

Dispensational Kingdom Postponement Theology as a Safeguard for the Edenic Divine Institutions

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The doctrine of kingdom postponement is a watershed for developing and defending a distinctly dispensational worldview. Postponement theology comes from a grammatical-historical approach to progressive revelation, so this article divides the doctrine of postponement into two phases: the kingdom as described in the Old Testament and the kingdom as offered, rejected, and postponed in the life of Christ. Both sections feature a non-dispensational trend in theology and a dispensational critique. Two trends have been selected due to the imminent threats that they pose to the divine institutions that were established in the garden of Eden: Christian ecojustice as a threat to responsible labor shall be handled in relation to OT kingdom descriptions; and Christian social justice, specifically relating to feminist and queer theology, as a threat to marriage and family shall be discussed in relation to the kingdom offer. But first, an overview of divine institutions and postponement theology is in order.

Divine Institutions and Postponement Theology

Divine Institutions

As one reads Genesis, certain divine institutions emerge that inform the dispensational worldview in light of a postponed kingdom. Charles Clough describes divine institutions as

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“absolute social structures instituted by God for the entire human race—believers and unbelievers alike.”² These institutions are designed for the protection and prosperity of mankind. Three divine institutions find their roots in the garden of Eden as the divine ideal and carry over to the post-fall world. These are responsible labor (Gen 1:26–30; 2:15–17; Ps 8:3–8), marriage (Gen 2:18–24), and, as a result of responsible labor and marriage, family. Sin has rendered each of these institutions dysfunctional.

God established more divine institutions in later chapters of Genesis, but the first three led to the global population and so it could be said that they lay the foundation for the subsequent institutions. After the flood and the Tower of Babel, two divine institutions emerged to restrain evil: these are civil government (9:5, 6) and national distinction (10–11). Sin has rendered these institutions necessary. The dispensationalist recognizes two more bodies, though not all dispensationalists would rank them as divine institutions;³ they are Israel (12:1–3) and the church (Acts 2:1–4).

This study will focus on the first three institutions (responsible labor, marriage, and family), which are evident the first three chapters of Genesis. Kingdom postponement has clear implications for government, national distinctions, Israel, and the church as well, but if Satan can confuse the church on these first three, then the church’s views on the rest of the divine institutions will crumble soon enough.

² Charles A. Clough, *A Biblical Framework for Worship and Obedience in an Age of Global Deception, Part II: Buried Truths of Origins* (1995), 39, https://www.bibleframework.org/images/bfm_documents/1995-BibleFramework-CourseNotes-02.pdf.

³ Thomas Ice and Charles Clough are excellent dispensationalist theologians who clearly recognize Israel as a blessing to the world, but do not list her as a “divine institution,” per se, while Robert Dean is a theologian with similar theology, who does recognize Israel as a divine institution. See Thomas Ice, “The Divine Institutions,” *Pre-trib Research Center*, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.pre-trib.org/articles/all-articles/message/the-divine-institutions>; Clough, *A Biblical Framework*, 39; Robert Dean, “18 - Divine Institution #6: Israel,” *Dean Bible Ministries*, September 10, 2020, <https://deanbibleministries.org/conferences/message/018-divine-institution-6-israel-b>.

Postponement Theology

Postponement theology contends that Jesus offered to Israel the literal, earthly, messianic kingdom, which is described in the Old Testament, but since Israel rejected this kingdom offer, Jesus postponed the literal kingdom to a future day. Among alternative views are those which say that Christ came and, in one way or the other, established the kingdom as a current spiritual reality. Such systems demand a non-literal understanding of the OT terms of the kingdom and an alteration of Christ's intentions while he was on earth.

It is entirely possible to defend exegetically the institutions of responsible labor, marriage, and family without appealing to postponement theology and the dispensationalist, like all conservatives, should be equipped to do so; however, there is an additional argument that is distinctly dispensational, as the errant doctrines that threaten the institutions are often inseparable from kingdom-now eschatology. The question at hand is how to develop a distinctly dispensational worldview, so this article will emphasize how a robust theology of kingdom postponement is beneficial to developing and defending a dispensational worldview in light of current Christian compromises on these three divine institutions.

OT Descriptions of the Kingdom and the Divine Institution of Responsible Labor

Trends in Ecotheology

Current trends in Christian ecojustice⁴ are posing threats to the divine institution of responsible labor by distorting the role

⁴ Ecojustice is an odd term. A NT word that the NKJV often translates as "justice" is κρίσις (Matt 12:18, 20; 23:23; Luke 11:42; Acts 8:33), which the KJV most frequently translates as "judgment" and occasionally even "damnation" (Matt 23:33; John 5:29). Another NKJV word for "justice" is δίκη (Acts 28:4), which the KJV renders as "vengeance." These words have negative connotations in the Greek, likely being related to κρίνω, which deals with separating, judging, and condemning (Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* [Leiden: Brill, 2010], I.780–81, κρίνω). Are ecojustice advocates calling for eco-damnation, eco-judgment, or eco-vengeance? Not necessarily. It seems that ecojustice adopts the

that humans play in nature and ascribing guilt to Christianity for the industrial use of natural resources. This trend often comes as a direct attack against the Bible and such attacks are often grounded in misunderstandings. Mark Musser is a dispensationalist who served for several years as a bivocational pastor and farmer. He has done much research on the history of environmentalism and summarizes well that “Environmentalists think that latent within the Biblical commands to subdue and fill the Earth is the concept that people may exploit nature for selfish or even greedy purposes.”⁵ As conservatives make evident in the term “*responsible labor*,” the Bible does not advocate the *irresponsible* use of resources, but first let us consider what Christian ecojustice proponents are saying before providing a dispensationalist response.

Certain unsettling ecothological movements have generally stayed among Christian academia in recent decades, but they could be permeating Christian laity in years to come. For example, the Hodos Institute is an Evangelical academic institution with an agenda to promote its ecotheology among Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical⁶ Christians in Ukraine and Russia. Hodos has recently taken a survey and determined, “In general, Christians of both traditions fundamentally shared the belief that the main value of nature and animals was as a resource for satisfying the biological needs of humankind.”⁷ They clarify,

For example, one Evangelical interviewee said, “The role of animals is to be our transport (like donkeys, horses), be our ‘living

buzzword “justice,” which is stripped of its actual meaning, and ecotheologians simply follow the world.

⁵ R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust* (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2018), 21.

⁶ “The term ‘Evangelicals’ is used to denote those who belong to various Russian and Ukrainian Baptist, Pentecostal, and charismatic congregations” (Alexander Negrov and Alexander Malov, “Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership in Orthodox and Evangelical Perspectives in Russia and Ukraine,” *Religions* 12, no. 5 [2021]: 18).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

canned food,' be materials for experiments. But animals haven't been promised eternal life. They don't have the 'superstructure' of the human spirit." An Orthodox priest put it similarly, "Nature was created for humans. Sun, sea, water, air, the earth that feeds the whole population of the planet,—these are the exceptional providence of God for a human."⁸

This shows that Christians intuitively believe that man is above nature (with the obvious call for responsibility), which is in line with the plain reading of the biblical text,⁹ but the researchers rebuked the interviewees, saying "This utilitarian and anthropocentric view has little to do with the Bible and/or Christian tradition and rather is rooted in the modernistic worldview. It is also rooted in the anthropocentric view of the salvific work of Christ and in the anthropocentric eschatological perspectives."¹⁰ A closer look at the roots of this ecotheological movement will show that the opposite is true, that ecojustice is based on an anti-biblical worldview that is more akin to postmodernism with roots in anti-biblical atheism and anti-biblical Eastern philosophy.¹¹

Contemporary Christian ecotheologists borrow much from atheist perspectives on environmentalism. Much of the ecology debate with atheists boils down to the debate between the biblical worldview, which draws a clear distinction between the Creator

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The researchers note, "It was noted that in expressing personal theological perspectives on ecology and ecological responsibility, Evangelical interviewees mainly concentrated on the biblical texts and used literal understanding of the Bible, while Orthodox respondents made references to the writings of the Church Fathers and used allegorical (figurative) understanding of biblical passages that they cited." While the Eastern Orthodox use a different hermeneutic, they still seem to arrive at a similar conclusion (Negrov and Maloy, "Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership," 15–16).

