

THE EVANGELICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT UPON ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction

The Social Justice movement is changing the character and nature of evangelicalism. In fact, if current trends continue, evangelicalism will likely be unrecognizable within a decade. Sadly, it is now no longer uncommon to attend services and ceremonies held by once Bible-believing institutions where the focus is placed upon victimology and changing exploitative structures of society rather than upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone can liberate the soul from the bondage of sin and an eternity separated from God (Rom. 1:16-17). It has now become common to attend graduation ceremonies and missional events featuring virtually every flag of every nation of the world, except the American flag, since its very presence is synonymous with oppression. Christian young people today frequently articulate as their life's purpose, their ambition to "conquer the land" for Christ, defined in terms of rectifying racial or economic injustice, rather than of winning souls from an eternal hell and for the coming kingdom.

Consequently, as explained by Mary Danielsen, given its comprehensive impact on the Christian worldview, the Social Justice movement is something that all followers of Jesus Christ need to understand.

Briefly, the social gospel places all the emphasis for how to live an "authentic" Christianity on good works, as in meeting the needs of the poor and "marginalized." It replaces the primary message of salvation by faith, through grace, in Jesus Christ with fixing society as the primary communication of truth and redemption. In effect, salvation through faith in Christ has no role in ridding society of all its problems, which they say must take place before Jesus can even return to set up His kingdom. While it has been around for over a hundred years, in today's repackaged version, it has made itself appealing particularly to the youth by merging with the Emerging church and becoming the political ideology that so many are identifying with... If you were of the impression that Social Justice is simply caring for the disadvantaged, then you need to upgrade your thinking on it, or you will risk being deceived by today's definition of the term. After all, who among us who names the name of Christ would ever be against

reaching out to the poor and alleviating suffering? ... [The Social Justice movement] takes any collective sense of moral responsibility we may have for the disadvantaged, and redefines and manipulates it for a different agenda.¹

One Christian apologist recently and naively tweeted that the Social Justice movement within the church represents nothing more than a passing fad.² However, a closer examination of its current inroads, as well as an examination of what Scripture reveals for the future, indicates that Social Justice theology represents far more than just the flavor of the month. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Social Justice movement is negatively impacting the field of biblical *Eschatology*.

Yet, what is *Eschatology* and why is it significant? *Eschatology* is a compound Greek word coming from the noun *eschatos* or “last” and *ology*, which means “the study of”. Simply put, *Eschatology* refers to an examination of what God’s Word, the Bible, reveals concerning the future. Although frequently relegated in the mind of the typical evangelical to the realm of the impractical and mere “pie in the sky” theology, *Eschatology* is a subject of tremendous import as far as the mind of God is concerned. This assertion can be demonstrated simply by observing how much of God’s Word is devoted to the subject. Non-dispensationalist J. Barton Payne observed that roughly twenty-seven percent, well over one-quarter of the Bible, was eschatological at the time it was written.³

It is the subject of biblical Eschatology that furnishes the believer with comfort (1 Thess. 4:18) and hope (Titus 2:13) within the present age, as well as provides

¹ Mary Danielsen, *What You Need to Know About Jim Wallis and the Social-Justice "Gospel"* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2014), 9.

² The tweet from Justin Peters can be found at @JustinPetersMin from April 19, 2019 at 8:34PM. “Every few years a new fad comes down the evangelical pike: Prayer of Jabez, Promise Keepers, Passion of the Christ, War Room movie, etc., etc., etc. Let us hope and pray (and work toward the end) that Social Justice is also a fad; albeit far more serious than the others.”

³ J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 674-75.

a natural stimulus for holy living (2 Pet. 3:11; 1 John 3:2-3). Concerning the practicality of Eschatology, J. Dwight Pentecost observes:

A short time ago, I took occasion to go through the New Testament to mark each reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and to observe the use made of that teaching about His coming. I was struck anew with the fact that almost without exception, when the coming of Christ is mentioned in the New Testament, it is followed by an exhortation to godliness and holy living.⁴

Because of the practical nature of Bible prophecy, the Apostle Peter explains that the field of biblical Eschatology to the Christian functions as light amid darkness and is consequently something that all would do well to consider. (2 Pet. 1:19).

