on his subject, including Robert Bernard Dann, “The Legacy of Anthony Norris Groves,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 29, no. 4 (October 2005): 198-202; *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A Radical Influence on the Nineteenth-century Protestant Church in Britain* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2007); and *The Primitivist Missiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A radical influence on nineteenth-century Protestant mission* (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 2006). More recently, Donald Harman Akenson has undertaken to produce a most cynical evaluation of the life and ministry of Anthony Norris Groves in the second installment of his critical trilogy on John Nelson Darby: Donald Harman Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture: John Nelson Darby and the Victorian Conquest of North-American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Third World cultures. The faith missions of the early Brethren were paradoxical and contradictory, humble in the sense that the missionaries followed St. Paul and put themselves through arduous deprivations, and arrogant in the sense that their goal was to supplant the core beliefs of the indigenous cultures which they targeted.<sup>12</sup>

What Akenson fails to recognize is that in both of these so called “paradoxical and contradictory” traits, the earliest Brethren were following the pattern laid down by the apostles. Not only did Paul assume a posture of humility in preaching the gospel of Christ to a people that were not his own kinsmen, but he too assumed that supplanting their native beliefs would be of eternal benefit to them; otherwise, the temporal cost could not be considered justified. In the case of the apostles it cost them their very lives. Although Anthony Norris Groves did not lose his life on the mission field, on May 14, 1831, he lost his wife, Mary, to the harshness of the foreign mission field. A week prior she had been afflicted by a plague which claimed between half and two-thirds of the population, according to Groves’ reports.<sup>13</sup> Just three short months later he would be deprived of his baby girl, who was born on the mission field, before she could see her first birthday.<sup>14</sup> Rather than abandon his efforts at this point, Groves maintained his commitment in the field to which he felt called. Within a year, while still laboring in Baghdad, unbeknownst to him, his story was published throughout London, and Grove’s faith-missionary efforts received manifold support. In addition to generating increased financial revenue for his field work, Groves received waves of visiting parties from the West, who came to see first-hand the work that he was pioneering in the heart of the Muslim world, the very area referred to in his day as “the headquarters of Islamism.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 51–52.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Norris Groves, *Memoir of the Late Anthony Norris Groves, Containing Extracts from his Letters and Journals* (London, UK: James Nisbet, 1857), 141.

<sup>14</sup> Groves, *Memoir*, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 13.

Groves' enthusiasm and sincerity toward his labors was truly contagious. In his time spent in Baghdad he was joined on the field by his friend and apprentice, John Kitto (1804–1854), who is deserving of a story all his own, though space will not permit. Additionally, Groves inspired visits from Edward Cronin and John Parnell, both of whom will be considered below, as well as Francis William Newman (1805–1897). A few years after the loss of his wife and daughter, Groves learned that a revised charter granted to the East India Company opened the way for unrestricted Christian missionary work in India. After an initial tour from Bombay to Calcutta in 1833, he determined to set his attention on Madras, where he was joined by an entourage of Brethren workers in 1836. Groves continued his work among the Indian natives until poor health forced him to return to England in 1852. Within a year he passed away. Though he felt unsatisfied by his efforts, wishing he had more time and strength to give to the field, his pioneering efforts inspired countless others to follow the path he had blazed as a primitivist-missionary and spawned a new generation of “faith missions.”<sup>16</sup>

### ***Edward Cronin and John Parnell***

Among those first Brethren who broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, Edward Cronin was perhaps the most religiously out-of-place, having been brought up a Roman Catholic.<sup>17</sup> That fact did not obstruct his kinship to John Varney Parnell, who later took on the title “Second Lord Congleton” or “Baron Congleton.” The two were bound to one another not only by the same energizing Spirit, but by marriage as Edward Cronin wedded John's sister, Nancy Parnell. Accompanied by a handful of others, the three set off for Baghdad in pursuit of Anthony Norris Groves in 1830. As Cronin was a doctor by trade, his skills would serve as a tremendous asset in Baghdad, where Groves had been laboring. As seen earlier, Cronin walked a path that intersected with Groves' in many ways. This is not only true of their travels,

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<sup>16</sup> For a very helpful timeline of Anthony Norris Groves' life and work, see Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, 572–74.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Pickering, *Chief Men Among the Brethren* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986), 16.

but also of their losses. While Cronin was on the mission field in Baghdad during the time of the plague which claimed the life of Mrs. Groves, so too did Cronin's wife share the same fate. In December 1831, Edward Cronin lost his wife, and John Parnell lost his sister.<sup>18</sup> Far from deterring their efforts, both faithful Brethren continued their work in Baghdad, and into India in the years that followed.

### *James Deck*

James George Deck was not among the first coterie that broke bread in Dublin in 1827–1828, but that does not by all means make him a late-comer to the Plymouth Brethren movement. Evidence of this can be seen in that some of his hymns were published in the one of the earliest Plymouth Brethren song books edited in 1838, titled *Hymns for the Poor of the Flock*.<sup>19</sup> James Deck was an officer who was stationed overseas in the East India Company's service for two terms, first between 1824 and 1826 and again from 1830 to 1835.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after returning to England from his first stint in India, he came under the influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He determined that in his second appointment he would take a strong stand as a Christian. After a few years "he became troubled in his conscience about whether a Christian could be a soldier, and so he resigned from the position."<sup>21</sup> Initially, he aspired to become ordained as a minister, though his introduction to the Brethren in Plymouth changed his mind concerning that ambition, and he resolved to pursue his Christian calling as a lay evangelist wherever he found himself.

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<sup>18</sup> Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 78.

<sup>19</sup> A digital copy of this hymn book edited by G. V. Wigram (1805–1879) is available online at [brethrenarchive.org](http://brethrenarchive.org).

<sup>20</sup> Peter J. Lineham, "The Significance of J. G. Deck, 1807–1884," *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* no. 107 (November 1986): 4. Note: a repaginated PDF of this article is located at the German Brethren history site [www.bruederbewegung.de](http://www.bruederbewegung.de). This version was accessed for purposes of this research, and thus the pagination corresponds to that of the electronic document.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

When a conflict erupted between a leading brother in Plymouth, Benjamin Willis Newton (1807–1899) and John Nelson Darby, for whom he had great respect, his unwillingness to take a partisan position gave him all the reason he needed to look for ministry opportunities outside of Plymouth. In 1852, Deck resolved to move his family to New Zealand, where he took up residence in the Waiwera district to exercise his evangelistic gifts among the indigenous people. Within a year of relocating, Mrs. Deck found herself as maladjusted to the foreign living conditions as were so many other wives of the Plymouth Brethren, and on December 8, 1853, she lost her life, leaving several young children behind.<sup>22</sup> Within two years, James Deck remarried a lady by the name of Lewenna Atkinson, with whom he had five more children. However, shortly after the birth of their fifth child in 1865, Lewenna and the infant both succumbed to disease on the mission field, leaving James Deck a single father, again, this time of thirteen children.<sup>23</sup> We must be careful not to slip into thinking Deck's experience in New Zealand was nothing but tragedy upon tragedy. To the contrary, he lived out the remainder of his days in New Zealand and bore decades of fruitful ministry until at last he received his homeward call on August 14, 1884.<sup>24</sup> Three days later his body was laid to rest in the New Zealand soil at the Motueka Cemetery between the graves of his first and second wives.<sup>25</sup> At least one observer has attributed Deck's success to his dispensational thought when he remarked: "He was one of the most original of the Christian pioneers in New Zealand. Because he owed allegiance to no foreign church of theology, his assemblies adapted to the local environment to a degree which was rare among colonial churches."<sup>26</sup> At the turn of the century, within 40 years of Deck's

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<sup>22</sup> Lineham, "Significance," 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pickering, *Chief Men*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Lineham, "Significance," 23.

<sup>26</sup> David C. F. Wright, "James George Deck," an unpublished biographical paper, 2012. Note: a PDF of this article is located at the Christian history site [www.christian-moral.net](http://www.christian-moral.net).

first arrival in that country, nearly 1% of the total population of New Zealand identified as Brethren.<sup>27</sup>

### ***George Müller and Henry Craik***

Far better documented are the efforts of George Müller and Henry Craik, whose social work in Bristol garnered, at least the former, international recognition, though they were, indeed two co-laborers whose names should be paired together in the annals of history. Shortly after his conversion in 1825, Müller's Christian interests were turned almost exclusively toward the evangelization of the Jewish people. This drove him from his hometown of Prussia to England in 1829, to study the languages of Hebrew, Chaldean, and Yiddish to prepare for his cross-cultural mission.<sup>28</sup> There in England he first encountered Henry Craik, who had been an associate of Anthony Norris Groves. Craik convinced Müller to broaden his ministry interests beyond merely the Jewish people. Beyond that, Craik introduced Müller to several dispensation ideals, which he was eager to adopt as his own. These several ideals have been identified by a secular Irish historian and dispensational-antagonist, as follows: "the conviction that the Bible as sufficient for all human guidance and a belief in its literal accuracy, an embrace of the imminent approach of the Second Coming, and an acceptance of the validity of lay-based worship, including the breaking of bread."<sup>29</sup> While Akenson understands Müller and Craik as converts "to the beliefs and to the attitudes of Anthony Norris Groves,"<sup>30</sup> they might be otherwise understood as beholden to those ideals which distinguish dispensational thought.

In 1832 Müller and Craik moved to Bristol, "where they found an open door, and their united ministry, chiefly in Bethesda Chapel, was exceedingly fruitful."<sup>31</sup> Within a decade Bristol

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<sup>27</sup> The results of the 1901 New Zealand Census have been made available online as part of the digitized collection of New Zealand Statistics: Tatauranga Aotearoa, [https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic\\_publications/1901-census/1901-results-census/1901-results-census.html#d50e1088](https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1901-census/1901-results-census/1901-results-census.html#d50e1088).

<sup>28</sup> Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>31</sup> Pickering, *Chief Men*, 7.

would rival Plymouth as the most prominent center of Brethrenism, outshining the Irish regions of Wicklow, where the Powerscourt conferences were held, and Dublin, where the Brethren first came together to break bread.<sup>32</sup> However, Müller and Craik were not content with mere church work. Müller, in particular, was burdened with a heart to care for destitute orphans who littered Bristol's streets. In the years that followed, the city where Müller and Craik labored became better known for its orphan homes, which provided for the needs of thousands of displaced children, than for its thriving Brethren Assembly. Despite their numbers, the Brethren in Bristol were not able to provide support for all of the resident orphans, financially or otherwise. Rather than causing Müller to despair, the care for Bristol's orphans became a national, and even international, affair.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Brethren's Extended Influence*

Space does not permit further accounts of early Plymouth Brethren, whose stories could fill countless pages. Though it would be remiss not to at least make mention of a few of the more notable efforts of those who were not among the earliest Plymouth Brethren, but whose work extended from their influence. One such name, which should not go unnoticed, is that of James Hudson Taylor. At the age of 17, Taylor made the acquaintance of Edward Cronin, and became inspired by his missionary exploits to Baghdad. Two years later he was baptized by Andrew John Jukes of the Plymouth Brethren in the Hull Brethren Assembly, before spending 51 years in China and famously set up the China Inland Mission.<sup>34</sup> Remarking on the magnitude of his impact, one historian assessed,

Few missionaries in the nineteenth centuries since the apostle Paul have had a wider vision and have carried out a more systematic plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than did James

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<sup>32</sup> Akenson, *Exporting the Rapture*, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Pickering, *Chief Men*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> In later life, as the Plymouth Brethren fractured, Taylor became associated with the Keswick movement.



Hudson Taylor. His sights were set on reaching the whole of China, all 400 million people, and to that end he labored.<sup>35</sup>

In a letter penned to his sister, Amelia, dated February 14, 1860, Taylor expressed his heart for the people of that developing country with these words: “If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it. If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China but Christ. Can we do too much for Him?”<sup>36</sup> Looking back on the results of his efforts, American historian of China, Japan, and world Christianity, Kenneth S. Latourette, described Taylor as “one of the greatest missionaries of all time” as well as “one of the four or five most influential foreigners who came to China in the nineteenth century for any purpose, religious or secular.”<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, Taylor paved the way for a generation of socially and cross-culturally minded Christians. One such man was the English cricket player C. T. Studd (1860–1931), who was so inspired by Hudson Taylor that upon coming into a sizable inheritance he gave away his wealth to support George Müller’s work in Bristol, as well as Moody Bible Institute, and the Salvation Army in India.<sup>38</sup> When his fortune was not enough, he gave of his own life to serve in the China Inland Mission. After

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<sup>35</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 186.

<sup>36</sup> A. J. Broomhall, *The Shaping of Modern China: Hudson Taylor’s Life and Legacy*, vol. 1, *Early–1867*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 480. Note: This title, along with its second volume which covers the dates 1868–1990, is the product of a great-nephew of Hudson Taylor’s who also labored as a missionary doctor in China. Together, these volumes represent the most comprehensive work on the life and impact of James Hudson Taylor, serving as a re-issue of the 7-volume history with expanded material taken from primary sources, including extracts from Taylor’s letters, articles, etc.

<sup>37</sup> Taken from a quotation on the back cover of Broomhall, *Shaping of Modern China*. Extracted from Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Mission in China* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1929).

<sup>38</sup> Norman Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (1933, repr. Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Press, 1935), 68-70.

spending fifteen years in China, he moved to India for another six years before spending the remainder of his days in Africa, where he founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, which is still in operation today under the name WEC International. This interdenominational agency reportedly has over 1,860 workers spread across 85 countries, who work to address a host of social concerns facing developing countries, including: education, medical work, rescuing and rehabilitating addicts, caring for children in crisis, offering business skills, among other services, with a view to “helping local Christians share the gospel cross-culturally.”<sup>39</sup>

Another Christian who was equally impacted by the life of Hudson Taylor was the famous missionary from County Down, Northern Ireland, Amy Beatrice Carmichael (1867–1951). In 1887 she met Hudson Taylor at the Keswick Convention. On account of Taylor’s influence, Amy Carmichael intended to join CIM and spend her life in service to the people of China. However, when her health proved too poor for the demands that journey would put on her, she delayed travel to China. By the time her health permitted, she went to Japan for fifteen months before turning to Dohnavur, India, where she remained for the next 55 years of her life. Carmichael’s energies were turned primarily toward helping underprivileged children, including temple prostitutes and orphans. She famously founded an orphanage in southern India, which was described by one historian as “a center for humanitarian services.”<sup>40</sup> The Dohnavur Fellowship, founded by Amy Carmichael in 1901, is active today, having expanded its social programs to include child services, community development, education, and health services.<sup>41</sup>

It may be seen that the impact of the early Brethren discussed extended far beyond the British Isles. Before the close of the nineteenth century, the influence of these dispensationally-minded Christians reached the shores of North America. There,

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<sup>39</sup> WEC International, “About WEC.” 2020, <https://wec-uk.org/about>. accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem*, 300.

