

ISSD VIRTUAL TRAINING INSTITUTE #POWER UP!
“HOMILETICS: THE ART OF PREACHING IN THE SPIRIT”
LECTURE, JANUARY 26, 2021
“HOMILETICS: THE ART OF PREACHING IN THE SPIRIT”
THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
BISHOP J. LOUIS FELTON, PRESENTER

I. Defining Social Justice: What is Social Justice?

Social Justice: “Matters of justice at the societal level rather than the strictly personal level.”¹

Several Forms of Justice:

Social Justice as Distributive Justice: “Just or fair allocation of benefits and burdens among the members of a social group.”²

Scriptural example: Acts 6:1-6

Social Justice as Compensatory Justice: “Compensating someone or some social group.”³

Scriptural example: Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10

Social Justice as Restorative Justice: “Restorative justice...has more to do with human relationships than with property damage or loss.”⁴

Scriptural example: 1 Cor. 11:17-26 Eucharist

Social Justice as Procedural Justice: “Procedural justice has its most direct application in legal and quasi-legal settings in which laws, rules, guidelines, protocols, or policies are enacted, administered, or adjudicated. The settings in which these actions are taken may be legislative settings, civil courts of law, settings in which laws are administered or enforced...[including] ecclesiastical bodies.”⁵

Scriptural Example: OT Prophets

Quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. on How He Views the Preacher’s Role:

Before I was a civil rights leader, I was a preacher of the gospel. This was my first calling and it still remains my greatest commitment. You know, actually all that I do in civil rights I do because I consider it a part of my ministry. I have no other ambitions in life but to achieve excellence in the Christian ministry. I don’t plan to run for any political

¹ Antipas Harris and Michael Palmer, “Introduction,” *The Holy Spirit and Social Justice Interdisciplinary Global Perspectives: Scripture and Theology*, eds. Antipas Harris and Michael Palmer (Lanham, MD: Seymour Press, 2019), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

office. I don't plan to do anything but remain a preacher. And what I'm doing in this struggle, along with many others, grows out of my feeling that the preacher must be concerned about the whole man. Not merely his soul, but his body.⁶

II. THE NEED FOR PREACHING SOCIAL JUSTICE: HISTORICAL REALITIES

A. Christianity, African Americans, Slavery, and Racism

Early on in this country white scriptural interpretation emphasized black dehumanization to justify slavery:

1. Old Testament Used to Justify Slavery

Genesis 4:10-15 And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 and now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand....13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear...14c I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me...15d **And the Lord put a mark on Cain**, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

Genesis 9:18 And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. 19 These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread. 20 And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: 21 And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. 24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25 **And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. 26 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. (Gen. 9:18 KJV)**

Josiah Priest

- White, Proslavery advocate
- Popular 19th century American writer
- Wrote *Slavery as it relates to the Negro or African Race* (1843)

Josiah priest, proslavery advocate: "The appointment of this [Negro] race of men to servitude and slavery was a judicial act of God, or in other words was a divine judgment. There are three evidences of this, which are as follows:

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Why Jesus Called A Man A Fool* <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/why-jesus-called-man-fool-sermon-delivered-mount-pisgah-missionary-baptist>

First—The fact of their being created or produced in a lower order of intellectuality than either of the other races . . . is evidence of the preordination of their fate as slaves on the earth as none but God could have done or determined this thing.

Second—The announcement of God by the mouth of Noah, relative to the whole race of Ham, pointing out in so many words in the clearest and most specific manner, that they were adjudged to slavery . . . that they were foreordained and appointed to the condition they hold among men by the divine mind....”

2. *New Testament Used to Justify Slavery*

Ephesians 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ.

Colossians 3:22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.

Common Thoughts of the Time by many white Americans:

- ▶ Slavery was “good” for African Americans
 - ▶ They can become “civilized”
 - ▶ They have the privilege of living in a “Christian” nation

*****How did African Americans employ Christianity and the Bible to protest and resist slavery, the slave trade, racism, and to advocate for social justice?*****

III. African American Exemplars of Social Justice

A. African Americans Rejected Vehemently this Notion that Slavery was Good for Blacks:

David Walker (1785/1796-1830) in *The Appeal*: “Christian Americans not only hinder their fellow creatures, the Africans, but thousands of them will absolutely beat a coloured person nearly to death, if they catch him on his knees, supplicating the throne of grace... Yes, I have known small collections of coloured people to have convened together for no other purpose than to worship God Almighty, in spirit and in truth, to the best of their knowledge, when tyrants, calling themselves patrols...would burst in upon them and drag them out and commence beating them as they would rattle-snakes---many of whom, they would beat so unmercifully, that they would hardly be able to crawl for weeks and sometimes months.”

B. African Americans Rejected the Christianity Practiced in America:

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895): “For between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for

calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels.”

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895): “For in the United States men have interpreted the Bible against liberty...They have declared that the Bible sanctions slavery. What do we do in such a case? What do you do when you are told by the slaveholders of America that the Bible sanctions slavery? Do you go and throw your Bible into the fire? Do you sing out, ‘No Union with the Bible!’ Do you declare that a thing is bad because it has been misused, abused, and made bad use of? Do you throw it away on that account? No! You press it to your bosom all the more closely; and you read it all the more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty—and not on the side of slavery.”