Yet, it is this very pivotal subject of biblical Eschatology that the Social Justice movement seeks to redefine. The purpose of this chapter is to explain why this change is occurring and how biblical Eschatology is now in the process of experiencing a massive redefinition at the hands of the Social Justice warriors. In short, we will examine how Social Justice theology is changing the very nature of the Church and how this in turn leads to a new understanding of God's blueprint for the end. Such a transformation result in basic neglect of the field, as well as a tone of derision cast toward those who seem to place too a great an emphasis upon it, in the eyes of the new Social Justice theologians. It will also be demonstrated that the new Social Justice eschatology leads decidedly in an anti-Israel direction.

Changing the Church's Mission and Calling

It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand how the Social Justice movement is changing biblical Eschatology without first understanding the monumental changes that the movement has introduced in the field of *Ecclesiology*, or what the Bible reveals about the Church. As explained by John F. Walvoord, one's

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today: The Middle East Crisis and the Future of the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 20.

Ecclesiology often dictates one's Eschatology. He notes, "Systems of theology can often be characterized by their ecclesiology. The premillennial system of interpretation has especially relied on a proper understanding of the doctrine of the church as a body distinct from Israel and from saints in general."⁵ As a mere pilgrim (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11) in the present evil age (Gal. 1:4), the Church has *three* divinely bestowed purposes. *First*, it is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21). *Second*, it exists to edify its believing members (Eph. 4:11-16). *Third*, it exists for the purpose of worldwide evangelization (Mark 16:15) and the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Yet, this simple divinely ordained formula has been altered in Social Justice circles. No longer is the Church's task solely to make fishers of men (Matt. 4:19). Now the Church is responsible for cleaning up the fishbowl by bringing Social Justice to the earth. This, of course, changes the basic purpose of the Church as its pastors are transformed from being mere shepherds into community organizers. The late anti-communist John Stormer, long recognized that one of Marxism's goals was to change the purpose of the Church so that it could be used as a tool to religiously condition the masses to tolerate mandatory wealth redistribution. Stormer explains how communist sympathizer "Ward recruited pupils, associates and disciples to his crusade to produce, in his words: '...a changed attitude on the part of many church members concerning the purpose and function both of the Church and Christianity.'"⁶ Robert Schuler similarly began to alter the church's purpose away from the individual salvation of souls and instead towards the collective salvation of society. He writes:

Negative-thinking theologians looked at the doctrine of sin, salvation and repentance... through distorted glasses tinted with mortification mentality. Too many prayers of confession of sin and repentance have been destructive to the

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 21.

⁶ John A. Stormer, *None Dare Call It Treason: The Carefully Documented Story of America's Retreat from Victory* (Florissant, MO: Liberty Bell Press, 1964), 126.

emotional health of Christians... God has a great plan *to redeem society*... The emerging church, reformed according to the needs of self-esteem-starved souls... will help us to affirm the concept that 'While God's ideas may seem humanly impossible, He will give us these ideas which will lead to glorious, self-esteem-generating success' (italics added).⁷

Much of the impetus for the transformation of the Church in Social Justice circles relates to the misguided idea that the Church is the Kingdom. If such an identification can be made, then it logically follows that the mission of the Church is to bring Kingdom conditions to the earth. Of course, the Social Justice movement is all too eager to define Kingdom conditions as mandatory wealth redistribution and the implementation of progressive policies. For example, the leftism of Russell Moore, the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, is rooted in his misunderstanding that the Church represents a present manifestation of the Kingdom of God: “The locus of the kingdom of God in this age is within the church, where Jesus rules as king. As we live our lives together, we see the transforming power of the gospel and the in breaking of the future kingdom.”⁸

Rick Warren similarly exemplifies the connection between the Kingdom Now theology and Social Justice Ecclesiology. Warren proclaims:

I stand before you confidently right now and say to you that God is going to use you to change the world. . . . I’m looking at a stadium full of people right now who are telling God they will do *whatever it takes to establish God’s Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.”* What will happen if the followers of Jesus say to Him, “We are yours”? What kind of spiritual awakening will occur? (italics added)⁹

Warren also calls his global mission strategy the “PEACE” plan.

⁷ Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 104-05.

⁸ Justin Taylor, “An Interview with Russell Moore,” online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-interview-with-russell-moore-the-new-president-of-the-ethics-religious-liberty-commission/>, April 1, 2013, accessed June 4, 2019.

⁹ Warren, cited in Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone: The Emerging Church...A New Reformation or an End-Time Deception* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails, 2007), 153.