¹⁰ Ibid., 16–17.

¹¹ On the eastern and western influences of postmodernism, see Philippa Berry, "Postmodernism and Post-religion" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2006), 168–81.

and creation, as contrasted to the atheist worldview that sees a continuity of being between nature and a common source. Consider, for example, a quotation from the atheist Niel deGrasse Tyson:

We are all connected. To each other, biologically, to the earth, chemically, and to the rest of the universe, atomically. That's kinda cool! That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It's not that we are better than the universe; we're part of the universe. We're in the universe and the universe is in us.¹²

Notice the continuity. To the atheist, all life shares a common origin in the primordial soup whence life evolved. Moreover, we share origins with all matter since we were together in the Big Bang. This concept has been labeled "Continuity of Being," and is similar to pagan myths and Eastern philosophy, as opposed to the biblical view of "Creator/Creation Distinction."

The Continuity of Being from evolutionary cosmogony has always been a driving force behind atheist ecology,¹³ but the merge with Christianity into modern ecotheology is typically traced to a lecture delivered by a medieval historian named Lynn White Jr. in 1966 at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The text of the lecture was later published as an article entitled, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."¹⁴ Although White identified as "a churchman,"¹⁵ he also accepted the narrative of evolution and concluded that man is not superior to nature. White shames Christianity for their attitudes that "despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to

¹² Neil deGrasse Tyson, "We Are Star Stuff--Cosmic Poetry," *YouTube*, May 30, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QADMMmU6ab8>.

¹³ A chilling aspect of environmentalist history is the role that Ernst Haeckel, the 19th century German zoologist who coined the term "ecology," played in the eventual development and rise of National Socialism. See Musser, *Nazi Ecology*, 128ff.

¹⁴ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1206.

nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”¹⁶ White summarizes his conclusion:

We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology—hitherto quite separate activities—joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.¹⁷

White praised the beatniks of those days because they “show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.”¹⁸ It seems that from the beginning of the movement, Christian ecojustice has had roots in atheism and eastern philosophy;¹⁹ indeed, Christian ecotheology has become dominated by pantheism (“God *in* all”),²⁰ which is

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The Eastern philosophy has emerged to resurface in a recent call for Asian Christians to participate in interfaith dialogue “for the development of contextual intersectional or liberationist ecotheologies which may redress this inequality” with practitioners of traditional religions, Buddhists, Confucians, and Daoists. See Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung and Tanya Riches, “Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis,” *Religions* 11, no. 7 (2020): 3, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070341>

²⁰ As a notable exception, the socio-ecologist Brian Snyder modifies some pantheistic ecotheologies for a novel ecotheological perspective from the Creator/creation distinction (which he calls dualism), not in opposition to the former, but as “an alternative means of arriving at the same place.” See Brian F. Snyder, “Christian Environmental Ethics and Economic Stasis,” *Worldviews* 23 (2019): 154–70.

softer than pantheism (“God *is* all”), but even non-dispensational Evangelicals²¹ have identified this as a problematic doctrine.²²

Ecojustice crosses several lines of demarcation that dispensational and non-dispensational conservatives alike should be willing to draw, but the dispensationalist has additional grounds for rejecting Christian ecojustice based on the kingdom programs that are prevalent in ecotheological trends. For example, Laura Ruth Yordy considers herself an ecotheology apologist who sees “Christianity as overgrown by weeds that obscure and choke its ecological guidance.”²³ Yordy proposes that the Christian life is a witness that demands ecojustice, which she clarifies:

By witness I mean a particular understanding of discipleship in which the communal lives of the disciples testify, through character, worship, and action, to the Kingdom of God as inaugurated, preached, demonstrated, and promised by Jesus Christ....

The Kingdom is not a generic ideal that Jesus happened to talk about during his ministry, but the realization of his redemption of the world. And redemption is another way of describing “bringing back to God.” So, Christians witness to Christ and his work of ultimately returning all of creation back to God; that return, or communion, is the Kingdom....

Nonetheless, the Kingdom has only been inaugurated, not fulfilled, so that disciples continue to run the risk of being taunted, threatened, persecuted, or killed. Only when God establishes the

²¹ See, for example, Oliver D. Crisp “Against Mereological Panentheism,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 2 (2019): 23–41.

²² Some ecotheologians would disagree on the importance of an orthodox understanding of God. Laura Ruth Yordy makes the shocking statement, “The anxiety about pantheism, nature-worship, or other sorts of paganism overshadows the concern about creation. But why, in a culture as nature-despising as our own, should nature-worship be of such concern? It is almost as if we hesitate to feed the starving children in Afghanistan lest we make them fat” (Laura Ruth Yordy, *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008], 41).

²³ Yordy, *Green Witness*, 40.

Kingdom, when the Reign is fulfilled, will death be vanquished entirely.²⁴

In other words, Yordy recognizes that a fundamental aspect of her ecotheological system is that the Christian life is to declare the kingdom as an already/not yet reality that grows “already” as Christians restore creation, while still anticipating a future “not yet” establishment of the kingdom.

This treatment of the “already” kingdom is key to many forms of Christian ecojustice. The Red-Letter Christian Movement (to be discussed more thoroughly below) is a Christian movement with an ecojustice agenda. One of the founders of the movement has said:

Jesus said that this peaceable kingdom [of Isa 11:6] is already breaking loose in our midst. He said, “The kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21 ISV). I see signs of the kingdom here and now, and I believe that his kingdom is increasing before our eyes. To be a kingdom people is to join God in what he’s doing, and to participate with God in rescuing nature from the mess we’ve made of it.²⁵

Notice that he begins with an inaugurated kingdom that is “breaking loose” today. The result is legalism, as instead of accepting God’s promises as guarantees that he will fulfill, the promises become mandates that men must fulfill instead. However, if indeed the kingdom is not “already,” then it is not currently “breaking loose in our midst.” In other words, the theological side of this form of ecojustice falls apart if indeed the kingdom has been postponed.

After starting the Christian ecotheology revolution, Lynn White once remarked that he was amazed at how quickly churches abandoned “the old scion of Man’s Dominion over

²⁴ Ibid., 85–86, 90.

²⁵ Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 103–4.

Nature,”²⁶ which includes what is referred to here as the divine institution of responsible labor. The issue is a matter of worldview; churches in the 1960s and 1970s simply were not prepared to defend the divine institutions. By no means must one be a dispensationalist to recognize the problems in the emergent trends in Christian environmentalism, but a proper understanding of the kingdom postponement and all that it entails is beneficial to developing a distinctly dispensational worldview that is safeguarded from current trends in ecotheology.

Dispensational Response

On the sixth day, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen 1:26). God has put man above the rest of creation to be a responsible laborer. Man is greater than the plants and animals and is free to use them for food (9:3; Ps 8:6–8). Even the sun, moon, and stars were created for man’s service to help him tell time (Gen 1:14). He is also free to use natural resources. Before the fall, gold, bdellium, and onyx stone were available in the land of Havilah (2:11–12). After the fall, there were craftsmen in bronze and iron (3:22); indeed, Jesus, God incarnate himself, was a craftsman on earth (Mark 6:3). Abraham was a chosen shepherd whose shepherd descendants served distinct roles in God’s plan (Gen 15:1–6). God chose Isaac the shepherd over the wilderness

²⁶ The full quotation is “As the inadvertent founder, it would seem, of the Theology of Ecology, I confess amusement at the speed with which the Churches have abandoned the old scion of Man’s Dominion over Nature for the equally Biblical position of Man’s Trusteeship of Nature. Since the Churches remain, despite some competition, the chief forges for hammering out values, this is important. I feel that before too long, however, they will find themselves going on to the third legitimately Biblical position, that Man is part of a democracy of all God’s creatures, organic and inorganic, each praising his Maker according to the law of its being” (Lynn White, quoted by Matthew T. Riley, “A Spiritual Democracy of All God’s Creatures: Ecotheology and the Animals of Lynn White Jr.,” in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, edited by Stephen D. Moore [New York: Fordham U P, 2014], 241).

wanderer Ishmael (21), God chose Jacob the shepherd over Esau the hunter (25–27), and God chose David, who had killed a lion and a bear in defense of his sheep (1 Sam 17). The Lord is described as being a shepherd (Ps 23) and Jesus himself is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), which is reminiscent of all of the animals that were sacrificed for man’s benefit. The Bible presents responsible labor that uses natural resources as being good and holy.

