

UR714 Leadership Development in the Urban Church

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Biblical Theology of Justice

God cares for justice and calls the church to be a voice for the voiceless by speaking the truth and advocating for those who are disenfranchised. The Bible provides examples of God's people continually being called to advocate for justice and stand up for the oppressed in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly commands His people to care for the vulnerable, such as the poor, widows, and orphans, and to seek justice for all the marginalized.

"Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows." (Isaiah 1:17). "This is what the Lord says: 'Be fair-minded and just do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering the innocent!'"

(Jeremiah 22:3) "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

(Amos 5:24) God demonstrated in the Old Testament when He removed evil rulers from power and used humans to stand up in protest to them. For example, the Hebrew midwives who would save the baby boys (Exodus 1:15-21) in protest to the King of Egypt's command to kill every boy born or Daniel who continued to pray at the window despite the King's proclamation to pray to no one else but him (Daniel 6:10), or the three Hebrew boys and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3, where they refused to bow down to the King's idol and were thrown into the fiery furnace where God protected them. King Nebuchadnezzar had a turning point in the book of Daniel and testified of how God humbled him and transformed his life (Daniel 4). In the New Testament, Jesus's compassion models leadership to social justice and challenges his time's religious and political authorities. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

(Luke 4:18–19) The Apostle Paul and John the Baptist challenged the social structures of his time by advocating for those abused by those in power, calling out those who should be good stewards of their authority and not act like the creator themselves. In contemporary times, God used important figures like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King to confront injustice. Dr. King's approach was too on challenging the systems, not just specific individuals. In his address on November 16, 1961, Dr. King said, "One seeks to defeat the unjust system, rather than individuals who are caught in that system. And that one goes on believing that somehow this is the important thing, to get rid of the corrupt system and not the individual who happens to be misguided, who happens to be misled, who has been taught wrong. The thing to do is to get rid of the system and thereby create a moral balance within society." (King, 47) He further asserts his case in one of his public addresses, "Our God Is Marching On," given on March 25, 1965, he encourages the masses in non-violence. "Let us march on ballot boxes, until we send to our city councils, state legislatures, and the United States Congressmen who will not fear to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. Let us march on the earth in decency and honor. For all of us today, the bottle is in our hands. The road ahead is not altogether a smooth one. There are no broad highways to lead us easily and inevitably to quick solutions. We must keep going... We will go on with the faith that non-violence and its power transformed dark yesterday into bright tomorrows. We will be able to change all of these conditions." (King, 229)

This is the role of the church in social movements, "no, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) We are to be change agents of this world, bringing about God's kingdom on earth. Jesus teaches us, "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as

worthless. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:13–16). The church is responsible for using its collective voice and resources to advocate for the marginalized, challenge oppressive systems, and work towards a more just and equitable society. During our trip on the Sankofa Journey, we watched teaching from Dr. Michael Emerson at a conference hosted by the Evangelical Covenant Church. In Dr. Emerson's presentation, he argued that there is a religion different from Christianity, and this religion is worshipping whiteness. He used national online surveys and collected data to help define what a practicing Christian versus a person who idolizes the white race and nationalism is. Our call from God is to pursue social justice. The biblical mandate to seek justice and love our neighbors compels us to engage with our communities issues and strive to make a positive difference in the world. When we don't love God, love our neighbor, and choose to idolize power and ourselves, it becomes an evil recipe for disaster. It is important to know what the heart of the Father is. It is evil to operate from a place to pride and power as if you have dominion over other human beings. God has called us to be good stewards of what He has blessed us with, and there has been great abuse of power where whites created a caste system to exert power over any black or brown person. Although Gandhi, a non-Christian, inspired Dr. King's non-violence resistance, the non-violent approach is biblical. "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4) "God

blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9) In the pre-work of our Sankofa trip, an important question came up about the church's role in integrating joy. The church plays a critical role in curating spaces for integrated joy. We need community and one another's hope and song. It's important we don't "leave at the door" our suffering and pain but bring it to the altar. Bring the pain and suffering in the community and in communion with joy. There is strength when sharing one's despair. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:3-5 "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Death is not the final word. The choice to not be strangled by despair and the illusion of not wanting to live anymore. Jesus conquered death and gives us the hope of everlasting life.

Sociological Analysis of the Civil Rights Movement

Our Sankofa trip took us through a necessary journey from the transatlantic slave era to the current generation of mass incarceration. The abuse of power, racism, and injustice have shown their ugly heads in every period, but with a different mask on. Each museum and documentary shared was informative and moving while the real-life testimonies of those who part of the Civil Rights Movements will forever be engraved in my memories. At the end of the Civil War, the United States constitution added the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and abolishing slavery, granting citizenship to African Americans, and granting voter rights, but to no avail as African Americans still were subject to discrimination, segregation, and violence. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded on