P.E.A.C.E. is an acronym for Promote reconciliation; Equip servant leaders; Assist the poor; Care for the sick; and Educate the next generation. Coalition members see these actions as Jesus’ antidote to five “global giants,” — problems that affect billions of people worldwide: spiritual emptiness, self-centered leadership, poverty, pandemic disease, and illiteracy.¹⁰

Yet, notice how Warren’s plan deviates from the simplicity of the God-ordained mission of the Church, since nothing in Warren’s plan emphasizes preaching the gospel or fulfilling the Great Commission. Conversely, there is no hint in any Great Commission passage (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) to slay “the five global giants.” In Warren’s plan, Kingdom building, societal transformation, and Social Gospel have largely eclipsed the Church’s central calling to evangelize and disciple.

Emergent Church leader Brian McLaren similarly believes that the Kingdom is a present reality. He states, “If Revelation were a blueprint of the distant future, it would have been unintelligible to its original readers... In light of this, Revelation becomes a powerful book about the kingdom of God here and now, available to all.”¹¹ Notice also how McLaren connects the Church as the Kingdom to its apparent Social Justice purpose of transforming society. Concerning the ministry of Jesus Christ, McLaren explains:

He selected 12 and trained them in a new way of life. He sent them to teach everyone this new way of life... Even if only a few would practice this new way, many would benefit. Oppressed people would be free. Poor people would be liberated from poverty. Minorities would be treated with respect. Sinners would be loved, not resented. Industrialists would realize that God cares for sparrows and wildflowers — so their industries should respect, not rape, the environment. The homeless would be invited in for a hot meal. The kingdom of God would come — not everywhere at once, not suddenly, but gradually like a seed growing in a field, like yeast spreading in a lump of bread dough, like light spreading across the sky at dawn.¹²

¹⁰ “Rick Warren and 1,700 Leaders Launch the Peace Coalition at Purpose Driven Summit,” online: <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/249586720.html>, accessed June 5, 2019.

¹¹ McLaren, cited in Oakland, 158.

¹² Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 111.

The fact that yeast invariably throughout Scripture represents a negative rather than positive force¹³ does not seem to faze McLaren's interpretation. Elsewhere, McLaren's Social Justice interpretation of the ministry of Christ becomes apparent when he says, "The church has been preoccupied with the question, 'What happens to your soul after you die?' as if the reason for Jesus coming can be summed up in, 'Jesus is trying to get more souls into heaven as opposed to hell, after they die.' I just think a fair reading of the Gospels blows that out of the water."¹⁴

The reason that the spiritual presence of the Kingdom is important to McLaren is that its amorphous meaning allows him to fill it with progressive causes that he believes the Church should be involved in. McLaren's sympathy for leftwing ideological issues becomes transparent when he says:

Liberals were heroic for tackling tough issues, often several decades before conservatives. For example, in terms of science and learning, they tackled issues like *evolution and the age of the earth* long before their conservative counterparts... Liberals took action on the issue of *women in the ministry* decades before most conservatives began to rethink their position. The same could be said about the *stewardship of the earth*, concern for *the poor*, sensitivity to *the plight of the Palestinians*, and a questioning of *unconditional support for Israel*. And although the debate has been agonizing, liberals have blazed the trail in seeking to treat *homosexuals and transgender persons* with compassion (italics added).¹⁵

This same connection between viewing the Church as the Kingdom and its role of implementing left-wing social change is also apparent in the theology of well-known Social Justice warrior, Jim Wallis. Wallis observes, "The kingdom of God, which Jesus came to inaugurate, is meant to create an alternate reality in this world, and

¹³ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 102-4; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 182.

¹⁴ McLaren, cited in Oakland, 203.

¹⁵ McLaren, 137-38.

ultimately to transform the kingdoms of this world.”¹⁶ Wallis then goes on to explain the kind of “new order” that this Kingdom is destined to produce in society:

Jesus proclaimed... “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ... He is saying that a whole *new order* is about to enter history, and if you want to be a part of it, you will need a change so fundamental that the Gospel of John would later refer to it as a new birth. Being born again was not meant to be a private religious experience that is hard to communicate... but rather the prerequisite for joining a new and very public movement — the Jesus and kingdom of God movement (*italics added*).¹⁷

The kind of “new order” that Wallis desires the Church to introduce is apparently anti-capitalistic in nature. Wallis explains:

We are all familiar with the famous pop culture image of a street evangelist holding up a sign reading, “Repent, for the end is near!” But repentance is... often misunderstood. ... one could imagine a group of pastors, priests, rabbis, and imams holding up a sign on Wall Street for the titans of the financial industry to see, reading, “Repent, or the end could be near again” ... let’s have some sermons on the repentance of Wall Street.”¹⁸