The sufficiency of Scripture is a basic presupposition to the grammatical-historical hermeneutics of postponement theology, but ecotheologians frequently go beyond the Scriptures and appeal to the voice of nature as a source of revelation. One ecotheologian proposes the “plausibility of reading contemporary environmental concern as a response to the prophetic voices of nonhuman nature, and in that sense as a movement of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷ Another ecotheologian writes in a similar vein, “Reading the Bible ecologically involves reading with suspicion of this bias in order to identify with creation and retrieve its voice, leading to engagement in action on behalf of creation.”²⁸ In his appeal for ecotheologians to get out of this “hermeneutical wilderness,” Peet van Dyke, a non-dispensationalist theologian, summarizes the problem:

... many eco-theologians (in their over-eagerness to discover something positive in the Bible about nature) have resorted to some serious cherry-picking, wishful-thinking and to what natural scientists would call story-telling. In extreme cases, some eco-theologians have even reverted to a kind of neo-paganist imagery in their desperate attempts to give the earth and its inhabitants a voice. Speaking about “Earth” or “mother earth” in a metaphorical sense, as if she were a conscious being, is not necessarily a problem. However, in some cases the usage of these metaphors

²⁷ Rachel Muers, “The Holy Spirit, The Voices of Nature and Environmental Prophecy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 3 (2014): 323–39.

²⁸ Jeffrey S. Lamp, “Ecotheology: A People of the Spirit for Earth,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, edited by Wolfgang Vondy (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 359.

borders on a revival of animistic beliefs, where elements of nature (both animate and inanimate) are believed to have indwelling spirits that can “speak” to us or can be addressed by humans.²⁹

Christians should recognize that such ecojustice advocates have been taken captive “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

The dispensational worldview argues for responsible labor, which includes responsibly subduing the land for human productivity. If a Christian is, as White accuses, “contemptuous” of nature, then he is irresponsible, which is a violation of the divine institution. Ecotheologians seem to miss this point when they write such things as, “Within millennialism it is believed that the faithful would very soon be swept away from earth and the ‘obvious correlation is that present earth does not matter, is to be used and even destroyed with impunity.’”³⁰ Since dispensationalism is based on a holistic understanding of Scripture, responses to this accusation, and current trends in ecotheology as a whole, can come from the Old Testament, which is silent on the issue of the rapture.

Isaiah 11:6–10 is particularly relevant to the discussion, as it is a passage to which ecotheologians of a kingdom-now perspective frequently appeal:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
 The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
 The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
 And a little child shall lead them.
 The cow and the bear shall graze;
 Their young ones shall lie down together;
 And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

²⁹ Peet van Dyk, “Eco-Theology: In and Out of the Wilderness,” *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 3 (2017): 836. Dyk cites N. H. Creegan, “Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis,” *Stimulus* 12, no. 4 (2004): 31–33.

³⁰ Peet van Dyk “Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology,” *Old Testament Essays*, 22, no. 1 (January 2009): 200. He cites N. H. Creegan, “Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis,” 33.

The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.
And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.

Isaiah 11:6–9 describes a renewed environment, followed by verse 10, which attaches that environment to the day when the Root of Jesse “shall stand as a banner to the people.” Since dispensationalists see that day as yet future, they see the redacted curse as yet future. Christian ecojustice advocates see the kingdom as already, so they see the redacted curse as already, but with the caveat that the responsibility falls on the church to redact said curse.

A noticeable problem with non-literal approaches is that since Isaiah 11:6–9 is not fulfilled in a plain sense, inaugurated interpreters are left to guess in what sense it is fulfilled. Dwight Pentecost stated a fundamental concept of dispensational interpretation when he wrote, “Inasmuch as God gave the Word of God as a revelation to men, it would be expected that His revelation would be given in such exact and specific terms that His thoughts would be accurately conveyed and understood when interpreted according to the laws of grammar and speech.”³¹ Among kingdom-now advocates, there is not and cannot be a consensus of Isaiah's meaning, since God cannot be interpreted according to the regular conventions of communication. Eusebius of Caesarea supposed that Isaiah 11:6 is fulfilled by “the church of God, where noble people who have been decorated with worldly honors and awards are gathered together with the

³¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing, 1958), 10.

poor and the commoners,”³² while others “understand the wild beasts as referring to the barbarians and Greeks (Eusebius) or Jews (Cyril) transformed by the teachings of Christ.”³³ Other commentators have proposed that “a little child shall lead them” is a reference “to Christ, already mentioned in Isaiah 9:6 (Jerome) and frequently described as a shepherd (Henry), but Calvin thinks instead of communities so obedient that their leaders will not need force or violence to restrain them (Calvin: cf. Cyril).”³⁴ Verse 9 refers to the holy mountain, but this is often spiritualized as well so that the interpretation of “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD” is left to the mercy of the interpreter. One historian notes,

Christian commentators from all ages relate it to New Testament texts about the disciples going forth to all nations (Matt 28:19; cf. John 6:45) (Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.13.8) and predictions that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’ (Phil 2:10) (Cyril). John Wesley’s sermon entitled ‘The General Spread of the Gospel’ (1783) is an exposition of this verse (*Sermons* 2.481–499).³⁵

Several ecotheologians propose that the ecological crisis began in the West with the Industrial Revolution that was founded on Christian ideals. There are scientific and historic problems with this assumption,³⁶ but regardless, pre-industrial Christian interpreters could not have understood a post-industrial ecological crisis in the text, much less could Isaiah’s original audience.

While dispensationalists do not always agree on every detail of Scripture, certain concepts are readily apparent and will

³² Eusebius, *Commentary on Isaiah*, translated by Jonathan J. Armstrong and edited by Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 64.

³³ John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Through the Centuries* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁶ See, for example, S. Fred Singer and Dennis T. Avery, *Unstoppable Global Warming Every 1,500 Years*, updated and expanded ed. (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 29–59.

certainly surface from a grammatical-historical perspective. The OT description of the coming kingdom as a time when the Edenic curse will be partially restrained is one such concept. Donald Cameron has collected statements from various dispensationalists on the restored animal kingdom:

Dr Ironside comments: “[Isaiah 11] Verses 6 to 9 are not to be taken as symbolic. The actual fulfilment of the conditions of the animal world will be the natural outcome of the presence and authority of Christ.” There is a shorter prophecy in Isaiah 65:25–26 about restored animal life. Dr Scroggie writes in a similar vein: “In that period, the blessings are material as well as spiritual; the lower creation and nature also participate in the new order of things, which certainly is not true of the Christian Age”. William Kelly puts these matters into perspective: “Indeed the mighty and blessed transformation which the Lord will cause for the lower creation is but part of the still grander prospect which the reconciliation of all things opens (Col 1:20); when the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, even the universe, shall be headed up in the Christ, the heir of all things” (Eph 1:10). Evolution will play no part—were there to be evolution—a purely hypothetical situation. To be consistent, this would make the carnivorous even more efficient raptors rather than peace loving! Only He who imposed the curse can and will remove it.³⁷

Such statements align with a plain reading of the text that accepts the kingdom as a literal reality that was postponed until a future date, but it is also noteworthy that even non-dispensationalists recognize the plain meaning of the text, even if they disagree with dispensationalism.