<sup>41</sup> The Dohnavur Fellowship, “Projects Grid” <http://dohnavurfellowship.org/projects-grid/>, accessed July 29, 2019.

a Presbyterian minister named Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921), who had attended several of the Niagara Bible Conferences, made the acquaintance of Hudson Taylor. Scofield caught Taylor’s infectious passion for developing countries, and in 1890 he organized the Central American Mission (CAM) in Costa Rica. Within a decade the efforts of CAM spilled over to Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, with as many as twenty-five workers serving in those five countries. By the end of the twentieth century, the organization had as many as three hundred workers serving in six countries, including Mexico.<sup>42</sup> The organization continues to thrive today under the name Camino Global as a nondenominational Protestant faith mission based in Dallas, Texas.<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to Hollywood, many have become acquainted with the more recent story of the Brethren missionaries, Nate Saint (1923–1956) and Jim Elliot (1927–1956), who lost their lives in an effort to bring the Gospel to a remote tribe in Ecuador.<sup>44</sup> While those men did not live long enough to establish works in their field, after their deaths, Jim Elliot’s wife, Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015) spent two years working with the very tribe that took her husband’s life.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

From the brief samplings offered above, it should be evident that the early Plymouth Brethren made a disproportionate impact, relative to their numbers, in countries throughout the developing world. Although Evangelical Protestant Christians are known for

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<sup>42</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem*, 350.

<sup>43</sup> Camino Global, “Who We Are,” 2019, <https://www.caminoglobal.org/who-we-are>, accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> The story of the missionaries to the Waodoni tribe who were mercilessly slaughtered in the jungles of South America near the Amazon in 1956 has been made famous by a documentary (*Beyond the Gates of Splendor*, 2002) and afterward a full-feature theatrical release film (*End of the Spear*, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Elliot went on to write several books detailing her experience, including *Through Gates of Splendor* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), and *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1978).

their charitable efforts directed throughout the world, this particular religious minority deserves special distinction. Despite their orientation of religious separatism from the world and from other Christians outside of their closed community, the Plymouth Brethren have proven themselves to be a group of dispensationally-minded Christians who have taken seriously their reading of the New Testament and have striven to emulate the example of the good Samaritan as told in parables of Jesus (Luke 10:29–37). Their efforts have therefore earned them a reputation as the most cross-culturally outreaching and socially-minded people of the past two centuries.

# Social Justice in the Kingdom of God

Tim Little

**Abstract:** Social justice advocates promote a different justice than biblical justice. Biblical justice is defined by righteousness which is connected to the character of God; whereas, social justice is defined by equality qualified through postmodern philosophy. This equality, they claim, should permeate all social institutions (competitive markets, family, etc.). Some even claim social justice concerns not only equal opportunity, but equal outcome. While there is ontological equality in the kingdom of God, there is not economic equality. Social justice promotes equal opportunity and the distribution of wealth, but the kingdom of God, however, will favor the nation of Israel and wealth will be consolidated in Jerusalem. Social justice feeds off sinful man's covetousness; whereas, biblical justice promotes righteousness and contentment.

Key Words: Kingdom of God, social justice, biblical justice, ontological equality, economic equality

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## Introduction

Social justice has become a lightning rod topic in our culture. Social justice concerns the academy and the masses. "Wrong" decisions can be politically, socially, and financially ruinous. Building upon a postmodern culture, social justice thrives upon lies, deceit, ambiguity, and confusion. One of the primary challenges with social justice is a definition. This movement prospers in a postmodern culture because proponents can read whatever meaning they want into the words and become a proponent of social justice. Who would not want to associate with social justice? As a result, many people subscribe to social justice as they perceive it. The lack of clear definition is

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compounded because grassroots organizations have sprouted up supporting social justice.<sup>2</sup> Lee Staples encourages “collective action through community organizing . . . to overcome unjust social relations and achieve changes that further human rights, participatory democracy, and distributive justice.”<sup>3</sup> Staples’s quotation also illustrates the diversity within the movement. This article first defines biblical justice and social justice. It will be demonstrated that the social justice movement would be better named social covetousness, for there is little biblical justice within the movement. The social justice movement has more in common with the seven sins which the Lord hates (Prov 6:16–19) and the injustice which the Messiah overthrows (Isa 59) than anything his arm will establish on this earth (Isa 59:15b–60:22).

### Definitions

The biblical idea of justice is different from the contemporary meaning of social justice. Semantically, righteous/righteousness (צדקה, צדק) and judgment/justice (משפט) can refer to justice in the Hebrew Bible and they occur about seventy-five times together.<sup>4</sup> Wytsma recognized the parallel uses of righteous and judgment and concluded “they meant the same thing—roughly, the right relationship between God, self, others, and creation.”<sup>5</sup> A

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Gundelach defines grassroots organizations as follow: “Grass roots organizations are a rather recent phenomenon. In the project they are defined as ‘local political organizations which seek to influence conditions not related to the working situation of the participants and which have the activity of the participants as their primary resource’” (Peter Gundelach, “Grass Roots Organizations,” *Acta Sociologica* 22, no. 2 [April 1979]: 187).

<sup>3</sup> Lee Staples, “Community Organizing for Social Justice: Grassroots Groups for Power,” *Social Work with Groups* 35, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 287.

<sup>4</sup> Search results using Accordance Bible Software. Johnson lists about 80 times together (B. Johnson, “קִדְּשׁ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, 15 vols. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2015], 12:247).

<sup>5</sup> Ken Wytsma, *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 107.

judgment (משפט), however, may be either right (Isa 56:1; 58:2)<sup>6</sup> or wrong (Hos 10:4; Hab 1:4), but righteousness (צדק) pertains to what is right. Johnson explains that the words “are not synonymous. The semantic field of ‘decision, judgment, law’ attaches to *mišpāt*, while *šdq* focuses on the principle of ‘what is right, correct.’”<sup>7</sup> Judgment (משפט) and righteousness (צדק, צדקה) are frequently used together, sometimes as a hendiadys.<sup>8</sup> A hendiadys, according to Watson, “is the expression of one single but complex concept by using two separate words, usually nouns.”<sup>9</sup> One function of the hendiadys is to extend the existing vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> Moberly explains the use of this hendiadys creates “a differing semantic range from that of *š<sup>e</sup>daqâ* on its own.”<sup>11</sup> “Righteous” ascribes an attribute to the judgment—right judgment.<sup>12</sup> This idea of a right judgment approximates the contemporary idea of “justice.” Correctly defining justice requires a study of righteousness more than judgment (משפט). Justice could be biblically defined as the judicial enforcement of

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson explains, “A just cause coincides with the substance of a right verdict. In this context *mišpāt* often has the meaning ‘what is right and proper, righteousness’” (B. Johnson, “משפט,” in TDOT 9:93).

<sup>7</sup> B. Johnson, “צדק,” in TDOT, 12:248.

<sup>8</sup> Judgment and righteousness (משפט וצדקה) occur 23 times, righteousness and judgment (צדקה ומשפט) three times, righteous and judgment (צדק ומשפט) four times, and judgment and righteous (משפט וצדק) two times for a total of 32 times. Not every use in these searches are hendiadys constructions. Search results generated using Accordance Bible Software.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2005), 324–25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 327. There are other functions of the hendiadys. It could be evoking a word-pair as well. But if it is evoking a word-pair, one might wonder why the word-pair is being evoked? It could be for a poetic reason, or it could be to further explain the kind of justice, righteous justice. Moberly agrees (R. W. L. Moberly, “Whose Justice? Which Righteousness? The Interpretation of Isaiah V 16,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 1 [January 2001]: 60).

<sup>11</sup> Moberly, “Whose Justice?,” 60.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 2:652.

God's righteousness. Judgment (משפט) frequently means "justice" because the writer implies that the judgment is *right* (cf. Isa 1:17, 21, 27; 56:1).<sup>13</sup> What makes the judgment *right*, however, is righteousness.

### ***Defining Biblical Justice***

This section begins to create a definition of biblical justice based upon four principles of righteousness. First, God defines what is right. Wayne Grudem writes, "God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right."<sup>14</sup> In Genesis 18:25, for example, Abraham describes the Lord as "the judge (שפט) of all the earth."<sup>15</sup> The judge of all the earth exacts judgments according to God's righteous laws and expected the same of earthly judges (Deut 1:16–17; Prov 17:15).<sup>16</sup> Wildberger describes the Lord as "the protector of justice and guardian of righteousness."<sup>17</sup> The Lord is the one who defines righteousness.<sup>18</sup>

Second, God's righteous judgment does not change. Deuteronomy 32:4 employs five different words to describe God's unmovable moral character, "The rock [the Lord], perfect (תמים) is his work; because all his ways are just (משפט); a God of faithfulness (אמונה) and there is not injustice (עול); righteous

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson explains, "A just cause coincides with the substance of a right verdict" (B. Johnson, "משפט," in TDOT 9:92).

<sup>14</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 203.

<sup>15</sup> For additional scriptural support that the Lord is the standard of righteousness see Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; 50:7; Zephaniah 2:3; Psalm 96:13; 98:9 119:75. In Psalm 119:75 the psalmist exclaims that even in times of affliction (ענה), God's judgments (משפט) are right (צדק).

<sup>16</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 52.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 64.

<sup>18</sup> B. Johnson, "צדק," in TDOT 12:243. See also Moberly, "Whose Justice?," 63; and E. R. Hayes, "Justice, Righteousness," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 467.



(צדיק) and upright (ישר) is he.”<sup>19</sup> Describing the Lord as a “rock” instructs the reader in another attribute of God—his immutability.<sup>20</sup> While the world may change its views concerning right and wrong, God does not. One manner in which God is unchangeable in Deuteronomy 32:4 concerns his character—justice.

Third, righteousness includes not only external actions but internal motivations.<sup>21</sup> In Psalm 15, the choir master asks, “Who can dwell in your holy mountain?” The response includes what could be the beginning of a definition of righteousness, “one who walks perfectly (תמים); one who works righteousness (צדק); and one who speaks truth (אמת) in his heart.” This last phrase explains that one must not only speak the truth, but must speak truth in one’s heart. Allen Ross explains, “This added description [in his heart] requires the sincerity of the speaker and the accuracy of what is spoken. There can be no guile, no hidden agenda, no half-

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<sup>19</sup> All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 203; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3d ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003), 292.

<sup>20</sup> Craigie explains, “The epithet or name, *Rock*, emphasizes the stability and permanence of the God of Israel. It is one of the principal themes in the song (see also vv. 15, 18, 30, 31 and compare v. 37), stressing the unchanging nature of the God of the covenant and contrasting with the fickle nature of the covenant people” (Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 378.

<sup>21</sup> Methodologically, this section borrows from von Rad and defines righteousness as what creates a relationship with the Lord. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 370–77. Von Rad analyzes Psalms 15 and 24, the “liturgies of the gate.” This method builds off of the holiness of God. Goldingay writes, “‘Holy One’ is the most fundamental description of Yhwh” (John Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, Old Testament Theology [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 22). He writes, “In Christian parlance ‘holy’ is a moral category; it points to the absolute integrity, uprightness, goodness and righteousness of God, to be reflected by those who claim to belong to God” (ibid., 23).

truths. The truth that is spoken must be sincere; it must be the intent of the heart.”<sup>22</sup>

In Psalm 15:4 the Psalmist continues describing the person who “can dwell in the Lord’s holy mountain” and the attributes continue to address the intentions of the heart: “A worthless one is despised in his eyes; but the ones who fear the Lord he honors; he swears to his hurt, but he does not change *the terms*.” The righteous one despises the “worthless.” Görg explains that “every offense against the will of Yahweh implies a *bazah*, ‘contempt, despising,’ of Yahweh.”<sup>23</sup> One who *despises* the Lord (the worthless one), the righteous *should despise* (it is a word-play). Instead of desiring the things of the wicked, the righteous despise the wicked.<sup>24</sup> The final characteristic here gives a powerful example of keeping one’s word. Even if one will suffer damage (financial, reputation, etc.), one must keep their word. Additional acts of righteousness could be added to this list.

Fourth, according to Psalm 15, righteousness does not include the following: slander, evil (רעה) to others, sharp criticism (חרפה), lend money with interest (greed), and take a bribe.

Consulting other passages could create an extensive list of righteous and unrighteous deeds. These lists serve as a basis for condemning not only the social justice movement, but any aspect of a culture that uses slander, reproach, disinformation, and lies to promote its agenda.

### ***Justice in the Messianic Kingdom***

The Messianic kingdom will be a kingdom of *righteous* judgment. The Messianic king will be the executor of justice, his kingdom will be a kingdom of justice, and his people will be a people of justice. Everything concerning the Messianic king and his kingdom will be characterized by justice. Isaiah 1:26–27

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<sup>22</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 391.

<sup>23</sup> M. Görg, “בזה,” in TDOT, 2:62.

<sup>24</sup> Ross agrees, “This is contrary to popular culture in which people tend to idolize many who are vile and worthless. John reminds believers not to love the world or the things that are in the world, for they are passing away (1 John 2:15–17)” (*Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 [1-41]*, 392).

explains, “Then I will bring back your judges like in the beginning, and your counselors like at the first; after this it will be called of you; The City of Righteousness (צדק); The Town of Truth (נאמנה); Zion, with judgment (משפט), will be redeemed; and her penitents, with righteousness (צדקה).” When the Messianic king returns, the Adulteress City (Isa 1:20) will be reconstituted as the City of Righteousness because her king is righteous. Isaiah 9:7 (H:6) explains, “Upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom; to establish it, and to sustain it; in judgment (משפט) and in righteousness (צדקה), from now and until forever; the zeal of the Lord of armies will do this.” Thus, according to Isaiah 9:7 (H:6), the Messianic king and his kingdom will be characterized by justice.<sup>25</sup>

The Messianic king’s kingdom can be a kingdom of justice because of the manner of his judgment: “And not according to the sight of his eyes will he judge (שפט); and not according to the hearing of his ears will he rebuke (יכה)” (Isa 11:3). The Messianic king will judge according to the intentions of the heart. Jesus exemplified this kind of judgment during his first coming (Luke 6:8; John 13:11). This point concerning the Messianic kingdom cannot be understated. It is only through the Messianic king’s physical rule that biblical justice can be meted out. Finite man will never be able to bring about justice upon the earth because he lacks the Messianic perception required for justice (Ecc1 5:8).