This identical pattern is equally observable in the theology of Wallis’ friend, colleague, and fellow Social Justice warrior Tony Campolo. Campolo’s Kingdom Now Theology is transparent when he says, “If the Shalom of God and the peaceable kingdom of Isaiah 11 are to become real, then new ways of thinking must be established. With some help from St. Francis and Teilhard de Chardin, we just might make it.”¹⁹ Like Wallis, Campolo also believes that such a present manifestation of the Kingdom should mold society in the direction of progressive politics:

If ghetto kids in Philadelphia have little to celebrate because they have hovels for homes and live in the midst of gang violence, then we must do something to

¹⁶ Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening*, paperback ed. (NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ Wallis, cited in Danielsen, 13.

¹⁹ Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth without Worshipping Nature: A Christian's Call to Save Creation* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, 1992), 89.

change all of that. If blacks in South Africa have to endure humiliation because of apartheid, then apartheid must be destroyed. If the Palestinians are denied human rights and are made into aliens in the very land in which they were born, then we must protest. If Catholics in Northern Ireland are made into second-class citizens by the Protestant majority, then we must work and pray for the restructuring of the Irish social system.²⁰

Tim Keller's identical belief system causes him to conclude that the Church should really be set up for unbelievers rather than believers. Keller holds this misguided view of the Church even though Ephesians 4:11-16 clearly teaches that the Church's primary mission is to equip believers or "the saints" for works of service. Keller notes:

The New Testament church doesn't have a book of Leviticus. It doesn't lay down absolutely everything we ought to be doing all the time, and because it doesn't lay down the book, it gives us all this freedom. That means that, in the church, we should use this freedom basically to ask ourselves not "Oh, how can we get our way?" but how – if you're the mature ones – how do we have a church not for ourselves, but for non-Christians?... See, the people running a church tend to be not poor, usually. They tend to be doctrinally more well-schooled. They certainly tend to be Christians. And as a result, when they look at non-Christians, when they look at non-poor people, and they look at other people who are not like themselves, Paul says, "You should be driven to say I'm going to do everything in my church for them, not for me." Don't build a church to please yourself. Build one that is not unnecessarily alien to the people around you, who are different than you.²¹

In this sense, the purpose of the Church is not to minister to its members but rather to reweave the community of the unregenerate world. Keller explains:

In general, to 'do justice' means to live in a way that generates a strong community where human beings can flourish. Specifically, however, to 'do justice' means to go to places where the fabric of shalom has broken down, where the weaker members of societies are falling through the fabric, and to repair it. This happens when we concentrate on and meet the needs of the poor... The only way to reweave and strengthen the fabric is by weaving yourself into it... The

²⁰ Tony Campolo, *The Kingdom of God Is a Party: God's Radical Plan for His Family* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 43-44.

²¹ Keller, cited in Brannon S. Howse, *Marxianity* (Collierville, TN: Worldview Weekend, 2018), 35-36.

strong must disadvantage themselves for the weak, the majority for the minority, or the community frays and the fabric breaks.²²

Craig Blaising teaches similarly that the Church represents an “already” form of the Davidic Kingdom.²³ Thus, in his mind, one of the Church’s great purposes is to bring Social Justice to the earth. Blaising laments, “Unfortunately, present-day dispensationalists have written very little in proposing a theology of social ministry.”²⁴ He continues, “If we as a community of Christ worked on creating our community as a model of Social Justice and peace, then we really would have some suggestions to make for social reform in our cities and nations.”²⁵

Of course, the primary problem with this type of thinking is that the Church shifts onto its shoulders a burden that it was never intended to carry. After all, Jesus explained, “For you always have the poor with you” (Matt. 26:11). Such a societal predicament will never change until Christ returns and establishes His long-awaited kingdom. Only then will the Social Justice issues of the world find their permanent resolution (Amos 9:11-15; Zech. 8:12). Bestselling author Hal Lindsey warned what could happen to the Church in the last days if she began to see herself as the establisher of God’s Kingdom and Social Justice upon the earth: “The last days of the church on the earth may be largely wasted seeking to accomplish a task that only the LORD Himself can and will do directly.”²⁶

²² Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 174, 177.

²³ Craig Blaising, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrel L. Bock (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), 232-83.

²⁴ Craig Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 14, n.3.

²⁵ Blaising, "Theological and Ministerial Issues in Progressive Dispensationalism," 288-89.

²⁶ Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust: Unchecked, the Dominion Theology Movement among Christians Could Lead Us—and Israel—to Disaster* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 269.