A glaring example would be the bulk of Jewish commentators who see Isaiah 11:6–9 as a reference to the future messianic

³⁷ Donald C. B. Cameron, *The Millennium: Restoration after Retribution* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 2014), 156–57. He cites H. A. Ironside, *The Prophet Isaiah* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1952), 50; W. Graham Scroggie, *Prophecy and History* (London & Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.), 98–99; and William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*, reprint (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1975), 274.

kingdom while rejecting the legitimacy of Jesus Christ altogether.³⁸ J. M. M. Roberts has written a commentary on Isaiah from a theologically liberal perspective, wherein he rightly notes a connection to the pre-fallen world, but unfortunately writes off the Genesis account as a myth, such that the reliability of Isaiah and other biblical authors³⁹ is diminished. This is in clear contradiction to the grammatical-historicist's insistence on biblical inerrancy,⁴⁰ but then Roberts recognizes that from the original audience's perspective, "the expectation of a return to that mythological golden age of peace and security between humans and animals under the messianic rule of God's ideal king is not surprising."⁴¹ A key disagreement between the dispensationalist's and Roberts's perspectives is that while they agree with what the author meant, the dispensationalist *agrees with the biblical author* while Roberts diminishes it to a similar status as other Ancient Near Eastern texts.⁴²

A more condemning quotation comes from within the Christian ecojustice movement itself. Gene Tucker, who generally agrees with Lynn White,⁴³ brings out some natural

³⁸ See Andor Kelenhegyi, "The Beast Between Us: The Construction of Identity and Alterity through Animal Symbolism in Late Antique Jewish and Christian Tradition" (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2017), 219–20; cf. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael Pisha 12:1; Sifra Hukkotai 1. Interestingly, Samuel White's commentary from 1709, which claims to approach Isaiah literally, mockingly contains, "The *Jews* are so simple as to ground their Hopes of their Imaginary Messiah, still to come, upon this and other such like Expressions, the literal Completion of which they still expect." See Samuel White, *A Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, Wherein the Literal Sense of His Prophecy's Is Briefly Explain'd* (London: Arthur Collins, 1709), 89.

³⁹ Roberts mentions Leviticus. 26:6; Ezekiel 34:25–26; and Hosea 2:18. See J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, edited by Peter Machinist (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2015), 180. doi:10.2307/j.ctvgs0919.21.

⁴⁰ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas: Bible Communications, Inc., 2010), 275–77.

⁴¹ J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 180.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 180–82.

⁴³ Gene M. Tucker, "Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 3–6.

conclusions, with which he disagrees, to a plain interpretation of Isaiah 11:6–9:

In the context of the announcement of a new Davidic king (11:1–5), these verses proclaim a transformation in the natural, cosmic sphere. Natural enemies in the animal world will live together in peace, even changing their diets. On the one hand, as so frequently in the prophetic literature, the poem stresses the relationship between justice, mercy, peace, and harmony in the natural order (cf. also Hos 1:18 and Ezek 34:25). Who does not long for a world without fear and violence? But on the other hand, the lines suggest that the world may have been created good, even very good, but not quite good enough. The text presumes a negative evaluation of the world as it is, filled with predators and prey, violence and death. One message of the passage, to put it bluntly, is that there will come a time when the world will be made safe for domestic animals and for children.

It is a serious problem for the affirmation of a good creation. Such visions, wonderful as they are, when linked with the sense of a fallen humanity and an earth that is cursed, pave the way for the apocalyptic rejection of this world as it is. So, does creation need to be redeemed?⁴⁴

Notice Tucker's apparent agreement with dispensationalists over the original intention of Isaiah 11:1–5 (cf. Hos 1:18; Ezek 34:25). The thrust of the disagreement is not over what the text of Isaiah seems to say, but rather it is over whether or not one should accept the plain meaning. An underlying disagreement is that Tucker argues that the ground was not corrupted at the fall, but instead that humanity's relationship to nature became detached and ambiguous.⁴⁵ His article never offers a reconciliation of Isaiah 11 with his ecotheology, but seems to brush the issue under a rug.⁴⁶ This passage is troublesome for the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–9. His conclusion is based on a division of the text into a Priestly and a Yahwist source, which tends to be another point of contention with dispensationalism's high view of Scripture.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

ecojustice perspectives on the past (what happened at the fall), the present (the current state of nature), and the future (whether a curse will be reduced), but it fits perfectly within the dispensational framework of history.

The curse will be partially redacted in the days of the messianic kingdom such that natural enemies from the animal kingdom can dwell in peace. This promise is stated quite plainly in Isaiah 11 and elsewhere. The defense of responsible labor on the grounds of kingdom postponement is a particularly dispensational aspect of worldview, since other theologians spiritualize, allegorize, or mythologize the promises of a redacted curse.

The Kingdom Offer and the Divine Institutions of Marriage and Family

Trends in Critical Theology

Current trends in critical theology, specifically related to feminist liberation theology and queer theology undermine heterosexual complementarianism, which is a biblical restriction of gender, gender roles, and sexuality that serves as the basis of the divine institutions of marriage and family. The Christian versions of these trends will tend to read Jesus as establishing a spiritual kingdom of social justice on earth, which comes with a church age mandate for Christians to endorse that which the world deems as “social justice,” thereby leaving the church vulnerable to views that are in clear contradiction to the biblical text. Several of these systems collapse, however, if one starts with the presupposition that Jesus offered a literal kingdom that was rejected and that he therefore postponed the kingdom to a future day.

Modern evangelical liberation theologians tend to read Jesus as spiritualizing and inaugurating the kingdom, such that the church’s current mission is to do likewise. Often the liberation theologian’s starting point is similar to that of the dispensationalists. For example, the liberation theologian, David Gushee, recounts his work with Glen Stassen:

Kingdom hope intensified, we suggest, whenever real-world Jewish realities worsened. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 587–586 BC, the Exile, the loss of Jewish sovereignty under a succession of world powers, and, in the time of Jesus, the miseries and offenses of pagan Roman occupation, sharpened and even more deeply politicized Kingdom hope—which became the hope of Israel being delivered from foreign oppressors, and sometimes broadened to the hope of a world transformed. Kingdom hope was never otherworldly, though sometimes it sounds somewhat dreamy with lions and lambs lying down in peace together. It was certainly a social hope; a this-worldly hope; a Jewish hope. Its themes are entirely alien to the classical world of Greece and Rome.

It is this account of this particular species of apocalyptic, messianic, Jewish eschatology that we offered as the theological frame within which Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah of Israel and Lord of the Church and the world, offered his moral teachings.⁴⁷

It seems from this quotation that Gushee and Stassen recognize the plain description of the kingdom according to the OT prophets. The great divide occurs over their understanding of how Jesus used the Old Testament and what he did while he was on earth. Rather than seeing Jesus as offering to establish this literal kingdom, they see Jesus as redefining the prophetic tradition and making the kingdom of God into a current reality of social justice that carries over as a mandate for the church:

Through the exegetical work that Glen Stassen primarily undertook, we became convinced that Jesus drew most heavily for his version of ‘Kingdom of God’ on materials in Isaiah, especially the redemptive/restorationist themes of Isaiah 40–66. In choosing to anchor his preaching mainly in this part of Isaiah, Jesus was authentically connected to his Jewish roots but, perhaps like all prophets, selectively appropriated those aspects of the tradition that he wanted to highlight...

⁴⁷ David P. Gushee and Cori D. Norred, “The Kingdom of God, Hope and Christian Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2018): 5–6.

Stassen and I identified seven ‘marks’ of the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching, citing passages in the Synoptic Gospels that allude to, cite or parallel passages in Isaiah. These seven purported marks of the Kingdom are deliverance (salvation), justice, peace, healing, restoration of community, the experience of God’s active redeeming presence, and joyful human response....