### *Defining Social Justice*

Defining the social justice movement is like trying to hit a moving target. Religious organizations and ministries advocate for social justice as a means of helping the unfortunate within society. These organizations, however, are rarely concerned with corrupt judges and injustice. Instead, they perform acts of compassion to the poor and marginalized within their

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<sup>25</sup> Motyer does not recognize the hendiadys, but he does recognize the distinction between the משפט and צדק, “The divine holiness will be perfectly manifested in true procedures (*justice*) which reflect righteous principles (*righteousness*).” See J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 103.

community.<sup>26</sup> Others promote controversial political agendas which some would call unjust.<sup>27</sup> Authors employ the term without definition.<sup>28</sup> Definitions which are given are covered in nuance and verbose. For example, after explaining there are “many different kinds of things [that] are said to be just and unjust,” John Rawls then notes,

Our topic, however, is that of social justice. For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements. Thus the legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples of major social institutions. Taken together as one scheme, the major institutions define men’s rights and duties and influence their life prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do. The basic structure is the primary subject of justice because its effects are so profound and present from the start. The intuitive notion here is that this structure contains

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<sup>26</sup> “Social Justice Ministry,” *St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish*, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://www.sjbnewburgh.org/Social-justice-ministry>; “Social Justice Ministry,” *Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church*, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://ctrcc.org/social-justice-ministry>; “Social Justice at UUCS,” *Unitarian Universalist Church of Savannah*, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://www.uusavannah.org/>.

<sup>27</sup> “Social Justice Issues,” *First Baptist Church*, accessed November 2, 2019, <https://www.firstbaptistithaca.org/socialjustice.html>; Ebenezer Baptist Church Atlanta, “Social Justice Ministry – Ebenezer Baptist Church,” n.d., accessed November 2, 2019, <https://ebenezeratl.org/social-justice-ministry/>.

<sup>28</sup> Robert C Fennell, “Theological Foundations for Social Justice: Another World Is Possible,” *Touchstone* 33, no. 2 (June 2015): 5–12; John D Delehanty, “Prophets of Resistance: Social Justice Activists Contesting Comfortable Church Culture,” *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 37–58; Alfonso Wieland, “Social Justice and the Mission of the Church,” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 99–102.

various social positions and that men born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances. In this way the institutions of society favor certain starting places over others. These are especially deep inequalities. Not only are they pervasive, but they affect men's initial chances in life; yet they cannot possibly be justified by an appeal to the notions of merit or desert. It is these inequalities, presumably inevitable in the basic structure of any society, to which the principles of social justice must in the first instance apply.<sup>29</sup>

Several words in Rawls's definition require explanation. He defines the "major social institutions" as the "political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements." Because that definition did not clarify much, he then clarifies further, "the legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples of major social institutions." One is left to wonder how Rawls may define a minor social institution. Rawls theory of social justice concerns not only the competitive markets and private property, but also the monogamous family (perhaps non-monogamous families are minor social institutions?). According to Rawls, social justice concerns how these institutions "distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation." To simplify, social justice focuses on equal opportunity within competitive markets and social institutions (family, church, government, people groups, etc.). Anne Phillips argues that the only means of evaluating equal opportunity is by measuring the equality in outcome.<sup>30</sup> Thus, social justice includes not only equal opportunity but equal outcome (redistribution of wealth, equal pay based on gender, etc.).

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<sup>29</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6–7.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Phillips, "Defending Equality of Outcome," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (March 2004): 1–19.

## **Social Justice in the Kingdom of God**

The Messianic kingdom of God will be a place of justice and God's righteousness, but, as will be demonstrated, it will not be a place of equal opportunity or equal outcome among social institutions and the distribution of wealth. Ontologically, there is not only equality in the kingdom of God, but there is equality even now (1 Cor 7:22). In Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Economically, however, there is inequality now, and there will also be inequality in the kingdom of God.

This section examines two aspects in the kingdom of God that concern social justice: equal opportunity and the distribution of wealth. It will be demonstrated that the Messianic kingdom of God will be known for inequality—there will be a special, chosen, ethnic people of God. Furthermore, wealth and power will be distributed unequally. Instead of a redistribution of wealth to all, wealth will be consolidated in Jerusalem. As a result of this study, one will see that the Messianic kingdom of God is not socially just.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Social Inequality***

The social justice movement considers inequality unjust, but the God of the Bible does not. When Israel left Egypt, the Lord informed Israel that they were his chosen people, "a special possession above all the peoples who are on the face of the ground" (Deut 7:6).<sup>32</sup> The other peoples were still cherished by God—a theme frequently forgotten by Israel (e.g., Jonah). Indeed, the whole earth and everything in it is the Lord's (Deut 10:14), but Israel is his special possession. Furthermore, Israel's description as a "special possession" (סגולה) includes ownership

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<sup>31</sup> Or rather, the social justice movement is not righteous according to God's standard of righteousness.

<sup>32</sup> The לְ preposition is partitive here; Israel is God's special possession out of all the nations. See James Robson, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 239. Cf. Exodus 19:5–6 and the discussion below.

and special prized status. In Ecclesiastes 2:8, Solomon describes his great possessions, “silver, gold and the special possessions (סגולה) of kings.” While silver and gold were valuable, these kingly treasures possessed much greater value because they were part of the king’s personal possessions.<sup>33</sup>

Israel’s “special possession” status was directly connected to the covenant: “And now, if you will certainly obey my voice and keep my covenant; then you will be my special possession (סגולה) above all the peoples, for all the earth is mine” (Exod 19:5). Israel’s responsibility as a special possession included being a physical representation of the Lord to the other peoples on the earth (Exod 19:6).<sup>34</sup> Israel, however, failed in their mission and, according to Hans K. LaRondelle, God invoked a different plan:

God’s purpose in His election of Abraham and Israel to redeem the world and reestablish it under the kingship of God was, in principle, fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah Jesus. Christ was the only perfectly obedient seed of Abraham, the only sinless Israelite who indeed deserved the endless blessings of God’s covenant with Israel. Christ now offers the blessing of God’s redemptive *reign* to all men, to Jews and Gentiles alike, without distinction (John 2:12; Galatians 3:14). . . . Christ has established His own *messianic Israel, His ekklesia or Church, His spiritual kingdom or rulership* in the present world (Matthew 16:18; 13:41).<sup>35</sup>

Thus, according to LaRondelle, God’s plan was initially concerned with ethnic Israel but now God’s “kingdom” is “without distinction.” The Messianic kingdom of God is no longer physical, but spiritual. One could presume that there may be social equality within God’s spiritual Messianic kingdom.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1 Chronicles 29:3. See also Moshe Greenberg, “Hebrew Segullā: Akkadian Sikiltu,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 71, no. 3 (September 1951): 172–74.

<sup>34</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 367.

<sup>35</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 95–96 (emphasis added).

Concerning LaRondelle's exegesis, Brueggemann, however, explains, "Such a belief is a historical absurdity and a theological scandal."<sup>36</sup> Theologically, Israel was not only God's chosen people in Deuteronomy, they will be God's chosen people at the end of time as well (Isa 14:1; 41:8–9). Isaiah describes a second exodus when God again chooses his people (Isa 14:1), brings them back to the land (Isa 60:4–5), and blesses them (Isa 60:6–9).

The regathering of Israel before the Messianic kingdom of God reveals preferential treatment for Israel and actual enslavement of "peoples" (עַמִּים). In Isaiah 13–14, the oracle against Babylon describes the fall of Babylon (Isa 13:20–22) and consequential regathering of Israel (Isa 14:1–2).<sup>37</sup> These events transpire right before the establishment of the Messianic kingdom of God.<sup>38</sup> During this regathering, the "peoples" (עַמִּים) will take (לָקַח) the children of Israel and bring them back to Israel (Isa 14:2). Isaiah describes a reversed deportation. Instead of Israel being "taken" (deported) out of the land, they are "taken" and brought back into the land. This reversed deportation continues through v. 2 and describes Israel as possessing (נָחַל) the peoples (עַמִּים) upon the ground of the Lord as male (עַבָד) and female slaves (שִׁפְחָה). Just as Israel is God's chosen people in

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 14:1–2 is poetry not prose. There are three points of continuity between Isaiah 13:20–14:2: (1) structure (12 cola each); (2) catchwords (in 14:1, רָחַם point back to the Medes in 13:18 and נָחַם points forward to 14:3); (3) contrastive כִּי. See Timothy A. Little, "The Identity of the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14:4b–21" (Ph.D. diss., Baptist Bible Seminary, 2018), 59–64.

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 14 does not mention the Messianic kingdom of God, but other Isaianic texts connect an eschatological judgment, regathering, and establishment of the kingdom. The little apocalypse of Isaiah recounts an eschatological judgment and regathering (Isa 24–27). Isaiah 59:15–20 describes a Messianic judgment and a regathering follows in Isaiah 60 with the king established on his throne in Jerusalem. Isaiah 49:22–26 describes a similar regathering.



Exodus and Deuteronomy, so also will they be placed above other peoples in God's Messianic kingdom.

Some may find enslavement in the Messianic kingdom of God odious and argue the male and female slaves in Isaiah 14:2 are really servants. Ringgren explains that "the subst. *'eḇed* refers to a person who is subordinated to someone else. This subordination can manifest itself in various ways, however, and *'eḇed* accordingly can have different meanings: slave, servant, subject, official, vassal, or 'servant' or follower of a particular god."<sup>39</sup> While the individuals in Isaiah 14:1–2 could be servants, they are likely slaves because they are a possession (נָחַל). When the direct object of נָחַל involves people, the meaning is slavery (Lev 25:45–46).<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 14:1–2 describes a reversed deportation. Just as the children of Israel are possessed (נָחַל), so also will the peoples be possessed. Israel's enslavement of their masters reveals an aspect of God's justice present throughout the Old Testament. Exodus 4:22–24 states, "Then you will say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, "My first-born son is Israel. Now I say to you. Send my son that he may serve me and do not refuse to send him. Look! I will slay your son, your first-born."'" God's retributive principle of justice is clear. Victor Hamilton explains,

God's declaration that he will slay Egypt's firstborn as a just response to Pharaoh's refusal to release his stranglehold on Israel, God's firstborn, may be an illustration of the talionic principle throughout Scripture. There is often a correspondence between the nature of the punishment and the nature of the trespass that generates the punishment. Take an eye, you lose an eye. Take a tooth, you lose a tooth. Persuade Adam and Eve to eat something they should not eat, and you eat dust for the rest of your existence

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<sup>39</sup> Ringgren explains, "The subst. *'eḇed* refers to a person who is subordinated to someone else. This subordination can manifest itself in various ways, however, and *'eḇed* accordingly can have different meanings: slave, servant, subject, official, vassal, or 'servant' or follower of a particular god" ("עֲבָד," in TDOT, 10:397).

<sup>40</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2:686.

(Gen. 3). Suck the life out of my firstborn, and you lose your firstborn.<sup>41</sup>

Upon their release, the remnant of Israel will enslave their enslavers, take captive their captors, and rule over their oppressors. This is justice according to God.

Parallel Isaianic texts reveal the pitiable condition of Israel upon their return. Isaiah 27:12–13 explains they will be regathered from Assyria to Egypt (location); one by one (אחד אחד לאחד); and they will be almost dead (physically): “the ones *perishing* (אבד) in the land of Assyria; and the ones banished in the land of Egypt.”

The returnees are in such frail health that Isaiah 49:22–26 describes them as being carried: “Then they will bring your sons in *their* arms; and your daughters upon shoulders they will be lifted.” This personal escort back to Israel corresponds to Isaiah 60:4, “Your sons from a distance they will come; and your daughters upon a side (צד) they will looked after (אמן).”

When Israel is regathered, they are physically close to death and are escorted back to the land of Israel by the peoples who enslaved them. Israel then enslaves these peoples. While the severity of this enslavement would be regulated by God’s law, the duration is unspecified. These slaves may be the agents who build and beautify Jerusalem (Isa 60:10–11). This inequality among peoples in the Messianic kingdom of God is at severe odds with the current social justice movement. One must conclude that according to contemporary social justice standards, the Messianic kingdom of God will not be socially just.

### ***Unequal Distribution of Wealth***

The social justice movement promotes a redistribution of wealth. The kingdom of God will include prosperity for all, but a consolidation of wealth in Jerusalem. As the peoples escort the children of Israel back to the land of Israel, they bring with them the wealth of the nations with which Zion is beautified (Isa 60:5–9). “Sons of foreigners” (בני־נכר) build the walls and their kings

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<sup>41</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 79.

serve Israel (60:10). There will be so much wealth coming into Jerusalem that the gates must remain open all day long (60:11).<sup>42</sup> This wealth will be used to beautify the Lord's habitation (60:7, 13).

While the wealth of the nations consolidates in Jerusalem, the nations will be blessed. Isaiah 27:6 explains that when Israel and Jacob "blossom and bud," then the "face of the world (פְּנֵי-חֶבֶל)" will be filled with fruit (תְּנוּבָה). The blossom and bud are metaphors for flourishing, but they describe only the beginning. The ripe fruit that fills the earth is the culmination of the blessing. This fruit is not in Israel alone, but in the whole world.<sup>43</sup>

Just as there is inequality with the *national* distribution of wealth, so also is there inequality with the *individual* distribution of wealth. One characteristic of the kingdom of God is the possession and enjoyment of one's own personal property. Alva J. McClain even describes this as social justice:

In Old Testament prophecy of the Kingdom a large place is given to social justice. In that day, Isaiah writes very specifically, "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat" (65:21–22). . . . The wastrels and parasites will not be living at the expense of others, and labor will acquire a new dignity and worth.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 620.