February 12, 1909, by Du Bois, Ida B Wells, and Mary Church Terrell. It was considered the most widely recognized civil rights organization. The Civil Rights Movement launched in the 1950s as a political and social movement that fought for equal rights for African Americans through non-violent protests, by the means of sit-ins, boycotts, and marches. Hearing the testimonies of J.T. Johnson and Lula Joe Williams taught us how there were trainings on workshops each person had to go through in order to participate in the marches or boycotts. One of the most significant boycotts during this era was in December 1955 that lasted over a year, that led to the desegregation of the Montgomery bus system, after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person. Another important event that took to national news was the death of Emmett Till that ignited a fire for the Civil Rights Movement. In 1963, the March on Washington, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, that outlawed Jim Crow laws that discriminated against blacks with public accommodations and protected the right to vote for African Americans. Even with all of these successful legal wins, racism or inequality in the United States did not end. To this day, blacks and browns continue to face discrimination and red lining in areas such as employment, housing, and criminal justice. Police brutality has been at an all-time high, and with technology it has really sparked nationwide outrage. As a nation we are able to witness several high-profile cases of unarmed African Americans tragically killed by police officers and no justice or action taken on behalf of the deceased, which then sparked protests and calls for change. The fight for equality and justice is ongoing. While crucial individuals in the Civil Rights Movement made progress, much work must be done to ensure everyone was treated fairly and respectfully regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., deeply rooted in his Christian faith and drew inspiration from Ghandi and the biblical teachings of justice and equality was a powerful example of the church's role in social movements. He saw the struggle for civil rights as a moral imperative rooted in the belief that all people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The unfortunate reality of the Civil Rights Movement was a response to the experience of injustice faced by blacks and browns in America. We as a church has a responsibility to continue the work of the Civil Rights Movement, advocating for the rights and dignity of all people and working towards a more just and equality for all by addressing issues such as police brutality, mass incarceration, economic inequality, and discrimination in all its ugly masks. The church must engage in racial reconciliation by acknowledging the harm done by racism and working towards the hard work of healing and restoration. Ultimately, the church's role in this ongoing social movement is rooted in the imago dei that our belief is that all people are created in God's image and worthy of dignity, respect, and justice. We are charged to love our neighbors and the church has a responsibility to speak out against the injustice, advocate for the oppressed, while working towards a more loving, just, and equal society.

Application

Our identity must be aligned with Jesus' heart. We are so diverse yet all co-heirs of Christ together not in hierarchy but equal in love. Jesus's blood penetrates past cultural boundaries and tribes and when we are in alignment with Jesus, we must become anti-racist. I think it's my duty to push back and resist racism, whether systemic or passive aggression. My job is to advocate and speak out, not observe and "keep the peace." Disrupt the idolatry of racism with action and break the tension of complacency and hatred through the promotion of peace. The organization

and thoughtfulness of the Civil Rights Movements inspires me. The importance of representation at the national level. advocacy

Another area I realized I need to apply in my life is to be educated in our history and what is happening now. During this course I learned the definition of Critical Race Theory as, "a legal movement aimed at understanding, resisting, and remediating how US law and legal institutions such as law schools have fostered and perpetuated racism and white supremacy." Then branched into different disciplines as CRT impacts social norms and regulations. I'm fully aware of the history of Christianity, the formation of white supremacy, the history of the United States, and the laws still in place today that are blatantly racist. This was not surprising or new to me. I think with how everyone's opinion tries to carry as fact, it's helpful to have a scholar use the constitution and scholarly historical facts to help shape and form our understanding of racism and the church's involvement. It's helpful to have an affirmation of my context and experience. In the pre-course work, I loved learning of Dr. Cartagena's background and his wrestle with being Puerto Rican and American. I strongly believe that if you can name it, it helps move us to heal and reconciliation. I loved Dr. Cartagena's charge for both/and preaching Jesus and social justice. I was inspired by I didn't know Ida was the first black woman to run for public office in the United States and also one of the founding members of the NAACP. It's a shame because she brought light to the lynching and the unfair treatment of blacks in her time. It was wise that many took her advice in The Free Speech and either left town or boycotted white-owned businesses known for terrorizing with lynching. There are people in power who liked things the way they are, so of course they wouldn't bring light to this trailblazer who confronted racism with her pen and actions.

Before the pre-course work, I had yet to hear of Gwendolyn Simmons, Diane Nash, Mildred Roxborough, Doris Derby, or Ruby Sales. I only knew of the reference to Rosa Parks in the final segment of the reading. It's unfortunate because as much as I knew a lot of my history, patriarchy and misogyny ruled then and still to this day which dictates the sources I read. Women are a force and I appreciate Ruby Sales saying, "If it had just been merely a protest about riding the bus, it might have shattered.

But it went to the very heart of black womanhood, and black women played a major role in sustaining that movement." Women are intelligent and a force to be reckoned with, there is tenacity, and we speak up when there is an issue. When women band together there's a level of authority and certain things men wish they could get away with and they can't. I believe many church denominations that only allow men in leadership have serious cases of sexual abuse because a band of women is not at the table advocating for the victims. There's a "mama bear" spirit, whether a woman is a mother or not, that always rises and protects.

All in all, I am heartbroken and angry about our nation's history. It took me a while to process and be able to articulate my feelings. All I can say is that I am heartbroken and angry. I agree with Dr. Cone. I believe the church can engage in such conversation as he mentioned the way Dr. King approaches the conversation. He correlates the lynching with the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'" (Luke 23:34). It really takes a deep-rooted peace to be able to forgive all that has and continues to be done to all black and brown persons. Honestly, there needs to be a conversation with all races alike with one goal of awareness, acknowledgment, and reconciliation. We need community and hope to be able to support such conversation. In my own area of influence, I plan to continue to speak out and correct misinterpreted scripture. Dig deeper into the word for these

problem areas that have been misconstrued and misrepresented to justify racism and discrimination. There is real hurt at the hands of "Christians", and I want to help reconcile what has been perceived and what is God really telling us. I need to lower my expectations of others when they are racist and abuse their power. I have the agency to vote and advocate for those marginalized and disenfranchised at the same time must trust God's divine timing and that this is His battle. Taking the time to reflect on how I can partner with God in what He is doing in the context and arena I am in. Whether it's soul care, racial reconciliation, speaking up and correcting those who are taking advantage of others. We are called to be good stewards of what we have been given, that goes for me as well in my area of influence.