To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ. This is also the primary task of the Christian Church.⁴⁸

Their evangelical liberation theology became manifest in gender issues, which resulted in their leaving their roles at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1996.⁴⁹

Gushee and Stassen recognize “a patriarchal strand [i.e., complementarianism] and an egalitarian strand in the New Testament, in Paul and beyond Paul,” but they write it off as a “deeply ingrained patriarchalism of the ancient world,” preferring that “egalitarianism certainly fits the characteristics of our own ethical method much more adequately.”⁵⁰ This fluid approach to biblical inerrancy is common in egalitarianism.⁵¹ Phyllis Trible is a feminist who writes more bluntly:

A feminist who loves the Bible produces, in the thinking of many, an oxymoron. Perhaps clever as rhetoric, the description offers no possibility for existential integrity. After all, if no man can serve

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 235.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 240.

⁵¹ See Carlos Montoya, “How Egalitarianism Attacks Inerrancy in the Latin American Church,” in *God’s Perfect Word: The Implications of Inerrancy for the Global Church*, edited by Mark Tatlock (Sun Valley, CA: The Master’s Academy International, 2015), 64–76.

two masters, no woman can serve two authorities, a master called scripture and a mistress called feminism.⁵²

The call to feminism is a call to abandon the objective meaning of the biblical text; indeed, the related doctrine of the social gospel typically rests on liberal theology, as Earl Radmacher explains,

The leading concept among leading liberal theologians was that the church is a spiritual society with the task of spreading the “social gospel,” which act paves the way for the coming kingdom.... Because of their blind optimism as to the essential goodness of man and his possibility of progress, they saw little need for the local churches, which simply impeded this progress by feverishly clinging to their ecclesiastical dogmas and traditions.⁵³

While the dispensationalist explains the church’s mandate in terms of evangelism and discipleship,⁵⁴ systems that advocate a liberation, a social gospel, or the like (whether they are liberal or conservative), typically blur the church’s vision into growing a spiritual kingdom on earth⁵⁵ through charitable works to usher in the eschaton.⁵⁶ This view is incompatible with dispensationalism for several reasons,⁵⁷ but one key reason is that dispensationalism

⁵² Phyllis Trible, quoted in Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 109.

⁵³ Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 92.

⁵⁴ Bret Nazworth, “God’s Grace in Missions, Evangelism, and Disciple-Making” in *Freely by His Grace: Classical Grace Theology*, edited by J. B. Hixon, Rick Whitmore, and Roy Zuck. (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel P, 2012), 553–80.

⁵⁵ The postmillennialist version of this is presented well in David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion P, 2007), 71.

⁵⁶ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 886–88.

⁵⁷ Thomas Ice was a Christian Reconstructionist who was a dispensationalist from 1974 to 1986. The system eventually collapsed as it

sees the kingdom as postponed as opposed to an inaugurated, growing spiritual reality.

Another hermeneutical key to feminist liberation philosophy is the worldview lens that sees the world as being run by patriarchy that oppresses women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza exemplifies this aspect of critical feminist liberation theology when she writes regarding the woman with the spirit of infirmity who was bent over in Luke 13:10–17, “Recognizing ourselves in the story of the wo/man bent double, we wo/men must identify ourselves *as wo/men* deformed and exploited by societal and ecclesiastical kyriarchy.”⁵⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza expounds further,

In short, a critical feminist the*logy of liberation names the*logically the kyriarchal bondage of wo/men in Western society and church. Kyriarchy inculcates and perpetrates not only sexism but also racism and property-class relationships as basic structures of wo/men’s oppression. In a kyriarchal society or religion all wo/men are bound into a system of male privilege and domination, but impoverished third-world wo/men constitute the bottom of the oppressive kyriarchal pyramid. Kyriarchy cannot be toppled except when the basis or bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid—which consists of the exploitation of multiply oppressed wo/men—becomes liberated.⁵⁹

We are socialized into gender roles as soon as we are born. Every culture gives different symbolic significance and derives different social roles from the human biological capacities of sexual intercourse, childbearing, and lactation. Sexual dimorphism and strictly defined gender roles are products of a kyriarchal culture, which maintain and legitimize structures of control and domination, that is, the exploitation of wo/men by men.⁶⁰

was too contradictory. His testimony is recommended and available in Thomas Ice and Hershel Wayne House, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), 7ff.

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 247.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

This lens depicts males negatively and raises the question of the reliability of a male Christ, and so a need arises for unique feminist christologies:

As the early proponents of feminist theology strove to understand the exclusion of women and women's experience in church practice and theological reflection, they were increasingly faced with the realization that it may be the very fabric of Christianity that caused the exclusion. Traditional belief held that Christ's incarnation and subsequent death and descent into hell were to enable the divine to experience all and therefore redeem all. If Christ could not experience being female, then the question arose as to whether the female state could be redeemed.⁶¹

Christian feminism often reframes the doctrine of Christ so that Christology becomes "a political practice, aiming not only at personal change, but also at structural change."⁶² The redirecting of attention to overthrowing the patriarchy distracts the feminist from the biblical teaching of redemption, as "redemption, then, within feminist Christology is about liberation. Therefore, it involves struggle against oppression as well as struggle for personal integrity and human freedom; it is about wholeness and transformation."⁶³

Feminist theologies quickly fall into christological fallacies, which are too numerous to list here, but several of the more liberal errors that are relevant to the current discussion can be boiled down to a Christology of embodiment in place of a metaphysical Christology. The notion, in so many words, is that since God became human, the Bible is not the best source of Christology, but rather people should turn to their own bodies to understand Christ. The feminist theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, has called the more Scriptural approach to Christology "the broken heart of patriarchy, as we have been encouraged to

⁶¹ Lisa Isherwood, "Feminist Christologies" in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, edited by Delbert Burkett (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 428.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 432.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

rip ourselves away from what is dear to us: feeling, the earth, others, ourselves.”⁶⁴ The result is a Christology that associates Christ with “erotic power.” Lisa Isherwood is another feminist christologist who summarizes this school of thought:

Carter Heyward and Rita Brock are two feminist theologians associated with the notion of Christ as erotic power. Brock believes that when speaking of Jesus as powerful, we have to be quite clear about what type of power we are speaking of, and for her it is erotic power. This understanding leaves us in no doubt about where the source of this power lies. It is not an abstract concept but is deeply embedded in our very being and is part of our nature, residing there as our innate desire to relate with each other, not just for the benefit of the individual self, but for the justice and growth of the whole cosmos. This kind of power is wild and cannot be controlled, and living at this level saves us from sterility that comes from living by the head alone. Christianity has always encouraged *agape*, a type of love that Brock sees as heady and objective and therefore not as something that will change the world. *Eros* on the other hand will engage us and so can change the world. Brock is convinced that erotic power redeems both the world and Christ.⁶⁵

This is the root of feminist and queer theological understandings of God, but the topic at hand is eschatology and specifically how kingdom postponement protects dispensational congregants. Voelkel recognizes her theology’s dependence on an already/not yet view of the kingdom:

Any constructive theological project that takes seriously women’s and genderqueer people’s bodies and sexualities is deeply eschatological. That is to say, the vision of how and what the world ought to be and how and what God’s future holds forms the basis and inspiration for much of liberated, feminist, queered embodiment. Especially in a colonized context, an eschatological

⁶⁴ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), cited in Lisa Isherwood, “Feminist Christologies,” 435.

⁶⁵ Isherwood, “Feminist Christologies,” 435.

vision is necessary to discern what liberation, decolonization, and hope might look like.

... Eschatology has traditionally been focused on the “last things.” But many Christians recognize that eschatology is more properly about the promised reign of God in all human experience and in all creation. It has powerful implications for both the individual and the community. Eschatology is not primarily concerned with what lies beyond death and outside of history. Eschatology is a practical and vital hope for the world as it is right now and in which we are all participating.