<sup>43</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 461. Wildberger correctly explains, "One would expect that there would be some mention of Israel in connection with the fruitfulness of the land of Israel, but the phraseology פְּנֵי-חֶבֶל (lit.: the face of the world) does not permit this interpretation. Therefore, this is what it intends to say: when Israel flourishes again, at that very time the whole earth will be full of good gifts, with material goods being the first to come to mind. The use of חֶבֶל (world) clearly has the end of time in view: when everything is in order in Israel once again, then the affairs of the whole world will be in their proper place." See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 594.

<sup>44</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2007), 226.

Social justice meant something different in 1959 when McClain penned these words. Micah 4:4 also describes the Messianic kingdom as a time when “each man will sit under his vine and under his fig tree.”<sup>45</sup> The third-person pronouns are possessive, indicating that in the Messianic kingdom, individuals will possess personal property.<sup>46</sup>

Not only will people have personal property, but some will have more dominion, authority, power, and/or wealth than others. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30), certain individuals are given more talents than others.<sup>47</sup> When the king returns, an individual committed to contemporary social justice might expect a redistribution of wealth, but instead the unprofitable servant’s talent is given to the one who has ten talents (Matt 25:28). Jesus’ proverbial final statement seems unjust: “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance. But to the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” Jesus repeated the kingdom principle previously given in Matthew 13:12.<sup>48</sup> The Messianic kingdom of God will contain national and individual inequalities in the distribution of dominion, authority, power, and wealth and, therefore, will not be socially just.

### Implications

The Messianic kingdom of God will be characterized by God’s righteousness and justice. Any movement that ascribes to “justice” must be evaluated by God’s standard of justice which is always defined by God’s righteousness. As demonstrated in

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Isaiah 65:21–22,

<sup>46</sup> Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1990), 169; Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 145.

<sup>47</sup> The opening Matthew 25:1, “The kingdom of heaven will be like . . .” extends to the parable of the talents as well making it a Messianic kingdom text. See Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 283.

<sup>48</sup> Jesus here enforces the “kingdom rule” which he introduced in Matthew 13:12. See D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 518.

this article, God's righteousness is directly connected to what is not only true, but what is true in one's heart. McClain writes,

The moral virtue of *truth* will be exalted in every phase of the Kingdom. In contrast to the average ruler of today—who is able to justify almost any story of an untruth on the ground of 'political expediency'—the coming King will 'bring forth justice in truth' (Isa. 42:3, ASV). According to Scripture, there is no deeper form of immorality than untruth.<sup>49</sup>

Two of the abominable sins which the Lord hates are a lying tongue and a false witness who speaks lies (Prov 6:16–17). The eschatological kingdom which the Lord overthrows will be known for injustice, unrighteousness, and dishonesty (Isa 59:4, 9, 14). God's righteousness will be the justice in the kingdom of God, and this justice is very different from the social justice movement which uses lies, disinformation, and deceit to accomplish its societal goals.

Palestinian Christian and liberation theologian Naim Stifan Ateek seeks to establish "justice" for Palestinian Christians through misinformation and lies. Concerning the Israeli conquest of Deir Yasin, he writes, "Deir Yasin was a small town on the outskirts of Jerusalem. When the soldiers occupied it, they massacred 254 persons, including women and children and threw their bodies in a well."<sup>50</sup> Although the events and casualties of Deir Yasin are a matter of discussion to this day, 254 persons were not "massacred." A battle transpired at Deir Yasin and some of the Arab casualties were fighting back. Palestinian survivors also claim the number of casualties was much lower.<sup>51</sup> Ateek has

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<sup>49</sup> McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 222.

<sup>50</sup> Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 8. Ateek provides an endnote to the comment, "See chapter 2, p. 31" which does not verify his claim.

<sup>51</sup> Catrina Stewart, "A Massacre of Arabs Masked by a State of National Amnesia," May 10, 2010, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/a-massacre-of-arabs-masked-by-a-state-of-national-amnesia-1970018.html>. For additional information see Paul Richard Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed: History of Replacement Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 271–73.

created a narrative that supports his social agenda. Details that may detract from the narrative are removed.<sup>52</sup> Ateek has spoken lies (שקר) and babbled injustice (Isa 59:2).

Not only does Ateek speak outright lies, he also trusts in empty words (תהו) and has worthless speech (שווא)<sup>53</sup> (Isa 59:4). He writes, “It is important to point out that Jesus never quoted from the Book of Numbers that sanctions the expulsion of the indigenous people of Canaan, nor did he quote from Joshua and Judges, which glorify ethnic cleansing of people. Jesus was very selective in his use of scripture.”<sup>54</sup> Ateek’s argument is clear. Jesus supposedly did not quote from certain biblical books because they contained bad language, so we should not either. Two pages later, Ateek quotes Deuteronomy 7 and 23 which also describe the ethnic cleansing of the inhabitants of Canaan. Is Ateek unaware that Jesus frequently quoted Deuteronomy? Ateek seems to be using misinformation to accomplish his social justice goals and misrepresents Jesus. Walter Lippmann writes, “There can be no liberty for a community which lacks the means by which to detect lies.”<sup>55</sup> These instances of misinformation (lies) are detectable, but how many other lies has Ateek uttered which are undetectable? The use of deceit, lies, and disinformation has become the common parlance of not only the social justice movement, but the far right, media, and every fabric of our society.

God’s righteousness as defined in Psalm 15 also does not include slander, evil to others, and sharp criticism. These are also characteristics of our modern culture. Christians should not become participants of any social organization which uses these methods to accomplish their social agenda, regardless of how

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<sup>52</sup> Important details may include the following: (1) There was a battle at this location in the middle of a war. (2) Determining the number of combatants/civilians is impossible. (3) Palestinian retaliation killed seventy-eight Jews in a medical convoy.

<sup>53</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 4:1425.

<sup>54</sup> Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 49.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 21.

ideal that agenda may be. As pilgrims of this world and citizens of the coming Messianic kingdom of God, Christians should live righteously, worthy of the Messiah's kingdom, and not become entangled with the deceitfulness of this world.

Second, belief in a physical Messianic kingdom of God guards one from many errors. Some proponents of a spiritual kingdom claim the king is currently on the throne and we are living in the kingdom or will usher in the kingdom. As a result, proponents can easily confuse the believer's current pilgrim status (1 Pet 1:2) and engage in societal reforms which are truly outside the mission of the church (Matt 28:19–20).<sup>56</sup> Believers who purport a non-dispensational theology can easily confuse the gospel with social justice.

Furthermore, without the presence of the Messianic king, any attempt for true justice on earth will fall. The king establishes justice in the land (Isa 9:7, H:6). The King is the light in Isaiah 60:1, and his light transfers to his people in Isaiah 60:3. True biblical social justice is not possible until the king returns and establishes the Messianic kingdom. One needs a king who can see the heart and judge based upon one's thoughts, not upon one's actions. This king of judgment should also spur true believers to not only speak the truth, but speak the truth in one's heart (Ps 15:2).

Third, the social justice movement seeks to usurp one's divinely appointed placement of a person in a society. If an individual is called to the Lord while in a disadvantageous social situation, Paul admonishes that person to stay in the situation where he or she has been called [saved]. In 1 Corinthians 7:21, Paul admonishes the slave to not be concerned about their slavery. If the individual has an opportunity to be free, Paul recommends they take that opportunity, but it should not be a significant concern of the person. One should remain in the situation where they were called (1 Cor 7:24). Before the Lord,

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<sup>56</sup> For a dispensational explanation of the church's involvement in culture see Scott Aniol, "Polishing Brass on a Sinking Ship: Toward a Traditional Dispensational Philosophy of the Church and Cultural Engagement," *Master's Seminary Journal* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 129–46. A revised version of this article is published in this issue of JMAT.

every slave is the Lord's freedman, and every freedman is the Lord's slave (1 Cor 7:22). The social justice movement is inordinately concerned with an individual's placement in society. Attempting to create an equal opportunity society is directly contrary to Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:21–24. Rather, Paul exhorts slaves to use their freedom in the Lord for the glory of God, and the freedman must use their freedom to enslave themselves to Christ.



## Book Reviews

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***Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour.*** By John Goldingay.  
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 278 pp. \$28.00.

Some of the finest books written by biblical scholars on ethics have been thematic in approach. The themes are often those of interest and concern to contemporary readers. In his book *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour*, John Goldingay has broken the mold in several surprising ways. Among them are his choice of topics, the brevity of the chapters, his translations and brief summaries of biblical texts, his presentation of the significance of the texts to the original audience, his insightful comments on cultures and characters, his thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter, and his personable interaction with the contemporary reader. After each translation of a longer passage, Goldingay takes a paragraph to refer back to the quoted text, explaining simply what the teaching of the passage is and identifying each verse within parentheses.

The genesis of the book helps to explain the uniqueness and popular approach of Goldingay's *Ethics*. After he finished his multi-volume short commentary series on the Old Testament, *The Old Testament for Everyone*, he was encouraged to write a few books on topics derived from the Old Testament. This book is one of those companion volumes. His translations throughout *Old Testament Ethics* are from drafts of another of his books, *The First Testament: A New Translation*. Along with suggestions for further readings for those who think his presentation is either too conservative or too liberal, Goldingay suggests that readers who want more of ethics from the angle of the book read volume 3 of his *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Life*.

The author introduces the book with a brief summary of the questions he is convinced ethics asks (what sort of people we are; how we think; what sort of thing we do; and what sort of thing we don't do), and of the angles from which he explains the views of those questions in the Old Testament. The book is divided into five major subject areas, each area consisting of a different theme or choice of source material for ethical consideration: Qualities; Aspects of life; Relationships; [selected biblical] Texts; and People [selected biblical characters]. The book includes a

conclusion in which the author makes a plea for Christian believers to go back to the Old Testament to see how it confronts us to teach, rebuke, correct and train today. There is also a Subject List and Scripture Index.

Goldingay does not leave out an examination of the “tricky issues.” For example, in a postscript he gives a brief response to the question “What about the Canaanites?”; in Part Three he deals with Migrants; and in Parts Three and Four he presents the subjects of sex and divorce. Throughout the book, he is very straightforward about the viewpoints of God, the human authors of the Scriptures, and his own views. For instance, in Chapter 33, he briefly discusses the theological concept of “just war.” Using Deuteronomy 20 as an example of the strangely different presentation of war in the Old Testament, Goldingay concludes that neither the Old nor New Testament support the Just War theory as it is usually defended.

Readers will not always agree with Goldingay when he introduces or concludes his chosen topics with personal, contemporary illustrations, but they may be won over as they see how he derived his conclusions from the Scriptures. Goldingay’s approach to ethics is like a biblical approach to theology that views doctrine as being taught to and through the lives and circumstances of the biblical characters. It is refreshing, stimulating, thought provoking and informative. The book is recommended reading for every teacher and student of ethics or Old Testament; and for pastors, teachers, and mature readers in local churches. It could serve as a text or discussion guide for an adult Bible class.

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***Joshua (The Story of God Bible Commentary).*** By Lissa M. Wray Beal. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 464 pp. \$39.99.

The Story of God Bible Commentary Series is a new commentary series that seeks to explain and to illuminate each passage of Scripture

in consideration of the entire storyline of Scripture. This commentary series “is designed to speak to this generation with the same word of God.” Each author explains “what the Bible says to the sorts of readers who pick up commentaries so they can understand not only what Scripture says but what it means for today” (13). While the OT world is foreign to those living in the Western world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Story of God Bible Commentary Series is convinced that “we hear God’s voice today in the Old Testament” and “In its pages he reveals himself to us and also his will for how we should live in a way that is pleasing to him” (14). Each commentary in the series contains three sections for each chapter that help each reader live out God’s story. The three sections are:

- (1) **LISTEN to the STORY:** This section presents the primary text and a list of other texts so that the reader can understand the text as part of the whole of Scripture.
- (2) **EXPLAIN the STORY:** This section presents the text in its canonical and historical setting.
- (3) **LIVE the STORY:** This section reflects on current application and includes contemporary stories and illustrations to help the reader apply the text.

Lissa M. Wray Beal, Professor of Old Testament at Providence Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba (Canada), contributes to the series through her work on the book of Joshua. She takes the role of Joshua in the OT canon seriously. She writes,

The importance of the book of Joshua is often reflected on its status as a ‘hinge’ book in Genesis-Kings. It stands as the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham, for in Joshua, Israel receives the long-promised land. Joshua starts again the narrative action of Numbers, which was put on hold for Moses’ last sermon in Deuteronomy; the sermon changed Joshua. Joshua also stands at the start of Joshua-Kings, setting down a paradigm for life in the land that governs the story that concludes with Israel’s exile in 2 Kings 25. (20)

Beal’s primary purpose is to engage “Joshua to ask how it prepares for Christ and informs the church” (20). One point that obviously needs to be examined in detail is the warfare presented by

the text. Aware of the challenges Joshua presents to a contemporary Western worldview, Beal presents a twofold solution.

First, she challenges the idea that the conquest involved a complete genocide of the people. She writes,

It is inaccurate, then, to charge the text with describing genocide, for neither the text's claims nor the ancient Near Eastern context supports such a conclusion. Warfare in Joshua, even with the *herem* command, does not empty the land completely or destroy all the inhabitants. God went ahead of Israel to drive out the inhabitants, and Israelite action was directed against the cities. Not all the inhabitants were killed, and even in the face of 'utter destruction' of cities, survivors remained. (38-39)

Second, she argues that one's starting point is indicative of one's perspective of the text. Beal concludes,

If it is assumed that humans are good and deserving, then the command, as well as God's decision to remove the inhabitants from the land, seems arbitrary and unfair. But if one's starting point is that all humans are sinful and under judgement, then judgment against the Canaanites is within God's just acts. (39-40)

When seen in the perspective of redemptive history, the conquest served as a part of God's plan to restore humanity to himself, and that required dealing with the sinful people of Canaan (40). While Beal admits that her solutions "may not satisfy all readers," it does allow for one reading of the text that rejects an indiscriminate genocide of the people of Canaan, a common caricaturizing of Joshua.

*Joshua* has been well researched, is well written, and makes many interesting observations about the text. It is easy to read, use, and is very detailed. This commentary will serve pastors, students, Sunday school teachers, and lay people alike.

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***Habakkuk: An Exegetical-Theological Commentary (Teleioteti Old Testament Commentary).*** By J. Alexander Rutherford.