C. African Americans seized hermeneutical control of the Bible:

1. 1774 Slaves’ Petition to the Governor of Massachusetts

“We have in common with other men a natural right to our freedoms without being deprived of them by our fellowman...Our children are also taken from us by force and sent many miles from us where we seldom or ever see them again there to be made slaves of for Life...By our deplorable situation we are rendered incapable of shewing our obedience to Almighty God *how can a slave perform the duties of a husband to a wife or parent to his child...* “*How can the wife submit themselves to their husbands in all things. How can the child obey their parents in all things. There is a great number of us sincere . . . members of the Church of Christ how can the master and the slave be said to fulfil that command Live in love let Brotherly Love contuner and abound Beare yea onenothers Bordenes How can the master be said to Beare my Borden when he Beares me down whith the Have chanes of slavery and operson against my will...*

Scriptures echoed in the 1774 Petition to the Governor of Massachusetts

- Gal 6:2 “Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
- Eph 5:25 “Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”
- Eph 5:22 “Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands.”
- Eph 6:1-2 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother”
- Heb 13:1 “Let brotherly love continue.”

2. Lemuel Haynes’ Biblical Critique of White Christians’ Proslavery Use of the Ham Story

- ▶ Skeptical of the Ham story (Gen 9:18-19)
- ▶ “Wheather the Negros are of Canaans posterity or not, perhaps is not known by any mortal under Heaven.”
- ▶ Our glorious hygh priest hath visibly appear’d in the flesh, and hath establish’d a more glorious economy. It is plain beyond all doubt, that at the comeing of Christ, this curse that was upon Canaan, was taken off.” (Gal 3:13)

3. Zilpha Elaw (1790-1846?)

The Almighty accounts not the black races of man either in the order of nature or spiritual capacity as inferior to the white; for He bestows his Holy Spirit on, and dwells in them as readily as in persons of whiter complexion...Oh! That men would outgrow their nursery prejudices and learn that “*God hath made of one blood all the nations of men that dwell upon all the face of the earth* (Acts 17:26).”

4. Legacy of Slavery into the 20th century

1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson

Segregation

Lynching

5. William Seymour (1870-1922)

“Real Personal Pentecost”

2 Cor 1:21-22: “Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

The Holy Spirit seals the believer until the eschaton

“When you have the Holy Ghost, you have an empire, a power within yourself...”

“Enduement of power for service and work”

Social Obligations

Eph 4:8: “Let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”

1 Cor 16:1: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, upon the first day of the week, let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.”

6. Charles Harrison Mason (1866-1961)

During 1917-1918 the Federal Bureau of Investigation investigated Mason because of his pacifist teaching and because the COGIC charter stated that the church did not believe in shedding blood: “We believe that the shedding of human blood or the taking of human life to be contrary to the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and as a body we are averse to war in all its forms.”⁷ This belief was demonstrated in Mason’s letter to President Wilson explaining why he and other members objected to participation in World War 1 on religious grounds.⁸ Bishop David Daniels

⁷ Juanita Williams Faulkner and Raynard D. Smith, eds., *It is Written: Minutes of the General Assembly Church of God in Christ Held at Memphis Tennessee 1919-1932* (Tennessee: Flywheel Ministries Press, 2017), 47, see 61-62 for a similar but extended statement; Also quoted in Raynard Smith, “Seeking the Just Society: Charles Harrison Mason’s Quest for Social Equality” *With Signs Following: The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason*, ed. Raynard Smith (St. Louis: Christian Board Publication, 2015), 107.

⁸ White, *Rising*, 65. See White’s chapter, “Mason Told Us Not to Fight” which provides detailed information about the hardships Mason and others faced in objecting to the war.

notes that this pacifist campaign by Mason “was the first major political activity of Pentecostal African Americans.”⁹

Along with his scriptural beliefs regarding war, Mason also objected to blacks participating in the fighting because “he witnessed how Whites were vehemently opposed to African Americans wearing their military uniforms in America,” and he “questioned the legitimacy of African Americans fighting for democracy abroad when they had no democracy at home.”¹⁰ Consequently, because of these views the Bureau alleged that Mason subverted the draft and advised black men not to fight in the war.¹¹ On July 16, 1918, Mason and two other men were arrested and one of the charges was committing offenses against the government.¹² In the end because of no solid evidence the grand jury did not indict Mason or the other two men and the charges were dropped.¹³

7. Ida B. Robinson (1891-1946) protested lynchings:

“There is but “*One Lord one faith and one baptism* (Eph 4:5)” so that, if *God is the Father of all* (Eph 4:6), the relationship that [exists] between Gentile and Jew, as well as Ethiopians, is ... unquestionably established.”

⁹ Daniels, “Doing,” 168.

¹⁰ Smith, “Seeking,” 107.

¹¹ Smith, “Seeking,” notes that Mason’s preaching and teaching was quite persuasive for although the black population was nearly eighty percent in Holmes County, Mississippi where Mason’s church was located more than half eligible for the draft did not sign up (107-108).

¹² White, *Rising*, 74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 75. Text taken from Lisa Bowens, *Sacred Matters: African American Readings of Paul—Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* and Lisa Bowens, *Faith Matters: African American Pauline Hermeneutics*, copyright © 2019 Lisa Bowens. Any use of this text in any form, including paraphrasing, must be cited and obtain written permission from Lisa Bowens.