Social Justice Theology Declares War on Dispensational Premillennialism

Not only does Social Justice theology sidetrack the Church into impossible projects outside of her purpose and calling, it directly challenges an eschatological system that states Social Justice conditions will only prevail upon the earth after Christ returns and establishes His long-awaited kingdom. In the interim, both the world and the Church will spiral “from bad to worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). In other words, Social Justice theology moves the Church away from the Eschatological position of pessimistic *Premillennialism* and more in the direction of optimistic Kingdom Now theology as expressed in either *Amillennialism* or *Postmillennialism*.²⁷ This reality explains why Social Justice warriors are quick to distance themselves from, as well as openly attack Dispensational Premillennialism.

For example, Campolo notes:

Doomsayers at one time in America seemed limited to those who preached the fundamentalist gospel. Leaning on their Scofield Bibles, these preachers of the Word predicted an increasing tendency toward sin and decadence until that day when the world would be so bad that Jesus would have to return to put a stop to it all. There seemed to be a degree of satisfaction in any news that things in this world were falling apart. As they understood it, the faster this world went down the tubes, the more the Lord’s return would be hastened.²⁸

McLaren expresses similar sentiments toward Dispensational Premillennialism when he says:

An eschatology of abandonment, which is how I would characterize certain streams of the Left Behind approach, has disastrous social consequences... Any

²⁷ *Premillennialism* maintains that Christ will return first and then His Kingdom will be established. By contrast, *Postmillennialism* contends that Christ will return only after the Church establishes the Kingdom. *Amillennialism* argues that Christ already established His kingdom in spiritual form at His First Advent.

²⁸ Campolo, *The Kingdom of God Is a Party: God's Radical Plan for His Family*, 132-33.

project geared toward improving the world long term is seen as unfaithful, since we're supposed to assume that the world is getting worse and worse.²⁹

Due to their inherent conflict with Social Justice theology, McLaren finds himself in a “rethinking process” covering all major areas of Biblical theology, including Eschatology. He explains:

I think many of us are in this kind of *rethinking process* – some starting from the beginning part by rethinking perhaps the relation of faith and science in relation to young earth creation and evolution... some starting from the middle, as they examine what the gospel of the kingdom is supposed to mean, or the idea of an integral or holistic mission... and some starting from the end, *re-examining eschatology*...³⁰

The book *Divided by Faith*, which is popular in Social Justice circles, similarly goes so far as to blame the existence of structural bias and institutional racism upon the prevalence among evangelicals of the biblical doctrines of Original Sin³¹ and Dispensational Premillennialism. Notice how the book’s authors take aim at the latter and blame it for historical evangelical non-involvement in racial injustice issues:

To understand this, we must account for the pre-millennial view that had come to dominate the American evangelical worldview and played a role in limiting evangelical social action on the race issues. According to this view, the present world is evil and will inevitably suffer moral decline until Christ comes again. Thus, to devote oneself to social reform is futile. The implications of this view were clearly expressed by Billy Graham. In response to King’s famous ‘I have a dream’ speech that his children might one day play together with white children, Graham, who had been invited but did not attend the 1963 March on Washington, said: ‘Only when Christ comes again will little white children of Alabama walk hand-in-hand with little black children.’ This was not meant to be harsh, but rather what he and most white evangelicals perceived to be realistic.³²

²⁹ McLaren, interview with Planet Preterist as cited in Oakland, 203-4.

³⁰ Ibid., 203.

³¹ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78-79.

³² Ibid., 47.

In sum, the war waged by Social Justice theology against Dispensational Premillennialism exists since that Eschatological system is perceived as contradicting a core belief of Social Justice thinking. That is, the world will get progressively better as the Church pursues its mantle of Social Justice responsibilities and consequently brings God's Kingdom to the earth. Such thinking does not fit well with the biblical reality held by Dispensational Premillennialists that both the world and the Church will continue to disintegrate morally and ethically until Kingdom conditions are finally imposed by our Lord, only subsequent to His Second Advent.

Prophetic Neglect

The conflict between Social Justice theology and Dispensational Premillennialism is expressed in different ways. Sometimes Social Justice warriors neglect prophetic truth altogether. Concerning the Eschatological beliefs of Social Justice warrior Jim Wallis, researcher Mary Danielsen notes, "In all of Wallis' writings, I could find no hint of 'our blessed hope' of Christ's return. Nor could I find a discussion by him of having a personal biblical relationship with Jesus Christ."³³ Apparently, in the mind of Wallis, Social Justice concerns are so overriding that we need not be inconvenienced by secondary theological subjects such as the return of Christ or personal salvation. After all, what is important is the collective salvation of nations through the implementation of Social Justice, rather than avoiding an eternal Hell. Indeed, the doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church seems to have fallen onto hard times in Kingdom Now circles. Notice the mindset of New Apostolic Reformation leader C. Peter Wagner in a radio interview with Terry Gross:

GROSS: What are you expecting? Like, what do you think will happen?