Vancouver, British Columbia: Teleioteti, 2019. 330 pp. \$30.00.

James Alexander Rutherford, a Ph.D. student at Moore Theological College, has recently released his commentary on Habakkuk, published by Teleioteti Publishing. Rutherford is concerned by the many commentaries on Habakkuk that focus primarily upon critical issues or that tend to find meaning in Habakkuk by allegorizing the text. In contrast to these emphases, Rutherford's commentary aims to present both a sound exegesis of the text as is and explain how Habakkuk relates to redemptive history and theology/application (xvi). To accomplish this task, Rutherford presents and justifies his own translation of the text, provides textual notes following each verse or set of verses (as necessary), and concludes each major section with an exposition intending to "draw out the meaning of the text in application to our day" (78n1). Rutherford rounds-out his commentary on Habakkuk with eight appendixes addressing issues related to the commentary, including the use of historical background in understanding the text (appendix 3), the translation of Habakkuk 2:2C in the LXX (appendix 6), and an expanded treatment of Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 (appendix 7).

There are many things to commend about *Habakkuk*. For example, Rutherford does a great job handling the issues involved in translating אֱמוּנָה in 2:4 as "faith" rather than "faithfulness." Arguing that אֱמוּנָה can mean "faith" (since Hebrew does not have a noun to distinguish "faith" and "faithfulness"), he points to the Targumic interpretations of Habakkuk and the use of Habakkuk in the New Testament, both of which give evidence for the understanding of אֱמוּנָה as "faith." Furthermore, Rutherford points to the context of 2:3 and chapter 3, both of which involve the righteous "waiting" for God to enact his judgment, thus implying "faith" apart from "fidelity" (129-34). These arguments are clear and helpful in dealing with a difficult exegetical issue.

Rutherford is also not afraid to part ways with the majority of commentaries when he feels that the text demands it. For example, he argues for the eschatological view of 3:3, meaning that 3:3-15 is describing the coming invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans through

God's hand rather than describing God's past actions in bringing Israel into the land of Canaan. This interpretive decision does impact the way one applies and preaches the text (i.e., believers should pray for and have confidence in God's will regardless of how terrifying it is versus believers should trust God in God's faithfulness based upon his mighty works in the past). Rutherford admits that the eschatological view is not the majority view (173-74n1), but provides good exegetical warrant for the position, noting that it fits thematically with the previous section which capstones with God's acts revealing the knowledge of God throughout the earth in 2:5-20 and Habakkuk's call for God to administer his program of justice in 3:1-2 (175). Rutherford explains God's entrance from "Mount Paran" as a theological identification of the Chaldean invasion with the conquest (175). This, coupled with the imperfect form of פָּנָה in 3:2, suggests the eschatological view. The implication is powerful: "It is a fearful thing to face an invasion by the Chaldean army. However, they [believing Jews] express the unbelievable faith to which God has called them: they pray for God to accomplish the very thing they fear" (177). This willingness to challenge current commentaries reveals the important emphasis of faith in the book of Habakkuk and one that is highly relevant for today.

Beyond exegesis, *Habakkuk* lives up to its "theological" emphasis by addressing the important theological issues presented by Habakkuk, including discussions of theodicy (79), compatibilism vs. libertarianism (99), and God's justice (158-61). Furthermore, Rutherford's explanations and applications of the New Testament's quotations of Habakkuk (1:5 in Acts 13:4; 2:4 in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38) are very insightful. These citations of Habakkuk become an important part of taking the text of Habakkuk, which addressed a very specific moment in the history of Israel, and determining and applying its timeless truths. The Acts 13:41 reference is no doubt the most difficult citation, but Rutherford explains this very clearly, seeing the salvation and judgment of the cross through the mediation of one's faith (or lack thereof) as comparable to Habakkuk's situation. Rutherford concludes, "The Cross and the Resurrection are the pivotal moments in human history; like the critical vision in Habakkuk, those who believe find God to be their savior, but those who reject him face judgment" (32).



At this point, one possible criticism should be mentioned. Rutherford is skeptical of the use historical background in interpreting any particular passage (see especially appendix 3). While he is not completely opposed to its use, Rutherford is primarily concerned with the presentation of the text as it stands. For example, in one place, he asks, “An interpreter must ask if they could make the point for which they are using extra-biblical evidence from the text alone? ... If the historical evidence disappeared, can you convince someone from the data available in the text?” (239) Rutherford’s points on this issue are fair, and many of the textual problems in Habakkuk are addressed in this spirit. However, on the other hand, if the reader is looking for a 200-page introduction interacting with everything every critical scholar ever said about Habakkuk, then one will be disappointed.

This quibble aside, *Habakkuk* is a solid commentary. The emphasis upon the text of Habakkuk and its address of key theological issues presented in the text make it a worthy addition to the collection of commentaries on Habakkuk already in print. *Habakkuk* will fit nicely on the bookshelf in the pastor’s library.

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***Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation.*** By Benjamin L. Merkle. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 192 pp. \$19.99.

Having spent months memorizing detailed grammatical charts, laboring over syntactical nuances, and toiling over a myriad of vocabulary words, the first-year Greek student is often thrown to the wolves, so to speak. Upon the arrival of summer break, he is tossed into the ocean without a life-preserver and told to swim. He is expected to make use of all the techniques he has learned over the past year in his devotional readings and sermon preparation. Terms he had not previously known and questions he had never thought to ask float around in his imagination. Is this an adverbial or an adjectival participle? What is this *sigma* doing here? What class

conditional statement is this? Not wanting to give up his hard-fought Greek knowledge (which was not cheap, by the way!), yet being unsure of how to move forward, he resorts to what is comfortable and contents himself with basic word studies and the conclusions of commentators, avoiding the difficult and laborious task of actually reading the Greek text himself. Put kindly, he treads water.

To combat this lamentable—though all too common—practice, Benjamin Merkle, professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, authored *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek*. Merkle is no stranger to students of NT Greek, having coauthored *Greek for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining, and Reviving New Testament Greek* and *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament*. In *Exegetical Gems*, Merkle takes many of the complex topics typically covered in a second-semester (or second-year) Greek class and seeks to make them practical. Merkle summarizes, “I wrote this book as a tool to help current and former students of New Testament Greek prosper and ultimately succeed in using the Greek they worked so hard to acquire” (vii).

*Exegetical Gems* is divided into thirty-five brief chapters, each around four or five pages long. The chapters are aptly titled. Take for example, “Textual Criticism,” “Genitive Case,” “Aorist Indicatives,” “The Granville Sharp Rule,” or “Adverbs.” No one should be confused about what each of these chapters entail. This format allows the book to be of equal value to the reader who chooses to work through the text chapter by chapter, or who turns to it as a reference text and reads only what is necessary to his current study. Although it would be an overstatement to assume one could exchange his first-year course textbook with this volume for his review needs, he may find himself turning to this book more frequently than expected, especially for concise and succinct answers to exegetical questions.

Despite the brevity of Merkle’s chapters, this book is by no means for the faint of heart. As Merkle notes, each of these chapters offer “two main things: (1) an exegetical gem from the NT and (2) a review of some aspect of Greek syntax” (viii). It almost goes without saying that this book assumes a working knowledge of the Greek language and a general familiarity with biblical concepts. Merkle is upfront about this expectation, as he comments that this book was

written for college or seminary students, former Greek students, and Greek teachers (ix).

Some chapters of particular interest include: 2. “Textual Criticism,” which offers a solid discussion of internal and external evidence, using Romans 5:1 as a case-study; 12. “Verbal Aspect,” which summarizes well this rather complex topic in a surprisingly brief manner; 33. “Exegetical Fallacies,” which is essentially a five-page summary of D. A. Carson’s book by the same title; and 35. “Diagramming,” which offers a valuable demonstration of the importance of diagramming by using Hebrews 6:4–6 as an example. Overall, this book covers just about all the topics typically found in a first-year textbook.

Upon first learning about the publication of *Exegetical Gems*, I was thrilled with the prospect of what it could offer. One frustration in my own experience of teaching first-year Greek is the lack of available devotional books on the Greek NT. While there is great value in resources such as the *Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* series and B&H’s *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* series, neither of these provide guided and devotional readings suitable for intermediate Greek students. At first I approached *Exegetical Gems* with this expectation—in part due to the subtitle’s claim that it is “A Refreshing Guide.” While this book certainly is *academically* refreshing and an exceptional reference resource, it was not as *spiritually* refreshing as I had anticipated. Perhaps more clearly, it is not a Greek devotional book. Although I was initially disappointed at this—as I had hoped to be able to recommend it to my students as a practical and devotional “next step”—I would certainly still recommend it, just for a different purpose than I had at first assumed. It is an academic refresher on the basics of Koine Greek.

So, should you purchase this book? If you find yourself trading water in your Greek studies, I could not think of a better resource to assist you in moving forward and renewing your Greek abilities.

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***Reading Mark's Christology Under Caesar: Jesus the Messiah and Roman Imperial Ideology.*** By Adam Winn. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018. 204 pp. \$24.00.

Adam Winn provides a scholarly, insightful overview of the Gospel of Mark with primary consideration given to its historical, cultural, and political context of the latter first-century Roman Empire. His basic premise is that Mark's Gospel was written post AD 70, following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, to Gentile believers living under Roman rule. These believers were victims of the propaganda of Flavian, which pitted the Roman emperors, and in particular Vespasian, against Jesus Christ. Flavian's purpose was to prove the superiority of Vespasian to Jesus, and thus defend the deification of Caesar and those emperors who followed him, while debunking Jesus as the promised Messiah. Winn contends that Mark's purpose was to present the life of Christ in the context of Roman culture, proving the superiority of Christ over all human rulers and declaring Jesus as the true God and the only one worthy of worship. In a sense, Winn portrays Mark's gospel as an apologetic for the deity of Jesus Christ while not losing sight of the humanity of Jesus by emphasizing Mark's favorite title for Christ, the Son of Man. To that extent, Mark reveals Jesus as the God-man, without rival in authority, greatness, power, suffering, and sovereignty.

In chapter one, "Reconstructing Mark's Historical Setting," Winn states his thesis, "For the purpose of this project it is only necessary to demonstrate the existence of strong evidence for a Roman provenance and thus establish Rome as a historically plausible provenance for the composition of Mark's Gospel" (29). In other words, Winn is proposing a Roman provenance as opposed to either a Galilean or Syrian provenance. The author cites two internal evidences of Roman provenance: Mark's numerous Latinisms—Caesar, census, denarius—and the Markan motif of suffering disciples due to Neronian persecution and its continuing effects (30-31). Winn does provide a compelling argument for the origin point of Mark's Gospel being Rome through his method which he describes as "historical-narrative" (24). He explains this method as focusing "on the final form of Mark's Gospel—specifically, the Gospel as a unified narrative from beginning to end, with the commitment that it was intended to be read as such" (24). Furthermore, he states, "my

work is distinct from narrative critics in at least one crucial way—it seeks to read Mark’s narrative from a particular sociocultural and historical setting” (24). Thus, the book unfolds in a purposeful fashion with each chapter building on and complementing the previous one(s), while maintaining the author’s commitment to his “historical-narrative” method.

In the introduction, Winn addresses what he calls, “the diverse pieces of Mark’s Christological puzzle” (2). He identifies the pieces as titles, power, suffering, power and suffering, and secrecy (2-8). Then, he promotes narrative criticism as the only way the pieces makes sense (14-22). Winn proves his point in successfully putting the pieces of the Christological puzzle together through this preferred method. By the end of the book, the puzzle is complete without one piece missing.

Perhaps Winn’s strongest argument for Roman provenance is the impact of Vespasian and Flavian propaganda on Roman Christians, referenced throughout the book. He states,

Over the past two decades of New Testament scholarship, there has been a growing recognition of the Roman imperial world as an important foreground for reading New Testament texts, and that New Testament authors were quite intentional about responding to the realities of the Roman Empire that challenged Christian commitments and practices (47).

In particular, Winn cites two challenges to Christian faith commitments by the propaganda of Vespasian. First, the implications of Vespasian’s defeat of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple which testified of divine support. Second, the superiority of Roman gods over the God of Israel. This second challenge strikes even closer to the heart of Christian faith. If this be true, then the Christian claim that Jesus was the prophesied Jewish Messiah is false. Thus, Winn contends that Mark’s Gospel was “a strong pastoral response that undermined Flavian propaganda and made a convincing case that Jesus was God’s Messiah and the true ruler of the world” (48).

Winn demonstrates that the Markan Gospel effectively counters Flavian propaganda by documenting Jesus’ superior power over nature, demons, and disease. Winn asserts, “Mark offers a counter-résumé to that of Vespasian, including Jesus as a superior healer,

benefactor, commander of legions, and master of the winds and waves” (164). In addition, Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection present a unity, not a tension between the powerful Jesus, God’s ruler of the world, and the suffering Jesus who experienced pain, shame, and death (153). Even as Jesus was dying, he evidenced signs of greatness and power by his cry with great strength from the cross and his giving up his own life in a relatively short six hours. The author sets forth Markan Christology as bent on countering the Roman culture and emperor worship by documenting the life and public ministry of Christ, as well as by the names or titles used of Jesus, such as Christ/Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man (the main identity), Son of David, and Lord, all of which substantiate the deity, authority, and superiority of Jesus (51-68).

Winn states another convincing testimony to the deity and superiority of Jesus Christ, the Roman centurion’s confession at the cross (160-61). The centurion’s confession came after he saw Jesus take his last breath. Winn states, “The debate as to whether or not he offered a genuine confession reflecting Christian faith (the Son of God) or a generic confession of Jesus’ greatness (a son of god) misses the confession’s narrative function entirely” (161). Consistent with Markan Christology, the confession was one offering allegiance normally reserved for Caesar to Christ. To the Roman reader, the centurion’s declaration would have represented a change in allegiance. Winn states, “The climactic declaration of the Roman centurion parallels the incipit and declares Jesus, rather than Rome’s emperor, to be the Son of God” (164). I found this interpretation to be especially insightful and another “feather in the cap” for Adam Winn’s thesis.

In his conclusion, Winn declares, “From the outset of this book my goal has been to assemble into a coherent whole the Christological pieces found within and shaped by the Markan narrative” (163). It is my opinion that he accomplished this goal quite convincingly.

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***Philippians: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching (Kerux Commentaries)***. By Thomas Moore and Timothy D. Sprankle. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2019. 256 pp. \$27.99.