This “here and now” eschatology fits well with a liberation, feminist, and queer understanding of eschatology. It roots our Christian hope in what God is doing to create a more just and liberated world. Nevertheless, precisely because justice is a major part of what we are hoping for, a sense of the timing and pacing of the eschaton is key.

Here, I am aligning myself with a tradition that celebrates an inaugurated eschatology as contrasted with a “realized” or “sapiential” eschatology on the one hand and “futuristic” or “apocalyptic” eschatology on the other.⁶⁶

Several liberation and queer theologians would disagree with Voelkel’s future kingdom, but the future aspect of her eschatology does not conflict with her main contention. Rather, she seems to be demonstrating that it is the “already” aspect of the kingdom that her queer theology depends on, so allowing for a future kingdom does not contradict liberation theology so long as there is still a current spiritual kingdom to rely upon.⁶⁷ Postponement theology rejects this foundational aspect of Voelkel’s system.

Another way to view Queer Theology and Feminist Theology is to see them as the theological sides of Queer Theory and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 79–80.

⁶⁷ Social gospel sentiments have also infiltrated progressive dispensationalism, which has a similar already/not yet approach to the kingdom. See the discussion on progressive dispensationalism and related issues in Andrew Woods, *The Coming Kingdom* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel P), 345–47.

Feminist Theory, which in turn are fields of Critical Theory.⁶⁸ Modern Critical Theory is inseparable from “intersectionality,” which is a term that Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined in 1989 to address legal challenges for Black women,⁶⁹ but has since proven to be a constant work-in-progress, a global academic movement to identify and engulf new critical groups.⁷⁰ The queer theologian Chris Greenough illustrates,

Intersectionality shows how systems of oppression and discrimination are multiple. The most marginalised people, therefore, fall under multiple minority groups. Writings from feminist and womanist thinkers were critical in the development of thinking (contesting categories of identity and exploring issues of marginalisation) which later came to characterise queer theory.⁷¹

Critical Race Theory is another discipline of Critical Theory, which one would imagine is separate from Queer Theology and Feminist Theology, but since they are under the umbrella of Critical Theory, they are intertwined through intersectionality. Another queer theologian has observed “that questions of sex and questions of race are always inextricably related.”⁷²

Racism is sin. It is anti-biblical as are the aberrant views of gender roles and sexuality that Queer Theory and Feminist Theory promote, but queer and feminist theologies have managed

⁶⁸ Chris Greenough traces the development of queer theology from its roots in liberation theology to feminist theology to queer theology, which is the inevitable result of what came previously. See Chris Greenough, *Queer Theologies* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 8–32.

⁶⁹ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–67.

⁷⁰ For a history of significant developments through 2013, see Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, Barbara Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory,” *Du Bois Review* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013), 405–24.

⁷¹ Greenough, *Queer Theologies*, 24.

⁷² Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 104.

to infiltrate mainstream Christianity in recent years through their attachment to Black theology. As one “African American queer lesbian womanist scholar” puts it, “The disenfranchisement of women intersects with the disenfranchisement of Black men, of poor people, etc.; the disenfranchisement of Black lesbian women intersects with the disenfranchisement of transgender women, and so on.”⁷³ Well-intended evangelicals have become entangled with some views that undermine the divine institutions of marriage and family by accepting certain fronts of anti-racism that are accompanied by critical theology.⁷⁴

The hashtag #blacklivesmatter emerged in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, and a movement grew, which led to the establishment of Black Lives Matter Global Network

⁷³ Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), xx.

⁷⁴ Similarities that predate Crenshaw’s intersectionality can be seen in the example of Martin Luther King Jr., who did much good for America, but whose low view of Scripture led to a rejection of the divine sonship of Jesus, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection and therefore a spiritualization of the second coming of Christ, the day of judgment, immortality, and the kingdom of God. King’s theology has gone essentially unnoticed by evangelicals, who rightfully praise the good that he did, but fail to examine the underlying presuppositions. King is rightly declared a heretic, yet he is hailed as an icon of Christian social justice by atheists and Christians alike.

For an example of King’s low view of Scripture, see Martin Luther King Jr. “Light on the Old Testament from the Ancient Near East” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951*, edited by Clayborne Carson, Ralph Luker, and Penny A. Russell (Los Angeles: University of California at Berkeley P, 1992), 162–80.

For King’s rejection of the divine sonship of Jesus, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection, see Martin Luther King Jr. “What Experiences of Christians Living in the Early Christian Century Led to the Christian Doctrines of the Divine Sonship of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, and the Bodily Resurrection” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I*, 225–30.

For King’s spiritualization of the second coming of Christ, the day of judgment, immortality, and the kingdom of God, see Martin Luther King Jr. “The Christian Pertinence of Eschatological Hope” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I*, 268–73.

(BLM) to serve as a loose network of activists in the Black Lives Matter movement.⁷⁵ It has been estimated that “about half of the United States’ Protestant clergy (both Black and White) were engaged by BLM, sensing its possibility for racial justice,”⁷⁶ so it seems that BLM perspectives could be integrating into a significant portion of the American Protestant worldview. At first, this may sound like good news for dispensationalists, who want to reach people of all races, but BLM actually promotes a worldview that undermines the divine institutions of marriage and family.

The BLM website featured a “What We Believe” page, which has since been withdrawn, though the original version is archived on the University of Central Arkansas website.⁷⁷ This statement put BLM’s intentions in clear terms and is worth resurfacing here since there has been no indication that BLM has changed views. The statement includes,

We see ourselves as part of the global Black family, and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black people who exist in different parts of the world.

We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location.

We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead.

We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence....

⁷⁵ Adam Szetela, “Black Lives Matter at Five: Limits and Possibilities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no.8 (2020): 1358–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1638955>

⁷⁶ Melissa M. Matthes, *When Sorrow Comes: The Power of Sermons from Pearl Harbor to Black Lives Matter* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2021), 312.

⁷⁷ Available online at <https://uca.edu/training/files/2020/09/black-Lives-Matter-Handout.pdf>, accessed August 17, 2021.

We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.

We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise)

We embody and practice justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another.⁷⁸

Of particular interest to this discussion is the explicit assault on the divine institutions of marriage and family. All spiritually healthy Christians want to help trans people—though there is disagreement over methodology. A difference with BLM is on the treatment of those who are cisgender; in addition to uplifting black trans folk, whatever that means, BLM specifically wants to dismantle cisgender privilege. In the BLM worldview, it is preferable to be queer rather than heterosexual, and families should be blurred into wider villages.

The Black Lives Matters movement does not claim to be Christian, though Christians are accepting the cause and ideology. Cru is a large Evangelical parachurch organization that is generally reflective of the state of Evangelicalism. Cru has been drifting into Critical Theory for several years now, and the events of 2020 increased the tensions within the organization, thus prompting several staff members to write a 174-page document entitled, *Seeking Clarity and Unity*⁷⁹ in November 2020. The document circulated internally before being released to the public in May 2021. Cru has since then withdrawn the document from its website.⁸⁰ While, according to the document,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Scott Pendleton et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity*, Report, November 6, 2020 (Cru, 2020), <https://languageandreligion.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/seeking-clarity-and-unity.pdf>.

⁸⁰ In the *Christianity Today* article, “Cru Divided Over Emphasis on Race,” Curtis Yee gives the history of the document and links to a page on

Critical Race Theory is the bulk of the concern within Cru, it is inseparable from Queer Theory, which involves topics that are recurring in the document as well.⁸¹ As circles within Cru accept the BLM agenda,⁸² one is left wondering if this Evangelical mega-organization is now, in accordance with BLM's purpose, trying to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure."