³³ Danielsen, 14.

WAGNER: I think the world is going to get better and better, not worse and worse. And I think that...

GROSS: So you don't believe in the Rapture and the Tribulation?

WAGNER: I used to.

GROSS: But now?

WAGNER: But I don't — I don't see how it fits now into what God is showing us... no, I don't believe in that.³⁴

In fact, many within the Emergent Church and Social Justice movement seem to pride themselves on having no coherent eschatological system whatsoever. Emergent Church leader Robert Webber envisions a day when, “The church will be less concerned about having an eschatology and more committed to being an eschatological community.”³⁵ Social Justice pastor Mark Dever goes so far as to claim that stating one's eschatological millennial convictions on a Church website is tantamount to sin. Notice the following remarks made by Dever in a sermon on Revelation 20.

I think that millennial views need not be among those doctrines that divide us. . . . I am suggesting that what you believe about the millennium — how you interpret these thousand years — is not something that is necessary for us to agree upon in order to have a congregation together. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed in John 17:21 that we Christians might be one. Of course, all true Christians are one in that we have His Spirit, we share His Spirit, and we desire to live out that unity. But that unity is supposed to be evident as a testimony to the world around us. Therefore, I conclude that we should end our co-operations together with other Christians... only with the greatest of care, lest we rend the body of Christ for whose unity He has prayed and given Himself. *Therefore, I conclude that it is sin to divide the body of Christ — to divide the body that He prayed would be united.* Therefore, for us to conclude that we must agree upon a certain view of alcohol, or a certain view of schooling, or a certain view of meat sacrificed to idols, or a *certain view of the millennium*, in order to have fellowship together is, I

³⁴ Radio interview with Terry Gross, October 3, 2011, “Fresh Air” program. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111005201128/http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=140946482>. Cited in Mark Oppenheimer, “Dominionism, Kingdom Now: And What Does the Bible Say?” online: <https://www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=30287>, May 27, 2019, accessed June 5, 2019.

³⁵ Interview by Jordan Cooper with Robert Webber, cited in Oakland, 136.

think, not only unnecessary for the body of Christ, but *it is therefore both unwarranted and therefore condemned by scripture*. So if you're a pastor and you're listening to me, *you understand me correctly if you think I'm saying you are in sin if you lead your congregation to have a statement of faith that requires a particular millennial view*. I do not understand why that has to be a matter of uniformity in order to have Christian unity in a local congregation.³⁶

Such marginalization of millennial doctrine would have come as quite a shock to early church father Justin Martyr (A.D. 100 -165). In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, he declared, "But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others."³⁷ The bottom line is that because biblical eschatology is contradicted by the optimistic and Kingdom Now agenda of Social Justice theology, many within the movement neglect Eschatological subjects altogether.

Ridicule

Unfortunately, the Social Justice movement goes further than merely ignoring prophetic biblical content. The movement also resorts to expressing ridicule and contempt toward those who emphasize God's plan for the end time that contradicts the optimistic Kingdom Now agenda of the Social Justice movement. Tony Campolo, for example, labels Dispensational Premillennialism as a "Johnny-come-lately theology."³⁸ Campolo's Social Justice colleague John Piper is far more strident in his tone when critiquing those whom he disagrees with eschatologically:

³⁶ Justin Taylor, "Dever: 'You Are in Sin if You Lead Your Congregation to have a Statement of Faith that Requires a Particular Millennial View,'" online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/dever-you-are-in-sin-if-you-lead-your/>, July 14 2009, accessed May 28, 2019.

³⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80.

³⁸ Campolo, cited in Paul R. Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed: Volume 2: The Rise of Christian Palestinianism* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel, 2018), 129-30.