To assist the pastor in preaching biblically-faithful sermons that effectively speak to those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, Kregel Ministry has released a new commentary series under the name Kerux (meaning “herald”). According to Kregel, “Kerux commentaries are written for trained pastors and teachers who speak regularly, who have some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and who spend a significant amount of time preparing to preach and teach God’s word” (7). Each commentary presents a solid exegetical analysis of every verse, summarizes the timeless theological truth of every major expository unit, and concludes with communication strategies to help the preacher apply the text in the contemporary world. A unique approach of the Kerux series is the use of the two authors, the first a biblical scholar and the second a working pastor or homiletics scholar, to help the pastor exegete the text faithfully while also addressing insights that would be important for sermon preparation and delivery.

The first commentary in the Kerux series is *Philippians*, authored by Thomas Moore (pastor at Fellowship Church Knoxville and president of Didache, Inc.) and Timothy D. Sprankle (senior pastor at Leesburg Grace Brethren Church in northern Indiana). Working together, the authors present an exegetical analysis, theological focus, and preaching strategies of the eighteen major expository units of *Philippians*. They also include a short introduction which summarizes the general introductory issues (authorship, date, prominence, etc.).

There is much about *Philippians* to commend. First, Moore and Sprankle organize the expository units of *Philippians* well. Developing thematically-organized preaching units that do justice to the author’s literary flow of thought is always a struggle for pastors, and they will definitely appreciate Moore and Sprankle’s outline of *Philippians*. Some of the preaching units could be broken down into smaller units (for example, while the authors list 1:12-18a as one expository unit, 1:12-14 and 1:15-18a are thematically distinct enough that they could warrant their own sermons), but overall the units are well-organized.

Second, the authors handle the significant interpretive and theological issues well without overwhelming the reader with extensive scholarly discussion. The two major interpretive issues are the prominence of Philippians and the identity of the “enemies of the cross” in 3:18-19. Although the authors argue that “a good case can be made for Rome (the traditional view) or for Ephesus” as the place of writing, they assume the Roman view. Although the distance from Philippi to Ephesus is shorter, Moore and Sprankle conclude that “the distance between Rome and Philippi does not seem to be a problem if Paul was imprisoned for two years” (33). As for the “enemies of the cross,” the authors identify them as a distinct group from the false teachers of 3:2, insisting that they were “outsiders, for Paul warning all of the Philippians about them.... If they were present in the church, Paul would hardly emphasize that he gave thanks for *all* the Philippians (1:4, 7)” (212-13). Likewise, Philippians contains some significant theological issues, and the authors handle these adequately as well. They take a metaphorical view of the Kenosis, citing other uses of *κενώω* by the Apostle (Rom. 4:14; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3) (127) and Paul’s rhetorical purpose in 2:3-4 (128) as defense. They further respond simply to the infamous “work out your salvation” imperative of 2:12, arguing that “The ‘working out’ did not rest on believers’ ability and efforts, but on God’s work in them that he would complete (1:6)” (148-49). The average evangelical reader will have no concern with these conclusions.

Third, pastors will especially appreciate the preaching pointers of each section. Although every congregation has different needs, Moore and Sprankle present solid application points for each expository unit that can aid the pastor in developing relevant application regardless of one’s preaching context. The authors are especially good at relating the biblical text to contemporary culture. One example will serve the point well. Addressing the application of 2:1-4, the authors, comparing the degradation of humility in the Roman world, lament,

Similarly, in the Western world,... most of our modern success stories lionize men with giant egos and women with tremendous ambition. Humility receives less praise than high self-esteem.... In such a world, others become an object or obstacle to personal goals, not partners pursuing the advance of God’s kingdom. (113)



This critique of contemporary culture is definitely needed and is normative for the preaching strategies in *Philippians*. There is no doubt that the application suggestions will pack a punch come Sunday morning.

If there is any criticism of *Philippians*, it might be found in the “Creativity in Presentation” sections. These sections include illustrations to help the preacher or teacher visualize the major theological point of the expository unit. Examples include “decorating the church podium with flags, pendants, posters, and swag from a recent championship team” to illustrate a celebration akin to Christ’s enthronement and victory in 2:9-11 (143-144), and “wearing a track suit” or “setting a treadmill on the stage to reiterate the point of taking one more step” to present Paul’s pursuit of the “upward call of God” in 3:12-16 (207). While the use of object lessons has become popular in modern preaching, not every pastor will feel comfortable presenting biblical truth in this way. Perhaps these illustrations would do better in a teaching setting than a preaching setting.

It is also worth pointing out that *Philippians* is not a heavily technical commentary. While it does address the meaning of important Greek terms as they become essential to interpretation, the purpose of the Kerux series is to help pastors preach the text, not to evaluate every textual issue in *Philippians*. Preachers looking for extensive discussions of these issues will need to look elsewhere.

Criticism aside, *Philippians* is a worthy addition to the collection of works on Paul’s beloved epistle. Its outlining of the text, clear addressing of the text’s interpretive and theological challenges, and preaching ideas that are faithful to its major theological themes make it worth a place alongside a preacher’s go-to commentaries for *Philippians*.

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***Investing in Eternity: What the Bible Really Teaches about Rewards.*** By Douglas C. Bozung. Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2019. 326 pages. Softcover \$19.49.

Readers of Douglas C. Bozung's *Investing in Eternity: What the Bible Really Says about Rewards* will find it both generally accessible as well as comprehensive. This book is an adaptation of his 2008 Ph.D. dissertation in which he argues that the Bible teaches degrees of eternal rewards for the Christian based upon his present earthly life. I believe the author has done reasonably well in bringing a highly scholarly product to a generally accessible level that will likely satisfy both the advanced general Christian public as well as the academician. Academicians will find it methodical and systematic with ample scholarly footnotes as well as inclusion of the original Greek and Hebrew. Laymen will appreciate the author's fluent writing style along with his sound logic and reasoning, as he moves methodically from point to point.

The book is 326 pages in length. The front matter includes endorsements, a list of abbreviations, and a preface. The back matter includes two appendices and a segmented scripture index. As for the layout of the book proper, the author provides a ten-page introduction explaining his approach to the topic and also underscoring the importance of the study (not to be confused with Appendix 2: "The Need for This Study"). He brings it all together in his concluding chapter ("What Does It All Mean?"). The intervening chapters divide somewhat evenly between an exegetical investigation (Chapters 1–4) and an assessment of arguments for various positions (Chapters 5–8).

In chapter 1, Bozung's first line of investigation is the teachings of Jesus. Except for one segment (Luke 19:11–27, the Parable of the Minas), he limits himself to five partial chapters of the Gospel of Matthew (viz., 5–7, Sermon on the Mount; 20, Parable of the Vineyard; 25, Parable of the Talents). He concludes that while there are passages that seem to point toward all Christians receiving the same eternal reward irrespective of their behavior on earth, there are "many texts, including some of Jesus' parables, which affirm the concept of degrees of rewards...[and wherein Jesus] demonstrates a clear link between faithful service *now* and reward in *eternity*" (41, emphasis original).

Bozung devotes two chapters to the Apostle Paul's writings. In Chapter 2, he addresses Paul's several references to the Bema Seat (Rom 14:10–12; 1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Cor 5:10), and then in Chapter 3, he investigates his various references to believers' "crowns" (1 Cor 9:25; Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8). In both chapters, he concludes that Paul consistently presents his doctrine of rewards as by degree based upon the believer's faithfulness of service.

In Chapter 4, the author addresses the remaining biblical texts which touch upon the issue (Jas 1:12, 1 Pet 5:4, Rev 2:10; 3:11). After a careful investigation, he sees two passages (viz., Jas 1:12 and Rev 2:10) as appositional statements wherein the reference to "crown of life" as equivalent to eternal life itself, something that every true believer receives due to his standing in Christ based entirely on the merits of Christ. He shows that the other two passages (viz., 1 Pet 5:4, Rev 3:11) support the doctrine of degrees of rewards for the believer based upon some aspect of the believer's present earthly ministry.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Bozung works through various arguments for or against the doctrine of degrees of the believer's rewards. In Chapter 5, he presents the two opposing views on the identity of the "Overcomer" (Rev 2–3). He concludes that the evidence best supports the notion that all true believers are overcomers and thus these chapters do not support the idea of degrees of punishment. Yet he is careful to point out that the notion of crowns does imply degrees of reward. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 are dedicated to fielding and answering opposing objections against the author's primary thesis. He interacts cogently against previously published works by authors who make opposing claims (e.g., Craig Blomberg, Joseph Dillow, Thomas Schreiner, et al., albeit, each opponent nuances his own view differently).

Bozung's concluding chapter offers a succinct and helpful summary of the foregoing material. He concludes that the New Testament teaching on the doctrine of rewards suggests that, first, there will be "future heavenly *consequences* for the present earthly activity of followers of Jesus" (249, emphasis original); second, these consequences are *eternal*; third, there are various criteria such as *purity of motives, faithfulness of service, and perseverance in persecution*; fourth, the rewards involve variegated *responsibilities* in the millennial kingdom, as well as *praise* from God; and fifth, all

rewards are based in *God's graciousness* in that they far outweigh whatever aspect of faithful service was rendered.

I am thankful for Bozung's book, *Investing in Eternity*, and I believe he has made a significant contribution to the Church. There are only two minor observations that perhaps hinder its accessibility to the general Christian public. The first is the lack of transliteration of Greek and Hebrew words. Readers with no knowledge of original languages will consistently stumble over these, even though he provides an accompanying definition or translation. Granted, although they may also stumble over the transliterations, they will, at least, be able to pronounce them. The second is there are a few typographical errors and one layout error (e.g., the concluding chapter is listed as "Chapter 9" in the Table of Contents" but it is not enumerated as such in the chapter itself). Despite these very minor points, I found the book quite edifying myself and believe it would be a useful title for professors and instructors to add to their required reading or recommended reading for theology courses or even Biblical Counseling courses at either the graduate or undergraduate level. Pastors and churches would do well to make it a choice resource for believers who are evidencing a seriousness toward their faith and for counselees struggling to overcome or lagging in biblical hope. In fact, the author closes the book proper by making a strong appeal to its relevance for biblical counseling (254–55), something with which I heartily concur.

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***Five Half-Truths: Addressing the Most Common Misconceptions of Christianity.*** By Flip Michaels. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2018. 158 pp. \$12.99.

A half-truth is a deliberate imitation of truth and a falsehood. It is designed to have the appearance of truthfulness and credibility while undermining, obscuring, and/or contradicting the real truth. Half-truths can be even more deadly than blatant lies because they deny the truth with such sinister subtlety. The key danger of half-

truths is that they tend to make lies and errors appear good or sound appealing. We live in an era when multitudes—including countless professing Christians—are perfectly willing to accept half-truths, especially in the realm of biblical doctrine and gospel preaching.

Flip Michaels, Associate Pastor at GraceLife Church outside of Hershey, Pennsylvania, has produced an incredibly helpful resource to aid readers untangle truth from error. In *Five Half-Truths*, Michaels responds to five major half-truths commonly used to deflect any consideration from the validity of the Bible, Christianity, God, Christ, and faith. These five half-truths have been administered to persuade people to discount and disregard the truth of the gospel by accepting too much error with too little discernment.

In chapter one, Michaels discusses the half-truth, “The Bible was written by man.” Although a true statement, it is frequently used to propose that the Bible is an assortment of fairytales bound together over the millennia (23-24). Michaels responds that the whole truth is that the Bible was written by men and inspired by God. Not only did men write the words, but it was God who gave his word to them to write with perfect precision (24-25). The whole meaning is that God spoke his divine will to and through men to be written down, and thus the writing was an activity of special revelation (25-26). For this reason, the Bible is authentic (29-32), accurate (32-38), and authoritative (38-41).

In chapter two, Michaels confronts the half-truth, “All religions are the same.” Although religions do share similarities, this statement alleges that the God of the Bible is simply another god among mankind and that all religions are on an equal footing (47-50). Michaels responds that the whole truth is that all religions are the same except Christianity (50-52). The four major witnesses of the Christian faith: John the Baptist, the person and works of Christ, God the Father, and the Scriptures (52-60) make it absolutely clear that Christianity as revealed in God’s word cannot reconcile with the religions of the world (61-62).

In chapter three, Michaels addresses the half-truth, “God is love.” It is a phrase that insinuates that a loving God could never be a judging God, or that the NT God is incompatible with the OT God (71-73). Michaels responds that the whole truth is that God is both loving and holy. This is demonstrated in God’s common grace which

touches all men, and in God's saving grace, which is rooted in both God's love and holiness (73-78).

In chapter four, Michaels confronts the half-truth, "Jesus is truly a man." Most individuals, even unbelievers, would not dispute that Jesus existed. However, this is only half the truth. Michaels responds that the whole truth is that Jesus is both truly man and truly God, having both human and divine natures. According to Scripture, Jesus was human like all men but did not sin. Furthermore, he had the same attributes of the Father, including omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence (97-111).

In chapter five, Michaels discusses the half-truth, "Our good deeds matter." Our good deeds do matter, but good deeds will never merit salvation. Sadly, man has devised a vast number of religious and secular ways to save himself (123-25). Michaels responds that the whole truth is that our good deeds matter, but when preceded by faith. The believer's life in Christ should yield good works that glorify God, but these follow faith (141-44).

In chapter six, Michaels presents a discussion of his journey to the whole truth (147-50). This inclusion of his heart and life experiences adds to the sincerity and authenticity of his responses. Michaels also includes a challenge to unbelieving readers to believe on Jesus and a challenge to believers to move towards spiritual maturity based upon the content of the book (151-58). This further adds genuineness to a discussion of difficult and urgent issues.

*Five Half-Truths* is well-written, readable, interesting, and devoted to Biblical truth. The book is nothing short of outstanding, and I am in agreement with everything Michaels wrote in this book. I would recommend it to every pastor and teacher, as well as to both believer and unbeliever alike. *Five Half-Truths* is a much-needed work in our day of doctrinal confusion and relativism.

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***Contemporary Theology: An Introduction.*** By Kirk R. MacGregor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019. 416 pp. \$24.49.

Very few books are a delight to the mind like MacGregor's *Contemporary Theology*. Designed as an introduction to hermeneutical, philosophical, and theological developments starting with the nineteenth century, it can serve as an excellent textbook in a seminary class on contemporary theology and issues. Several positive features of the work lead to this conclusion.