Perhaps a more consistent example of a critical theology movement that claims to be Christian is the Red Letter Christian movement. The movement's co-founder, Tony Campolo, describes the term:

By calling ourselves Red Letter Christians, we are alluding to those old versions of the Bible wherein the words of Jesus are printed in red. In adopting the name, we are saying that we are committed to living out the things that Jesus taught.⁸³

Campolo believes the entire Bible to be inspired, but sees a contrast rather than continuity throughout, as "those black letters that make up the words of the Old Testament are the record of those mighty acts in which we see God revealed," whereas in "the red letters of the Gospels, Jesus spells out for us specific directives for how his followers should relate to others and what sacrifices are required of them if they are to be citizens of his kingdom."⁸⁴ Since Jesus spoke much about the kingdom, and since Red Letter Christians understand Jesus' words as

the Cru website that is not functional, presumably because the document has been withdrawn. It is still available online elsewhere. See Curtis Yee, "Cru Divided Over Emphasis on Race," *Christianity Today*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/june/cru-divided-over-emphasis-on-race.html>.

⁸¹ Pendleton et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity* (Cru, 2020), 4, 12, 24, 35, 40, 45, 47, 50, 56, 59, 73, 74, 75, 92, 93, 95, 97, 98, 101, 103, 104, 110, 122.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4, 6, 9, 29, 40, 41.

⁸³ Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians* (Grand Rapids: Regal Books, 2008), 20–21.

⁸⁴ Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 8.

commanding the church to advocate social justice, it comes as no surprise that much of the Red Letter justice agenda is inseparable from a kingdom-now eschatology.

On the surface, it may seem that Red Letter Christians have a high regard for Jesus and the Bible, but the Red Letter Christians website is more telling. The website has a blog with categories such as Creation & Environment, Interfaith, Race, Women, and LGBTQ+, each featuring blog posts from their perspective, which has plenty of examples of critical theologians appealing to non-biblical and even anti-biblical sources⁸⁵ and cherry-picking⁸⁶ the biblical evidence when they do use the Bible. Red Letter Christians redefine Christ's kingdom teaching into a current spiritual kingdom of social justice as is apparent in the "Red Letter Christian Pledge," which is as follows:

I dedicate my life to Jesus, and commit to live as if Jesus meant the things he said in the "red letters" of Scripture.

I will allow Jesus and his teaching to shape my decisions and priorities.

⁸⁵ For example, a blog post from the Red Letter Christians website includes the following: "As recently as 2013, you could catch me making Christian apologetic arguments against same-sex marriage. But the more I've consumed content by artists like Lil Nas X, the more I realize the church and some of the puritanical standards I parroted end up creating a special kind of hell on earth for those on the receiving end of that condemnation. And for that I am sorry." See Mark Bauer, "What Lil Nas X is Telling Us About the Hell We Create," *Red Letter Christians*, April 7, 2021, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/what-lil-nas-x-is-telling-us-about-the-hell-we-create/>.

⁸⁶ For example, another blog post on the Red Letter Christians website has "... where is our sexual ethic to be found? In Biblical principle, not precedent. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor and to do to others what we want done to us. Is cheating on my partner wrong? Yes, because it is not how I would wish to be treated, and it is not loving toward my partner. It has nothing to do with my or my potential bedmate's genitals." See Hugh Hollowell, "Open and Affirming Because of the Bible," *Red Letter Christians*, November 30, 2011, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/open-and-affirming-because-of-the-bible/>.

I denounce belief-only Christianity and refuse to allow my faith to be a ticket into heaven and an excuse to ignore the suffering world around me.

I will seek first the Kingdom of God—on earth as it is in heaven—and live in a way that moves the world towards God’s dream, where the first are last and the last are first, where the poor are blessed and the peacemakers are the children of God, working towards a society where all are treated equally and resources shared equitably.

I recognize that I will fall short in my attempts to follow Jesus, and I trust in God’s grace and the community to catch me when I do.

I know that I cannot do this alone, so I commit to share this journey with others who are walking in the way of Jesus. I will surround myself with people who remind me of Jesus, help me become more like him and hold me accountable for my actions and words.

I will share Jesus with the world, with my words and with my deeds. Like Jesus, I will interrupt injustice, and stand up for the life and dignity of all. I will allow my life to point towards Christ, everywhere I go.⁸⁷

There are several points of contention between the Red Letter Christians Movement and orthodox Christianity, but to the extent that Red Letter Christians try to apply the Bible, they do so from a position that cannot endure being separated from a kingdom-now perspective.

The divine institutions of marriage and family have been under attack since Genesis. Current threats within Christendom to God’s plan for these institutions are found in critical theology, which combines feminist theology, queer theology, and other critical theology agendas that seem at first to have good intentions. These intentions may be attractive to well-meaning Christians, especially on the topic of racism, but Critical Theory has a way of combining these issues in an anti-biblical manner. The dispensationalist sees Jesus as offering to establish a literal kingdom on earth, but theologians who hold to liberal critical theologies will typically see Jesus as building a spiritual kingdom

⁸⁷ “Red Letter Christian Pledge,” *Red Letter Christians*, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/pledge/>.

of social justice, which is a work that continues today through a mandate to build a social justice spiritual kingdom now. On the grounds of postponement theology, dispensationalists have a unique aspect to protect their worldview from current trends in critical theology.

Dispensationalist Response

Dispensationalists are not the only ones who see problems in liberal critical theologies and theories. In her critique of Christian feminism, Mary A. Kassian does well to summarize a key presupposition to the feminist hermeneutic:

Biblical feminists have as a basic premise the idea that truth is relative; there is no absolute right or wrong and no ultimate standard. According to Biblical feminists, even the truth in the Bible is subject to alteration. This attitude is well-disguised; however, if one examines Biblical feminist literature closely, one can find numerous examples of it.⁸⁸

Conservative Christians agree that the Bible has objective meaning. They may disagree with each other, and perhaps even contradict themselves on certain issues, but they recognize that the relativism of feminism is not biblically sustainable.

Anyone with internet access should be able to tell that wherever Judeo-Christian worldviews thrive, so do women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, accuses the complementarian view of marriage of being a Western kyriarchy that is based on paganism, not Christianity,⁸⁹ insisting that women are “deformed and exploited by societal and ecclesiastical kyriarchy.”⁹⁰ While conservatives recognize that there is exploitation within churches, such activity is contrary to conservative biblicism, not because of it. MacArthur and Mayhue summarize the biblical position well:

⁸⁸ Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 147.

⁸⁹ Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons*, 248–49.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

The teaching in 1 Timothy 2 shows that women in the church are not permitted to hold the office of a pastor or teacher (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). However, this would not preclude a woman from teaching in other appropriate contexts, such as teaching other women (Titus 2:3–4) or teaching children (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15). The Bible clearly indicates that women are spiritual equals with men and that the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ. Nonetheless, by God’s design, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.⁹¹

Accusations that complementarianism is a paganistic kyriarchy that needs to be overthrown simply fail to represent the position.

Moreover, any conservative Christian should be grieved by the plight of racism in America, including White on Black racist attitudes and actions. Dismantling Black American families will not make the situation better, so any Christian who is willing to defend the divine institution of family should be ready to stand against Black Lives Matter for their anti-family agenda.

Christian attacks on the institution of marriage even include accusations that Jesus was gay.⁹² Postponement theology comes from a holistic reading of the Bible, which recognizes homosexual behavior as a sin that extends beyond Jewish taboo as it is a corruption of God’s intention for marriage that carries through the dispensations, but by no means does it take a postponement theologian to recognize this sinful behavior.

Accusations of Western kyriarchy, attempts to destroy black families, theories that Jesus was gay, etc.: these are all false teachings from the more liberal critical theologians, but this is not to say that every flaw in critical theology is easily identifiable. Regarding transgender people, Gushee and Stassen write,

⁹¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 764.

⁹² See, for example, Theodore W. Jennings Jr., “The ‘Gay’ Jesus” in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, edited by Delbert Burkett (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 443–57; E. L. Kornegay Jr., *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin’s Blues Project and Gospel Prose* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 114–18.