For two generations, perhaps, we have failed to study prophecy with anything like the rigor that it deserves. We have been so afraid of being viewed as one of those Zionist, right-wing, antichrist-sniffing, culture-denying, alarmist left-overs from the Scofield prophecy conference era that we give hardly any energy to putting the prophetic pieces together - at least not in public.³⁹

One also notices the tone of derision in Jim Wallis' critique of Dispensational Premillennialists:

It's all too easy to make fun of the extreme examples of prophecy belief that we encounter on bumper stickers and best-seller lists. When people talk breathlessly of the dangers of Universal Product Codes and automated teller machines as signs of the impending Tribulation, giggles and head-shaking are hard to repress... when we ridicule apocalyptic interpretations of bar codes and the European Common Market, we are... properly rejecting an interpretive method that (suggests a) correspondence between biblical events and symbols, and our own lives. Ought Revelation to be included within the family of Christian texts, or should it be thrown on the fire of apocalyptic excesses?⁴⁰

Notice also the ridicule that Wallis employs to deflect criticism for his participation in a dinner where the then United Nations Head, Ban Ki-Moon who was featured as the keynote speaker. In an article on the event entitled, "Dinner with the Antichrist," Wallis writes:

Last night, the supposed Antichrist [Ban Ki-Moon] was listening to gospel music, speaking of his own faith, quoting Scripture, celebrating a new alliance with "the evangelical church" on the critical issues of poverty and global warming, and bringing the conservative Christian crowd to its feet in smiling agreement with the U.N. Secretary's agenda. Indeed, leader after Christian leader insisted this was a biblical agenda."⁴¹

In his best-selling book, *A Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren employs a similar tone of derision against those he deems as overly preoccupied with the subject of Bible Prophecy:

³⁹ John Piper, message preached at the 2015 Gospel Coalition National Conference. Cited in *ibid.*, 331.

⁴⁰ Danielsen, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, “The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!” If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. Speculating on the exact timing of Christ’s return is futile, because Jesus said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Since Jesus said He didn’t know the day or hour, why should you try to figure it out? What we do know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it.” Jesus said, “The Good News about God’s kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come.” If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. It is easy to get distracted and sidetracked from your mission because Satan would rather have you do anything besides sharing your faith. He will let you do all kinds of good things as long as you don’t take anyone to heaven with you. But the moment you become serious about your mission, expect the Devil to throw all kinds of diversions at you. When that happens, remember the words of Jesus: “Anyone who lets himself be distracted from the work I plan for him is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”⁴²

Thus, using straw-man form of argumentation, Warren castigates his Eschatological opponents as being interested in non-Christ-like pursuits, apathetic about personal evangelism, date setters, distracted and un-serious about their life’s mission, influenced by Satan, and ultimately unfit for God’s kingdom!

As much as the Social Justice warriors decry biblical Eschatology, they are, in fact, the very fulfilment of it. The Apostle Peter predicted that in the last days those resorting to ridicule would arise from within, seeking to discredit Bible prophecy: “Know this first of all, that in the last days *mockers* will come with their *mocking*, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of *His coming*? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation’” (italics added, 2 Pet. 3:3-4). It is as if Peter was describing the very Social Justice movement of today.

⁴² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 285-86.

Anti-Israel

Beyond simply neglect and ridicule, Social Justice eschatology is also moving in a decidedly anti-Israel direction. There are at least *three* reasons why Social Justice warriors always seem to come down so strongly against the modern state of Israel. *First*, many of them, for whatever reason, are adherents of Calvinism. Reformation Theology is in their spiritual DNA. Yet, their spiritual forebearers were similarly anti-Jewish in their worldview. Of the Jews, Church reformer Martin Luther declared:

First, their synagogues should be set on fire... Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed.... Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds.... Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden, under threat of death, to teach any more... Fifthly, passports and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews.... Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury (charging interest on loans).... Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the axe, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses.... We ought to drive the rascally lazybones out of our system.... Therefore, away with them.... To sum up, dear princes and nobles who have Jews in your domains, if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one, so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden — the Jews.⁴³

While John Calvin perhaps was more discreet, his anti-Semitism is equally transparent:

But here he [the rabbi] not only betrays his ignorance, but his utter stupidity, since God so blinded the whole people that they were like restive dogs. I have had much conversation with many Jews: I have never seen either a drop of piety or a grain of truth or ingenuousness — nay, I have never found common sense in any Jew. But this fellow, who seems so sharp and ingenious, displays his own impudence to his great disgrace.⁴⁴

Second, as adherents of Replacement Theology, they incorrectly see the Church as the New Israel. If true, then there really is no divine future for physical or

⁴³ Martin Luther, as cited in Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the "Church" and the Jewish People* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1992), 14-15. For Luther's complete text, see Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* (1852; reprint, York, SC: Liberty Bell, 2004).