First, the writing style makes the discussions readily accessible to those who have no background in the various areas. Oftentimes, books on contemporary theology get bogged down with hyper-technical language that often loses and discourages the conservative reader who is not used to the terminology common to the less traditional views. The clear and explanatory writing style helps the reader conquer, so to speak, the material of less currency in his own usual field of study.

Second, there is a wide selection of viewpoints covering the last two hundred years. After a chapter on philosophical backgrounds, MacGregor reviews 37 different individual contributors or movements that affect theology. Each of those chapters is around eight pages long, which is sufficient to do justice to the survey but not overbearing. It is a benefit that MacGregor deals with evangelical movements like early dispensationalism, Princeton theology, Spurgeon's practical biblical theology, Christian fundamentalism, and the rise of neo-evangelicalism within the scope of contemporary theology. Oftentimes, in studies on contemporary theology, the more conservative theological movements get short-changed.<sup>1</sup> Students need to be aware of the variations of conservative theological thought as influences on contemporary theological discourse. MacGregor adds the usual presentations on Schleiermacher's liberal theology, Hegel's dialectical theology, Kierkegaard's existentialism, and Wittgenstein's picture theory and language games approaches. One can also find individual chapters on the Niebuhr's "Christian

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<sup>1</sup> One such example is the existentialist John Macquarrie. In his monumental and useful work *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, conservative contributions are largely absent.

Realism,” Barth’s neo-orthodox presentations, Bultmann’s demythologizing of the Bible, and Tillich’s theology of culture.

One useful feature is the examination of Vatican I and the eighteenth-century opposition among Roman Catholics to its tone. MacGregor follows that up by a later chapter on Vatican II and its influence in the late twentieth century as Roman Catholicism grapples with modernity. Although all the viewpoints represented cannot be mentioned here, a pleasant surprise is the review of unexpected areas like Chinese eschatology, the recent movement of “theology and the arts,” the contributions of African Christology, and the Reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga. Hermeneutical discussions abound throughout MacGregor’s skillful expositions, but especially helpful are those dealing with postliberal and postconservative theologies, the New Perspective on Paul, the evolutionary creation approach of John Walton, and the recent movement known as theological interpretation of Scripture.

A third strength of MacGregor’s work stems from its highly descriptive method of presentation. While occasionally MacGregor’s opinions sneak out (how could they not?), such thoughts are more often couched in what others have said than MacGregor’s personal, prescriptive assessment. In summary, he does an excellent job of letting people and movements speak on their own terms. In fact, it is difficult to tell where MacGregor’s theological sympathies lie. This produces an irenic tone to the book that puts the reader at ease.

In spite of these excellent qualities, MacGregor’s work does have some shortcomings that can be mentioned briefly. First, there is the occasional misunderstanding of a view which he is describing. Since the current reviewer comes from the dispensational tradition, a short analysis of the chapter on dispensationalism is instructive. MacGregor gets many things right in discussing John Nelson Darby, but there are a few concerns with MacGregor’s evaluation.

One, he overstates when he refers to Darby’s “rigidly ‘literal’ reading” of Scripture (55). Such a statement does not do justice to the robust typological interpretations (both good and bad) that can be found in Darby and later dispensationalists of the nineteenth century.

Two, MacGregor also missteps when he accuses Darby as treating the church as secondary and Israel as primary in his theological system (57). Such an assessment of dispensationalism is prominent among nondispensational evangelicals but misses the



mark. Arno Gaebelein, greatly influenced by Darby's followers, noted that the truth given to the church in the book of Ephesians is "by far the greatest revelation."<sup>2</sup> Along the same lines, dispensationalists are accused on the other side of treating the church as "too special" due to a belief in the pretribulational rapture in which the church is exempt from the tribulation period while Israel must endure the affliction of that time. Many dispensationalists believe it is unfair to characterize their theology as Israel over the church.

Three, perhaps the most significant incorrect analysis of Darby is the affirmation that Darby held to two new covenants, one for Israel and a separate one for the church (60). To be sure, this is the later view of Lewis Sperry Chafer, but it is not the view of Darby. Darby held that the church today experiences the spiritual blessings of the same new covenant promised to Israel in Jeremiah, but such experience is not the fulfillment of the promise to Israel.<sup>3</sup> MacGregor's presentation on this issue does not do justice to the nuances of dispensational views and is, in fact, inaccurate when it comes to John Nelson Darby.

A few other areas exist where accuracy needs to increase. For example, MacGregor identifies the Princetonian Charles Hodge as an amillennialist when his viewpoint is more properly associated with postmillennialism (69). To be sure there is some fogginess in Hodge on the issue, but he appears to support the idea that there is a time in which the Church experiences a glorious state on earth before the Second Advent.<sup>4</sup> Another example would be MacGregor's assertion that R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon were two businessmen who underwrote the twelve volumes of articles which launched the

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<sup>2</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *God's Masterpiece: An Analytical Exposition of Ephesians I-III* (New York: Our Hope Publication Office, 1913), 3; Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 127-33.

<sup>3</sup> Rodney Decker, "New Covenant, Dispensational Views of the" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 280-83; Mike Stallard, "The Interpretation of the New Covenant in the History of Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant*, ed. Mike Stallard (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist P, 2012), 73-78.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 858-59.

fundamentalist movement (113). Torrey and Dixon were ministers, not businessmen. The California businessmen Lyman and Milton Stewart paid for the publication of the writings. In areas like this, MacGregor needs to pay more attention to detail although his overall summary of beliefs and impact are fairly accurate.

One final thought is that the work would benefit from a final, epilogue chapter bringing everything together in some way. Perhaps an editor's decision, such a wrap-up, would serve the readers in a helpful way. However, in spite of the criticisms just cited, MacGregor's work will become the favorite work on contemporary theology in many personal libraries.

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***Five Views on the Extent of the Atonement.*** Ed. Adam J. Johnson  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 256 pp. \$22.99.

This work represents yet another contribution from Zondervan's Counterpoints series. What is somewhat intriguing in this case is the inclusion of five perspectives on a topic that traditionally is understood in terms of two. As Johnson states, "We are asking who Christ died for, whether for all or for the elect" (10). In this regard, besides a "limited" or Reformed perspective (Michael Horton, Westminster Seminary, California) and an "unlimited" or Wesleyan perspective (Fred Sanders, Biola University), the editor provides an Eastern Orthodox perspective (Andrew Louth, Durham University), a Roman Catholic perspective (Matthew Levering, Mundelein Seminary), and a Christian Universalist perspective (Tom Greggs, University of Aberdeen). Unfortunately, no contributor from a Calvinistic but unlimited perspective, such as myself and many readers of *JMAT*, is included.

Space does not permit more than a cursory overview of each presentation, but what is striking about all of the presentations is how little discussion there is of the key biblical references that are historically adduced in support of one viewpoint or another. Rather far more space is given to quoting or citing theologians both ancient

and contemporary. To be sure, as Johnson points out in his introduction, “To come to grips with this doctrine is no mere wrestling with one or two passages of Scripture” (12). Yet, one would expect at least *some* wrestling with Scripture beyond a mere recitation of verses, which is too often the case in this work.

As the Eastern Orthodox representative, Louth is uncomfortable with the question itself: “I found myself entering territory largely unknown to me” (90). After a series of contrasts between the historical trajectories and emphases of “Eastern” and “Western” theology, he protests that

the suggestion that salvation is to be understood in terms of making amends, satisfaction and expiation ... narrows down the myriad ways in which the saving work of Christ is understood in the biblical and patristic tradition. (42)

But as Horton responds, though the West may be guilty at times of downplaying other aspects of Christ’s work in favor of the forensic, Orthodox presentations tend to dispense with such concepts altogether (52). And Sanders observes, “At some points, Louth seems to presuppose a dichotomy between the forensic and the transformative, as if we had to choose between the legal and the actual” (60). In the end, Louth opts for a qualified “unlimited” atonement in view of the unlimited mercy and love of God for mankind (38).

Levering’s presentation is noteworthy for the evangelical feel of its theological assertions and proof texts, not surprising in light of his longtime participation in “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (7). Indeed, in Levering’s discussion, Aquinas comes across as rather “Calvinistic,” even to the point of endorsing double predestination (82). Though he channels most of his arguments through Aquinas and Augustine, Levering makes no mention of the Roman Catholic system of sacramentalism and its vital role in the understanding of what Christ actually accomplished on the cross. In line with the Church, he also supports an unlimited atonement.

Horton begins by disabusing his readers of popular but “simplistic” portraits of Reformed theology that reduce it to the TULIP acronym or view it as a system largely governed by the doctrine of predestination (112f). On the contrary, he insists

predestination and unconditional election were taught by many in Calvin's day and affirmed by many confessions outside of Reformed theology. Furthermore, "particular redemption is not deduced from predestination as a necessary logical entailment. Rather, Reformed theology maintains that it is a truth taught explicitly in Scripture" (121). But even though Horton affirms that Christ's death was "sufficient ... for a thousand worlds" (127), he responds to objections to his limited atonement view in a mere three pages and without ever discussing the many texts traditionally cited in support of an unlimited atonement.

Despite his Wesleyan affinities, Sanders often sounds like a Calvinist, even citing several Puritan sources to buttress his arguments. A large portion of his initial presentation spells out the distinctions affirmed by the greater part of Christendom between the persons of the Trinity (159–65), which are the basis of his subsequent differentiation between what he calls salvation *accomplished* and salvation *applied*. This differentiation in turn becomes the basis for arguing for a universal or unlimited atonement that has limited effect (166–71). Personally, I resonated most with this presentation, though I would digress from his "corporate election" view of Romans 9 and his adherence to libertarian freewill (some of his Wesleyan distinctives).

Finally, Gregg's "Christian Universalist" presentation purports to combine "the Arminian position that God *wills* the salvation of all people with the Calvinist position that God's sovereign will cannot be resisted" (197; emphasis original). Essentially, because God is loving and omnipotent, he is compelled to save all human beings. But as Horton observes, "[This] is not *merciful* love. By definition, mercy must be free" (229). Elsewhere Gregg is more circumspect, calling his view a "daring hope" (63, 111, 153, 154, 195). Though his universalism is well outside the fold of orthodox Christianity, he nevertheless identifies as an "evangelical Methodist" (154) and disavows "pluralistic universalism" (e.g., John Hick), which downplays the significance of Christ. Not surprisingly, Karl Barth figures prominently in both Gregg's arguments and responses. In the end, his presentation is a classic example of the selective (ab)use of Scripture.

In summary, if someone is seeking a robust examination of the pertinent biblical texts on the extent of the atonement, they should

look elsewhere. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson's (eds.) *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (2013) or David L. Allen's equally weighty response to this work, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (2016) would be far better choices on this particular issue. But as a general overview of the topic, especially as it is viewed by non-Protestant traditions, the book could be useful, such as a supplemental text for a soteriology class.

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***For Thou Art With Me: Biblical Help for the Terminally Ill and Those Who Love Them.*** By Bruce A. Baker. Larkspur, CO: Grace Acres Press, 2019. 118 pp. \$11.95.

Baker's first paragraph is only three words, "I am dying" (1). This reality makes it tough to continue. While it is true, as Baker points out, that we will all die, seeing his confession in print is personally difficult. Bruce and I were in the Doctor of Philosophy program together at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, PA, and as trying times have a way of forging friendships, ours was forged in the classroom, dining hall, and dorm room when we came to campus. Bruce has a sharp mind and maybe a sharper wit. In the classroom he was quick to share his theological insights and Texas humor. I enjoyed both.

For the past years Bruce has been a medical enigma. Bruce and the medical community knew he wasn't well but there was no definite diagnosis and certainly no "you have x amount of time to live." However, in August 2017 he was diagnosed with ALS and given the often dreaded "you could live a year, eighteen months at the outside" (1). While he has "outlived" the initial timeframe, he understands this disease will be his death.

It is from this place that Bruce writes: he is dying and he knows it. And as a pastor who is always teaching and preaching, he employs his unique "ALS pulpit" "to provide biblical help for the terminally

ill” (75). This help comes from the place in which he lives and studies—the Bible.

In fifteen short chapters each with its own set of reflective questions, Bruce shares biblical hope for the terminally ill. He observes how a terminal diagnosis is a gift of time to think about death (chap. 2). He talks about the fear of death (chapter 3) and the antidote to fear: the gospel (chap. 4). The rest of the sections deal with why Christians suffer (chap 5), the questions they naturally ask in their suffering (chaps. 6-8), death and resurrection (chaps. 9-11), assisted suicide (chap. 12), and living for the glory of God (chap. 13). Reflections on suffering and death by Charles Spurgeon and Matthew Henry respectively conclude the book (chaps. 14-15).

Knowing Bruce, I wished that he would have at times fleshed out and illustrated with his own story the biblical truths he shared so clearly. While it may seem heartless to point out, his negative critique of the added fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life says more of how the Judean king used this gift than the gracious gift itself. Not everyone who was granted more time abused it (52, cf. Lazarus, John 11). Also, Bruce’s use of a nineteenth-century missionary anthropologist seems dated (11). It must have been his ALS that moved him to use the dreaded endnotes, which gratefully are few.

For the believer who has received the fearful terminal diagnosis, Bruce’s book is a reminder for the believer how to live at peace and in comfort in light of eternity’s gateway, death. For those who do not know Christ, his insights are gentle and point to their greatest need before they die and stand before God.

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***Encountering World Religions: A Christian Introduction.*** By Irving Hexham. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 223 pp. \$16.99.

Irving Hexham is professor of religious studies at the University of Calgary and adjunct professor of world Christianity at Liverpool Hope University. He has published nearly thirty academic books, most of them on religious topics, and a multitude of articles. His new

work, *Encountering World Religions: A Christian Introduction*, was written to help Christians to live out and spread the gospel to those around them in pluralistic societies.

To this end, he begins with a brief journey back to first century, and some of the biblical principles for dealing with non-Christian religions given at the time of the origin of church. He then briefly summarizes the development of religious ideas in the West, providing a picture of the context of pluralism faced by Christians today, including the increasingly negative views of Christianity that have accompanied increasingly positive views of Eastern religions.

