

Should the Movement Protest Injustice?

Introduction

With all the injustice that is going on in the world, oppressions that are difficult to comprehend or explain, the question that often arises is what are God's people to do? What is our role in these crises? Should we remain silent while much of the world is loudly protesting for justice and equality? Are we to turn a blind eye to the brutal systems that perpetuate inequalities and oppress the most vulnerable of society's citizens? The purpose of this article is to answer these questions, and give Biblical direction as to how God's people can make the best possible impact on these situations, while avoiding getting swept up by the current of popular worldly movements.

Christ our example

Christ was born when Israel was under severe oppression from their Roman occupiers at the external level, and from the Jewish leadership at the internal level. It was the hope of every Jew to be delivered from their Roman oppressors. Such was the intensity of their desire that they perverted the truths of the Bible to serve this hope. They hoped the Messiah would come to wipe away their tears; vindicate them before the Romans, procure their freedom, and restore them to a position of pre-eminence before the nations of the world. This hope led them to reject the Messiah because he did not come in the manner they expected. Israel's problem was that they did not understand the nature and manner of the kingdom that Christ was to establish. He endeavoured to re-educate his followers through parables as shown in Mathew 13. Ellen white gives a beautiful break down of this chapter in the following passage.

It had been an eventful day in the life of Jesus. Beside the Sea of Galilee He had spoken His first parables, by familiar illustrations again explaining to the people the nature of His kingdom and the manner in which it was to be established. He had likened His own work to that of the sower; the development of His kingdom to the growth of the mustard seed and the effect of leaven in the measure of meal. The great final separation of the righteous and the wicked He had pictured in the parables of the wheat and tares and the fishing net. The exceeding preciousness of the truths He taught had been illustrated by the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, while in the parable of the householder He taught His disciples how they were to labor as His representatives. – {DA 333.1}

Christ was touched by every kind of oppression that He witnessed. His heart reached out to bring relief to every weary and oppressed soul. Nevertheless He endeavoured to separate His kingdom from that of the world. He made this distinction clear when He said "my kingdom is not of this world."

The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. The gospel of the grace of God, with its spirit of self-abnegation, can never be in harmony with the spirit of the world. The two principles are antagonistic. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for

they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Corinthians 2:14. – {DA 509.1}

But today in the religious world there are multitudes who, as they believe, are working for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly and temporal dominion. They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and market places. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority. Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His kingdom. The establishment of such a kingdom is what the Jews desired in the days of Christ. They would have received Jesus, had He been willing to establish a temporal dominion, to enforce what they regarded as the laws of God, and to make them the expositors of His will and the agents of His authority. But He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” John 18:36. He would not accept the earthly throne. – {DA 509.2}

The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses,—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart. – {DA 509.3}

The passage above serves as a warning to those who would seek to unite church and state and make religious doctrine the law by which all classes must abide. When placed in a present truth context it is a clear denunciation of the dominionists under Donald Trump who are actively engaged in a misguided effort to establish their version of Christianity as the guiding principle of that country’s government. They are seeking to establish God’s kingdom on earth. However on the other end of the spectrum are the left-leaning political and social justice movements that are striving to build a society that is free from the various injustices that they speak out against. Unlike the dominionists, these left-leaning groups are not explicitly driven by religious motivations. They tend to be secular in nature and some are even hostile to religion. But their end-goal is fundamentally the same - to establish their version of a utopia on this earth in which their vision of justice would prevail.

As both the dominionists and the social justice movements seek to establish a righteous kingdom on this earth, they both employ worldly means to accomplish this end. Their tools are protest, lobbying, legislation, and policy. It must be acknowledged that legislation and policy can and have achieved good. However they do not strike at the heart of the human problem. And it is the heart of the issue (the human heart) that Christ seeks to address through the gospel.

Christ did not attack national abuses or condemn national enemies. He did not incite a rebellion against oppressive civil authorities. This was not because He was indifferent to injustice. It was because He understood that these methods were not the answer. What did He do instead? He taught the people. He sought to reach their minds and hearts with the transformative spiritual lessons which were the only true and lasting solution to the societal problems that were current at that time. He exemplified correct principles in His own life, thereby giving an example as to how women and men in society should treat each other. He taught them Bible prophecy. His message,

like that of John the Baptist, was that the time of the Messiah had come. And the Jews needed to repent or suffer the judgement of God as “the axe had been laid at the root of the tree” and was ready to do its work. Thus without ever leading a protest He created a movement that grew at the grassroots, reached into courts and palaces of power, and became a powerful influence in the then known world. Christ’s methods while He was on the earth are pregnant with lessons for the priesthood of the present truth movement in this dispensation.

The World’s Method vs. God’s Method

There are two approaches to dealing with injustice that God’s people can compare. The world’s method and God’s method. When one considers the progress of protest movements throughout the history of the United States a pattern can be seen which shows:

1. A group of people are oppressed.
2. They protest the injustice.
3. The system of oppression gives in to the demands of the protesters.
4. But the system of oppression comes up with new ways to continue the same oppression.