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel* (Vol 1, p. 185). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. Commentary on Daniel 2:44-45. (2010).

national Israel. Alva J. McClain notes the parallel between New Israel Kingdom Now Theology and the marginalization of physical or national Israel. “The confusion of our... Lord’s rule... leads to serious consequences. [I]t makes the present age the period of the Mediatorial Kingdom. [I]t dissolves the divinely covenanted purpose in the nation of Israel.”⁴⁵ *Third*, it is western-style Democracies, like that of the United States, that the Social Justice adherents view as oppressive and consequently seek to fundamentally transform. Since Israel represents the only semblance of such a government in the Middle East, as she is surrounded by a sea of Islamic theocracies, the Social Justice warriors have a natural animosity toward the modern state of Israel.

Pro-Palestinian statements from the Social Justice crowd abound. According to Jim Wallis:

The completely one-sided support for Israel from conservative evangelicals rests on two things: one, a very dubious interpretation (I’m being generous here) of biblical prophecy... in which the modern state of Israel is still equated with the Old Testament notion of “God’s Chosen People,” and two, a complete denial of the very existence of Palestinian Christians.⁴⁶

According to Lynne Hybels, “It is true: I am not a Christian Zionist... I do not hold to a theology asserting that the modern state of Israel represents a divinely mandated return of ancient Israel to the Promised Land... At the same time, I wholeheartedly support justice for the Palestinians.”⁴⁷

It is also common for those involved in Social Justice theology to significantly marginalize what God’s Word reveals concerning Israel’s future. Tony Campolo, for example, introduces a new hermeneutical methodology as a basis for dismissing the vast

⁴⁵ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom; an Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 438.

⁴⁶ Danielsen, 13.

⁴⁷ Lynne Hybels, cited in Wilkinson, 155.

Old Testament prophecies that speak of Israel's national future. Campolo asserts that his own understanding of God, as revealed in Jesus, "...trumps whatever was thought about God back there in the Old Testament days."⁴⁸ John Piper attaches no prophetic significance whatsoever to the modern state of Israel.⁴⁹ Campolo apparently also refuses to acknowledge that the modern state represents a work of God when he refers to Israel as "...a little nation that has survived primarily because of the wealth and the war materials supplied by the U.S. government."⁵⁰ At times, Piper pays lip service to Israel's biblical future. He notes, "[God] has a saving purpose for Israel. All Israel will someday turn to the Lord Christ as a group. This is my deep understanding in belief of Romans 11. The broken off branches will be grafted in one day to the people of God, the bride of Christ, His church."⁵¹ However, according to Paul Wilkinson, such a concession remains a far cry from what God has promised to national Israel.

On the basis of this kind of statement, many in the church are being misled into believing that Piper stands with Israel, but he does not. What Piper said is *not* what Paul taught. Israel's destiny as a nation is not one of spiritual incorporation into the church, which is the classic Reformed Calvinistic teaching. The church comprises *individual* Jews and Gentiles, not "Israel," which is a distinct national entity. The appointed destiny for Israel is for her to remain a *nation* in the sight of God and in the midst of all the nations, for as long as God's "fixed order" of creation endures (Jer. 31: 36).⁵²

⁴⁸ Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christianity: Living the Words of Jesus No Matter the Cost* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), 215.

⁴⁹ See John Piper, "Land Divine?: We Should Treat the Israeli-Palestinian Dispute as We Would Any Other," *World*, May 11 2002.

⁵⁰ Wilkinson, 140.

⁵¹ Piper, as cited in *ibid.*, 331-32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 332. See also Jeremiah 33:7 and Ezekiel 36:11-28.

Whether it be through perpetual pro-Palestinian sentiments or through a gradual marginalization of what God's Word reveals concerning Israel's future, Social Justice eschatology seems to be moving in an anti-Israel direction.

Conclusion

When the Church is transformed away from the simple design of God and instead into a vehicle for social change, such an abrupt Ecclesiological alteration cannot but help impact biblical Eschatology. Consequently, Social Justice theology finds itself at odds with Dispensational Premillennialism and more sympathetic to the Amillennial and Postmillennial Kingdom Now theological perspectives. Such animosity naturally expresses itself through prophetic neglect and even derision aimed at those deemed to have embraced an Eschatological system considered less optimistic than what is decreed by the Social Justice agenda. Social Justice theology also pushes the Church in a decidedly anti-Israel direction. Social Justice theology is not going away any time soon. As its impact is already being felt in the area of Ecclesiology, biblical Eschatology is apparently the next area of biblical truth subject to redefinition.

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