Instead of an encyclopedic presentation of many of the thousands of religions in the world today, Hexham provides helpful descriptions of several groupings of religions. The first of these is that of “traditional” or “primal” religions (or those which lack written holy texts). African traditional religions are highlighted in this group. Wisely, the author warns Westerners not to accept generalizations about “African Religions,” due to their geographical and content diversity. At the end of his description of the experiences and worldview of primal religions, Hexham takes the time to remind contemporary Christian readers of Africa’s “forgotten” Christian heritage. This highly readable essay (Chapter Four), is worth the price of the book.

Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and related religions are grouped as Yogic religions, based upon their core practice of various forms of yoga. Hexham warns the reader that most textbooks describing world religions have followed a traditional standard account of Yogic religions developed by British scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose motives were usually not altruistic. In Hexham’s descriptions of the religions, their practices and cultural influences are emphasized. Yet he stops to take the time to remind the reader that the most fruitful approach to witnessing to followers of religious or philosophical systems is that of testing whether the belief system “holds together in a coherent way” and whether the coherence “fits the facts of life” (96). Although the former might be true, for example in Buddhism, its premises do not match human experience.

The final group is the Abrahamic tradition, which encompasses Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Because the book is written for Christians, Hexham does not include a chapter on Christianity. He

moves instead into a description of the things that should be held in common among the Abrahamic religions, and the ways in which they are not. As he moves to a concise description of the history of Judaism, he helpfully explains why basically Jews are neither grateful for the interest of Christians in the Old Testament, nor trusting of Christians because of the treatment Jews have received from Christendom in the past. His careful presentation of Islam also includes some helpful insights that will prepare the Christian to understand and live as a witness before Muslim neighbors.

Hexham concludes the book by encouraging Christians to be aware of the good things in the history of the church, including its embracing of truth, care for others, rational arguments for Christianity, worshipping God, and living Christlike lives as practical demonstrations before the world.

It is difficult to find any complaints against this book. *Encountering World Religions* is deceptively brief. However, its status as an introduction is where the genius of the book appears, and thus it is reasonable to encourage all Christians, beginning with teenagers, to read this book. It is the kind of summary of what we need to know about world religions to form relationships with non-Christian people that is desperately needed today.

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***Shepherding God's People: A Guide to Faithful and Fruitful Pastoral Ministry.*** By Siang-Yang Tan. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 272 pp. \$22.99.

Serving as a pastor of a local church is an awesome opportunity as well as a grave responsibility. Among other things, it requires a calling, courage, commitment, and character. A person who is contemplating the call to pastoral ministry must understand that this is a high calling that bears great rewards but must be embraced with gravity. The task of obtaining information and direction for the many facets of ministry should not be one that is considered complete when one finishes seminary, but rather it must be an engagement of lifelong learning.



Siang-Yang Tan has assembled a ‘library’ of information that can be of great assistance in that learning and growing experience every pastor should be enjoying. *Shepherding God’s People: A Guide to Faithful and Fruitful Pastoral Ministry* covers many essential topics that a pastor needs to be aware of and continuously learning about. It is obvious that the book is not an attempt to cover every issue that a pastor will face in a lifetime of service, but one that will greatly assist a new or a seasoned pastor with refreshing guidance on various ways that many of the common issues or needs should be approached.

The first part of Tan’s book is devoted to the biblical and theological foundations of pastoral ministry, with a close look at how pastoral ministry is aligned with the duties and responsibilities of the local church as a body of believers. Although it may seem that a pastor ought to firmly understand these responsibilities during his seminary or Bible school training, unfortunately not all pastors have had extensive training in ministry and many have had their theological and pastoral training at a school that has been somewhat weak in ecclesiology. Therefore, at the beginning of the book, it may be a temptation for the reader who feels that he has a solid grasp on pastoral theology and ecclesiology to move quickly through these pages, but Tan gives a quick compilation of information to consider, setting the stage for the remainder of the book. Another significant contribution the first part of the book provides before moving into the various components of pastoral ministry is a hard but necessary evaluation that a person must take into account of one’s personal life, family life, and spiritual vitality. As Siang-Yang Tan is also a psychologist and counselor as well as a pastor, his emphasis on self-care that is sprinkled throughout the book is advice that should not be overlooked. Also included in Part 1 is a reminder that successful pastoral ministry must be done in power of the Holy Spirit who alone is the one who brings about successful pastoral ministry from heaven’s perspective.

In “Part 2” of the book, Tan shares a wealth of information from his extensive reading and research on numerous topics of pastoral ministry. This section spans a broad spectrum of subjects, from the commonly understood and education-prepared responsibilities of preaching and teaching to the less commonly considered subjects of leaving a church and retirement. What is especially appreciated in the author’s coverage of these many topics is the plethora of ways in

which various biblically sound pastors and leaders have navigated these areas. Tan's effort to synthesize much material offered by others into succinct pages plus sharing from his own twenty-year experience of how he has personally approached the issues helps to launch the reader into fruitful guided research.

Relatively speaking, this book is brief in that much content is condensed into less than 300 pages. Therefore, it is not comprehensive on any one subject. Nevertheless, it is not a text that should be picked up and read one time. Rather, the book lends itself to being one that should be referred to often as a place to look at new and existing aspects of ministry from various angles and provoke the reader to pursue path that has been birthed in wisdom.

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***Preaching to Be Heard: Delivering Sermons That Command Attention.*** By Lucas O'Neill. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 241 pp. \$13.99.

Many preachers feel the tension of being true to the biblical text yet engaging to their audience, facing the pressure of not only finding the "big idea" of the passage but also capturing attention with stories, illustrations, and examples. In *Preaching to Be Heard*, Senior Pastor and Homiletics Professor Lucas O'Neill combines those seemingly divergent goals by calling pastors to capture attention with the biblical text. Rather than relying on homiletical technique, preachers should "lean into the text of Scripture" (12) to earn the attention of their hearers.

*Preaching to Be Heard* is a succinct five-chapter guide to preaching biblically focused engaging sermons. In chapter one, O'Neill introduces the concept of tension as "desire for resolution" (18). Rather than adding tension to the sermon, the preacher is to capitalize on the inherent tension of the biblical text. Building off 2 Timothy 3:16-17, O'Neill reminds the reader that each biblical text is designed by God to equip and complete his people. The goal of the preacher is then to discover God's design for the particular text under

study and show people their need of it. Chapter two guides the reader in the discovery process to find the text's problem and solution. O'Neill strongly recommends that pastors find the one "big idea" of each text. This approach honors the text, makes for clear and memorable communication, and builds on the anticipation already in the text. Chapter three provides four structural templates for sermons depending on the shape of the biblical text. O'Neill provides helpful examples for each of the four structures.

Chapter four, entitled "Disclose the Ultimate Solution," is O'Neill's plea for Christ-centered preaching. Whether in the OT or NT, Christ is the only and ultimate source of change that God's people need. The last chapter returns to the more practical considerations of how to introduce and conclude sermons. The book also contains two sets of helpful exercises to practice finding the "big idea" and determining the best structure depending on the text. O'Neill also provides appendices on the case for expositional preaching along with sample sermon series and outlines.

The greatest strength of the book is the author's conviction that the Scripture needs to be the center of attention in preaching. Each passage reveals a vital need and the preacher's job is to make his hearer aware of that vital need and design the sermon to address that need with the text. O'Neill also provides numerous examples along the way and gives the reader opportunity to work with the text along with the author. It is an ideal textbook for a Bible college, seminary, or church leadership class.

The most debated part of the book is surely to be the chapter on Christ-centeredness as the ultimate solution for every sermon. O'Neill, following in the footsteps of Clowney, Goldsworthy, and Greidanus, will likely rub some readers the wrong way. The question that naturally arises as a result of O'Neill's own emphasis on authorial intent is how that intent, which produces the problem-solution for the sermon, relates to his ultimate intent of getting to Christ. Are there two intents for the sermon? Is the thrust of the sermon delivering on the author's intent or on preaching the gospel? Interestingly, the inclusion of the chapter on Christ-centeredness illustrates the issue in O'Neill's own book. Without the chapter, his book reads as a focused, succinct, and purposeful book on engaging biblical preaching. With the chapter, the book feels a little disjointed by addressing two important but seemingly different issues.

This difficulty aside, *Preaching to Be Heard* is an incredible resource for preachers. Whether just starting out in seminary or having preached for years, the reader is sure to find the book convicting, encouraging, and exceptionally practical. It is reminiscent of the best parts of Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* and Jay Adams' *Preaching with Purpose*. It is highly recommended.

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***A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics.*** By Matthew D. Kim. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 128 pp. \$12.00.

Matthew D. Kim, associate professor of preaching and ministry and the director of the Haddon W. Robinson Center for Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has authored a new work in homiletics titled, *A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics*. He identifies his text as “a primer or introduction to preaching focusing on the characteristics of what makes for effective sermons and faithful preachers” (14). Stating the purpose of the text, Kim writes, “My hope and prayer you is twofold: that your reservations about preaching and being a preacher will be mitigated and that your interest in and even enthusiasm for preaching will be kindled” (15). To encourage readers to pursue the study of homiletics, he first addresses the importance of faithful preaching for the church today (Part I). He then presents and explains the three characteristics of faithful preaching: faithful exegesis and interpretation, cultural exegesis, and application (Part II). Finally, he examines the three characteristics of faithful preachers: benevolence, integrity, and being prayerful (Part III).

It should be stated up front that *A Little Book for New Preachers* is not a guide to homiletical method. In other words, Kim does not walk the reader through the process of selecting an expository unit, accurately exegeting the text, developing biblical consistent illustrations and relevant application, and presenting the sermon. Kim

admits as much (13-14). Instead, the work serves as an introduction to homiletics. It presents important topics new and experienced preachers must know about the practice in order to effectively and faithfully proclaim God's word.

There is much to commend in *A Little Book for New Preachers*. First, Kim effectively presents his case for the importance of biblically faithful preaching in today's churches. Without just a little noticeable irony, while the academy, popular culture, and even the church, have neglected and ridiculed the practice of preaching (19-21), solid and relevant preaching is still the primary draw of believers to a particular church. With Gallup survey research in support, Kim argues that "people in the pews still hunger for faithful exposition of Scripture" (26). If that is not convincing enough, Kim reminds his readers that "the tradition of the church's preaching has been one of God's chosen vehicles to change lives" (42). According to Kim, "We preach because our preaching seeks to increase discipleship, and a significant part of that discipleship process is loving God through our obedience, becoming more Christlike, and changing what we love" (52). Ultimately, the faithful proclamation of God's word is an incredible opportunity for the growth and spiritual health of the church, and Kim helpfully reminds preachers of the impact of their calling.

Second, Kim addresses the importance of preaching for the student of theology. According to Kim, preaching is the "capstone of biblical studies and theology" and "is the very cross section and consummation of all other theological disciplines" (29). Proclaiming the word of God boldly and accurately is the highest calling of the minister and the end goal of all one's biblical and theological studies. Kim's words stand as a healthy reminder of this fact. This proclamation is an important reminder for seminary students who may believe that teaching in the academy and academic research is more glorious and less "troublesome" than the work of the pastor.

Third, Kim skillfully balances the authority of God's word with the importance of cultural exegesis in preaching. According to Kim, "preaching also requires specialized knowledge of one's congregational culture" (72) because this culture can impact the way people receive the message (e.g., a decline in culture's biblical literacy might impact the biblical knowledge of the congregation, which can impact the reception of any given sermon). In other words,

preachers need to recognize who they are preaching to and shape their sermons accordingly. However, at the same time, Kim rightly warns his readers that

whenever race, ethnicity, or culture becomes the primary agenda and the primary lens through which to read the text rather than advancing God's kingdom and declaring the good news of Jesus Christ, we become less faithful interpreters of the text (62).

As our culture becomes more secular, diverse, and reaps the harvest of postmodern thought, Kim's words stand as an important reminder for all preachers as they seek to faithfully proclaim God's word.

Finally, Kim rightly addresses the importance of character for the preacher. Kim reminds his readers that "preaching ability and charisma are inadequate to sustain a long-term, fruit-yielding ministry" (106). Instead, "a central pillar for faithful and effective preaching entails being a person of character and integrity" (113). Interestingly enough, one of Kim's best tips to safeguarding one's character is "to be who you are and like who you are instead of trying to be someone else or liking who someone else is" (112). While that advice might come across as self-help when taken out of context, it is valuable wisdom in a culture that glorifies celebrity preachers and ministerial fame (cf. 107-108). Being happy with God's calling upon one's life and recognizing the seriousness of one's calling to preach the word is the greatest deterrent to spiritual failure in ministry.

If there was one critique of the text, it would be found in Kim's comments regarding the Antiochian and Alexandrian schools of interpretation. He concludes his discussion on this topic by writing, "In order to deliver the message today, one must be a faithful interpreter of Scripture whether one ascribes to the Antiochian or Alexandrian philosophy" (60). The reader will likely question how a preacher could be a faithful interpreter of Scripture using an allegorical method of interpretation, or discovering meaning behind the text that is not stated by the text. Some clarification here is needed. On another note, some readers might get uncomfortable with his references to "her" when referencing the practice of preaching (e.g., 78).

Criticisms aside, *A Little Book for New Preachers* is a solid introduction to homiletics. While the text is not long, Kim's address

of critical issues in preaching makes it a worthwhile read for any preacher, whether in seminary or seasoned. I highly recommend this work for both the preacher in ministry and the seminary classroom.

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## Dissertations in Progress at Baptist Bible Seminary

### — *Old Testament* —

Ismael Dora — *The First Rock Song: Contributions of Divine Metaphors to the Theology of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43)*

David Cooper — *The Contribution of Patterned Toledot Cycles to the Macroplot of Genesis*

### — *New Testament* —

Pavel Togobitsky — *Middle Voice with “Passive” Morphology in New Testament Greek*

### — *Systematic Theology* —

David Gunn — *The Matthean Outer Darkness Passages According to Kingdom Exclusion Theology: An Analysis and Critique*

Jay Keith Hollinshead — *The σὰρξ / πνεῦμα Antithesis in the New Testament Pauline Letters of Galatians, Philippians, and Romans*

George Wayne Willis — *An Evaluation, Explanation, and Comparative Analysis of the Mediatorial Kingdom View of Alva J. McClain*

### — *Bible Exposition* —

Michael I. Cha — *The Positive End-Time Fate of the Nations in the Book of the Twelve*





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