Transgender people need to be recipients of Christ's delivering, compassionate love and need to be offered welcome in community. They need justice and an end to domination violence, economic discrimination, and exclusion from community. They need to be treated as sacred persons in God's sight.⁹³

A conservative Christian may like to agree with the *words* of this statement, but the *underlying sentiment* is corrupted. Nobody in the discussion wants the transgendered to face violence, economic hardship, or exclusion from society, but the first and greatest need that all people have—queer and cisgender alike—is the gospel of salvation. Hopefully, Gushee and Stassen would agree. Hopefully, they would also agree that sacred persons in God's sight should conform to his vision for them. The disagreement is not over whether or not people should love transgender people, but rather the argument is over what God wants for them. Those who defend the divine institutions of marriage and family have a different understanding of God's intentions from those who do not.

These and many other points of contention with critical theology are readily available to any conservative Christian, but the dispensationalist has a framework of kingdom postponement that he can draw from for additional defenses against these threats to marriage and family. Jesus' earthly ministry is source material for much of the social justice reading of Scripture. To recount Gushee's earlier comment, "To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ." The Red Letter Pledge includes, "Like Jesus, I will interrupt injustice, and stand up for the life and dignity of all." The Bible says that Jesus performed miracles and unfortunate people benefitted. The social justice reading seems to indicate that Jesus' healing ministry was a "justice-making" ministry with the purposes to "interrupt injustice." The kingdom postponement reading has that Jesus, like other prophets, used miracles to support the authenticity of

⁹³ Gushee and Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, 250.

his claims, with one of these claims being the authentic offer of a literal, earthly, messianic kingdom.

For example, Matthew 9:1–8 records an instance of Jesus healing a paralytic wherein Jesus stated his purpose for the miracle. He did not heal the man for the man's sake. Some scribes were present who accused Jesus of blasphemy (Matt 9:3), so he healed the man, telling the scribes, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sin" (v. 6). The paralytic certainly benefitted, but the miracle was to verify the Messiah for the scribes' sake. From there, Jesus went to Matthew's house, where he dined with the tax collectors (vv. 9–13), and this was a stumbling block for the Pharisees who ultimately rejected Christ. Likewise, it should be a stumbling block for the Red Letter Christians, as their worldview, if applied consistently, should have them side with the Pharisees in this situation, after all, the tax collectors were the first-century bourgeoisie who oppressed the proletariats (cf. Luke 3:12–13).

Jesus did send out his disciples to perform miracles, but that does not mean that this particular sending carries over to the church. The sending of the twelve in Matthew 10 came with the message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 10:7). The dispensationalist Stanley Toussaint comments, "To authenticate their message concerning the nearness of the kingdom, the Lord gave them power to perform signs. These miracles were not to be used merely to instill awe, but to show that the kingdom was at hand (Matt 12:28)."⁹⁴

After Israel's utter rejection of the Messiah and messianic kingdom at the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (12:22–50), Jesus revealed that there would be an interval before the coming tribulation and subsequent kingdom. Even after the shift, Jesus' ministry remained focused on Israel. Matthew 15:21–28 tells of a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus for a miracle, but Jesus initially refused because this was not his mission, but when she recognizes her separation from Jesus' initial ministry, he does help her. Stanley Toussaint comments,

⁹⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1981), 139.

When she comes to Him as a Gentile outside the pale of Jewish blessings, she is helped. She sees that she has no right to their blessings, but turns to Him in faith alone. On the basis of her great faith, not because of her relationship to the covenant people, her request is granted.

In this miracle of mercy there is a clear foreview of Gentile blessing which fits the pattern established in Matthew 1:1 and Romans 15:8–9. The actions of Christ show that He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God for confirmation of the promises made unto the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.⁹⁵

Jesus loves Gentiles, but the notion that Jesus came and established a kingdom of justice on earth simply fails to recognize the entire narrative. The messianic kingdom will be of a thoroughly Jewish nature,⁹⁶ and Jesus offered it to the Jews. When God's attention shifted to the Gentiles during the postponement's resulting interim, the use of miracles went through a shift as well. Miracles initially confirmed the dispensational shift to the church age and the human agents that God selected for ministering the transition. Once the shift was accomplished, God withdrew the miraculous gifts, as is evidenced by Paul leaving Epaphroditus and Trophimus sick (Phil 2:25–27; 2 Tim 4:20) and Paul's and James's instruction for Christians to resort to medicine rather than miraculous healing (1 Tim 5:23; Jas 5:10–15).⁹⁷ If the insistence on social justice comes from Christ's kingdom offer and postponement, then it would follow that social justice should have ceased when the miracles ceased.

As noted, Rebecca Voelkel holds to inaugurated eschatology with a future kingdom. This is a fitting framework for her queer

⁹⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁹⁶ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, rev. ed. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 403–84.

⁹⁷ For an excellent treatment of this topic from a dispensational perspective, see Moses Onwubiko, *Signs and Wonders: A Biblical Reply to the Claims of Modern Day Miracle Workers* (Nashville: Grace Evangelistic Ministries, 2009), 60–61, 74.

liberation theology. What is particularly interesting is that she utilizes kingdom offer language in reference to Jesus' preaching, but unfortunately her version of the offer skews the kingdom. She writes of Christ's ministry that the "kin-dom is already 'on offer' for anyone who is willing to accept it (Luke 19:11–27)."⁹⁸ Rather than seeing Jesus offer a national kingdom to national Israel, she sees Jesus as redefining the kingdom into a present spiritual reality for individuals who accept it. This difference brings vastly different results; while the dispensationalist has evangelism and discipleship on his agenda, Voelkel's current task is to build a movement of lovers who are "guided by an embodied and sexual eschatological vision of liberation and decolonization ... practicing revolutionary patience even as they are prepared for and awaiting the inbreaking of the kin-dom."⁹⁹ To accept postponement theology is to reject the very foundations of critical theology.

As a final word on the matter, it is worth mentioning that dispensationalism's most famous doctrine, the pretribulation rapture, is frequently critiqued for distracting Christians from social justice. One critic writes, "This doctrine [the rapture], when combined with dispensational theology, had much to do with the 'great reversal' of evangelicals from their earlier commitments to civil rights and equality."¹⁰⁰ In reality, the direct opposite is true. The imminent rapture is a source of urgency for the dispensationalist.¹⁰¹ The same critic disregards dispensationalist soteriology since "their teaching specifically states that eternal security is reserved solely for those who have been saved from their sins through the atoning blood of Jesus

⁹⁸ Rebecca M. M. Voelkel, *Carnal Knowledge of God: Embodied Love and the Movement for Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 79–81.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131–32.

¹⁰⁰ L. B. Gallien Jr., "American Evangelicalism's Struggle Over Civil Rights" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, edited by Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 526.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on this and other benefits of understanding the rapture, see Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House), 3–21.

Christ, God's Son—his provision for their sins.”¹⁰² The stakes are high. Perhaps there is a degree of temporal comfort in conforming to the world, but the message of salvation offers a comfort that is far beyond any discomfort in this life. By no means does a person need to be a dispensationalist to believe in Christ alone for eternal life, but the doctrine of kingdom postponement, especially when combined with the imminent rapture, has done far more good for promoting the salvific Gospel than any movements for the social gospel ever could.

Conclusion

This article has discussed three divine institutions which are apparent in the garden of Eden: responsible labor, marriage, and family. These institutions are foundational to any decent society, but they are under attack from worldly ideologies that are infiltrating Christendom. It does not take a dispensationalist to defend the divine institutions, but there are uniquely dispensational responses that are available through the doctrine of kingdom postponement. Christian forms of errant ecotheology and social justice are constantly evolving and updating, so a reactive approach to the doctrines will prove to be a tedious task in the years to come. However, these errors are usually built on frameworks of kingdom-now theology, so the dispensationalist can construct a proactive defense against institutional compromises by being well versed in postponement theology, both through an appreciation of OT descriptions of the kingdom, as well as through an understanding of Christ's ministry of the kingdom offer and postponement.

¹⁰² Gallien Jr., “American Evangelicalism's Struggle Over Civil Rights,” 526.