Slavery in the United States is an example. Abolitionists gained a victory when slavery was abolished through the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Although the institution was abolished the hearts of the people were not changed. Ellen White testifies that the “spirit of slavery,” which is racism, still lived and would manifest itself in oppressive acts against the former slaves.¹

*“There is a terrible crisis just before us, through which all must pass, and especially will it come and be felt in _____. My mind has been much troubled over the positions which some of our brethren are liable to take in regard to the work to be done among the colored people in the Southern States. There is one point that I wish to lay before those who work in the Southern field. Among the colored people, they will have to labor in different lines from those followed in the North. They can not go to the South and present the real facts in reference to Sunday-keeping being the mark of the beast, and encourage the colored people to work on Sunday: for **the same spirit that held the colored people in slavery is not dead, but alive today, and ready to spring into activity. The same spirit of oppression is still cherished in the minds of many of the white people of the South and will reveal itself in cruel deeds, which are the manifestation of their religious zeal. Some will oppose in every possible way any action which has a tendency to uplift the colored race, and teach them to be self-supporting.** SpM 19.6*

Notwithstanding its official abolition, racist legislators perpetuated slavery through policies that excessively criminalized black people. The end of slavery was also followed by the violence of the Ku Klux Klan era and Jim Crow. So a pattern is seen here where people fought to end an evil, policy and legislative changes were enacted, but the evil simply changed shape and

¹ 10LtMs, Ms 22c, 1895, par. 13;

continued.^{2 3} This is because the fundamental issue had not been addressed which is the plague of sin in the human heart.

The movement's best hope of doing good amid the hatred and oppression that are increasing in this dispensation is to follow God's method - to speak to the hearts and minds of the people. By pen, voice, and the lived example, they should educate those in their sphere of influence regarding the right way to understand the issues that are current in the world. They should speak about the principle of equality, and the importance of personally living up to this principle in every sphere of life as one of the most effective means of not perpetuating the evils they seek to address. And this should be done with the understanding that the time has not yet come to make direct appeals to people, whether they be Adventists or not, to join the movement.

The Present Truth Movement's Relationship to Popular Protest Movements

There were a variety of groups, sects, and movements in the history of the end of ancient Israel. Examples include the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes. And there were revolutionary movements such as the Zealots and the Sicarii which sought to expel the Romans by force of arms.⁴ Christ did not join any of these popular movements while He was on the earth. And the members of the early church did not do so either. The church Christ raised up was separate and distinct from all of them. The line of the end of ancient Israel is a line of success and is thus especially instructive for God's people at the end of the world. The lesson it communicates is that however much the movement may agree with causes espoused by the popular protest movements of today, it is important to remember that the movement is separate and distinct from them, and has a broader and much more important work to accomplish. The movement is not to pattern after these popular movements or copy their methods. The movement itself and the light God opens to it are to be the point of reference. At the appointed time, whether as levites or nethinim, all the people of the world, including those involved in the popular movements of today will have to join this movement to be saved. As Christ said, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

Structural Considerations

The present-truth movement is governed by the patterns seen in the prophetic lines. Given this fact it is important to observe what the lines teach about the movement's current position and work. One application of the history of Christ shows that Nov 9th, 2019 marked the end of a thirty year period and the beginning of a time of preparation typified by Christ's forty days of fasting in the wilderness. Christ fasted to prepare Himself for the public ministry He was soon to start. Another application of this history presents the fact that 2019 marks the cross. And the movement is presently in a period of training and re-education typified by the forty days in

² Smithsonian. (2011, March 14). Slavery by Another Name: The Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPlk41mNDuM>

³ Netflix. (2020, April 17). *13th* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8>

⁴ *Judaism's first century diversity*. (n.d.). PBS: Public Broadcasting Service. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/judaism>

which Christ taught His disciples following His resurrection. Both these lines present the fact that the present is a time of preparation - of learning and unlearning. What is implied by the fact that the priests need training is that they are presently unprepared or unfit for public ministry. To enter upon such a work without adequate preparation would do damage to God's work and the souls He is seeking to save. This is seen in the history of the disciples. Even after the cross the disciples did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. They needed an increase of knowledge before they were prepared to rightly teach and lead those who joined the church at Pentecost.

Given that the present is a time of preparation it would not be appropriate for Priests to participate in the popular protest movements of the day. Even if they identify with the justness of the causes these movements advocate. However well the subject of equality may be understood, the testimony of the history of the disciples after the cross demonstrates that their understanding is flawed and incomplete. They do not know how to work as God would have them and working according to their own wisdom will do damage that they do not now see. The movement's work now is to learn and unlearn; to do away with all vestiges of nationalism and sexism both at the corporate level and at the individual level.

Conclusion

The time has not yet come for the priests to enter upon their public ministry. They are still in need of preparation and do not as yet understand the message as they should, or how God would have them labour when the time for them to labour publicly arrives. The popular protest movements of today are espousing just causes. But they are a mixture of truth and error in both their teaching and their methods. It is contrary to God's counsel through the prophetic lines for God's people join or participate in the activities of such movements.

The work the priests are to be engaged in now is seeking a clearer understanding of the present-truth message and the methodology upon which it is based. That is not to say they are to have nothing to say on the subjects of racism, sexism, and homophobia which are receiving increased attention today. All have a sphere of influence comprising of family, friends, and Seventh Day Adventists. They can share with their loved ones as to the correct way to understand these issues which is on the basis of the principle of equality.