PHI-815 History of the Integration of Religion & Society

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Professor

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Assignment #3 – Essay

1. Write a 5-page essay that analyzes the following items:

a. Introduction of the Present Issue: Begin with a contemporary social issue that

has a (probably unappreciated) history of positive Judeo-Christian response to it.

b. Body Sections:

i. Biblical Worldview Perspective: Locate the issue in the progress of

Biblical revelation and explain the foundations of a Judeo-Christian

perspective. What is a biblical/theological position on this issue based on

sound biblical interpretation?

ii. History of the Issue: Trace the development of the selected issue

alongside the history of Christianity's social impact on it. Summarize the

historical trend at different points in history with an eye to identifying

significant causes of the social problem, identifiable processes at work,

and enduring patterns that emerged. How did the problem/issue originate

and develop? What were the causes of the social problem? What

identifiable sociological or theological processes were at work? What

enduring patterns emerged that recur?

iii. Exemplars of Religion and Society Integration: Present a specific

example (e.g. key leader(s) or movement(s) of socially and intellectually

active Christians) of religion and society integration. If known, discuss

how God raised up the leader or movement.

iv. Applicable Principles: Distill the timeless principles of truth or leadership

derived from the historical examples above. (Develop these based on the

Body Sections #1-#3). Pose possible contemporary applications for the

integration of religion and society in your field of influence.

c. Conclusion: End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis. Discuss what

impact this research had on your sense of calling to change your world.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

How can the wealthiest country in the world have such a high poverty level?

Author Matthew Desmond sums it up nicely in his book Poverty, By America, by stating, “This is who we are: the richest country on earth, with more poverty than any other advanced democracy” (Desmond, 2023, p. 6).

According to the United States Census Bureau Report (USCBR), the official poverty rate in 2022 was 11.5 percent, with 37.9 million people in poverty (USCBR, 2022, p. 32). Having eleven and a half percent of our population living in poverty is unfathomable because we have more than enough resources to move people above the poverty threshold; we need to strategically address the situation and formulate a plan of action to curtail poverty in America (Desmond, 2023). As Boaheng states, “Poverty is one of the most significant challenges facing twenty-first-century society. No country in the world is unaffected by poverty. Global poverty keeps rising, especially in developing countries” (Boaheng, 2022, Introduction). Although every country is impacted by poverty, we, America, can and should do something about it.

There are a myriad of factors that contribute to people living in poverty, with discrimination and racism being prominent ones in America and American history. Desmond writes, “Over the course of American History, immigrants have served as scapegoats for America’s economic anxieties” (Desmond, 2023, p.33). Along with being the scapegoats, minorities, especially Hispanics and Blacks, have been historically discriminated against; to that end, even poor white families live in communities with lower poverty levels than poor Black and Hispanic families (Desmond, 2023). Growing up in what I know now to be the ghetto was an invaluable experience. The community I spent my formative years living in was filled with Blacks and sprinkled with Hispanics; there were not any White people in the neighborhood.

Poverty in the United States is measured by a threshold (Siddique, 2023, Introduction). I am sure everyone in my neighborhood was classified as impoverished/poor according to the abovementioned threshold. Even though we were poor, we did not know that our crime-infested, dilapidated neighborhood was out of the norm as it was simply home to us.

As I grew up and began to be exposed to other surroundings and people with means, a curiosity resonated with me. I wondered why my family and others who looked like me lived (by many standards) in unlivable conditions. I started to question why we did not have enough while my White counterparts residing in the other part of the city had more than enough. In short order, I came face to face with the reality that racism, poverty, and inequality have long lived in America.

Like my White counterparts, my neighborhood was self-sufficient; we had convenience stores (albeit with limited supplies), churches, and other small licensed and unlicensed businesses; we also had a fence around our community, as did they. In visiting some of my White friends, usually going over for a swim party in their private pool (which was a big deal to me), I noticed that although both of us had churches, stores, etc., theirs were much nicer. I also realized that their wall was there to keep their lifestyle contained, whereas ours was built to separate us from them. Walls are generally constructed for two purposes: to keep things in or out. They wanted to retain their lifestyle, which to some meant keeping us separated from them and the opportunities they were exclusively privileged to have.

The one place I found troubling that contained a (metaphorical) wall, so to speak, was the church. In my church, I was taught that all men were created equal, and due to injustice, man-made systems, and policies, Black people were being suppressed. While attending my White friend’s church, at times, the message seemed to insinuate that Black people did not work hard enough to cash in on the American dream and that their lifestyles corroborated that. Even in the church, I discovered there were differences of opinion based on racial worldviews; this was hard to process for a ten-year-old.

Looking at poverty and injustice through a biblical lens, I have always believed that humans are moral beings who seek justice for themselves and others (Maina, 2023, Introduction). Even though it is hard to believe, some people who are Christians (I guess) are prejudiced and or at least appear to push a discriminatory agenda. Their biases against people of color were captured well in a statement from one of Dr. King's writings by an unnamed White man in Dr. Martin Luther King’s book titled” Blessed Are the Peacemakers.” Dr. King quotes the individual who said, “We believe in segregation, and I mean believe in it as we believe in God” (Bass, 2021, p.1). Dr. King goes on to pen that many White Christians shared that opinion and apparently placed more faith in Jim Crow than Jesus Christ. During the time of slavery (which spilled over to Jim Crow), white Christians cherry-picked Bible verses to claim that God wanted enslaved persons to respect their enslavers; Black Christians insisted that there was only one master to obey and that one was God/Jesus. (Placencia, 2022, p.837)

The Bible I read says we are to love God and his best creation (Matthew 22:37-40; Arterburn & Merrill, 2004, p. 1120). All that God made was good, but God said it was very good when He made man. If God says that man is very good, that should be good enough for us to treat all men (and women) with dignity and respect regardless of skin color or social status.

Furthermore, America was built on biblical principles. In an article by Osuagwu, the author states, **“**It is noteworthy that American liberal democratic values spring from a culture primarily influenced by protestant virtues.

Protestant Christianity provides individuals with a moral compass for civic virtues central to forming republicanism. Many in the Founding generation believed that religion was necessary to preserve the virtues of good governance for a decent and orderly society” (Osuagwu, 2023, p. 10). A good and orderly bible-led society would demand that people be treated equally. Furthermore, I cannot be convinced the bible was written to be a tool to discriminate against people of color, people of different sexes (women), or people who have less education, fewer opportunities, or less money, landing them in the poverty/poor category, which makes me consider siding with the critics who say Christianity’s influence on society is decaying rapidly, and that American society is experiencing a moral decline (Stivers, 2023, Preface).

 In speaking of discrimination, two things come to my mind. American Slavery of Blacks and Jim Crow Laws. One norm that’s embedded in the fabric of American history is the misuse of black people and using them as slaves in particular. Due to the residue of being a slave, blacks were denied an education, voting rights, fundamental human rights, and the list goes on and on.

Being that a black slave was considered less-than-human, it was all but impossible for blacks to acquire land and or any other means (material things) that would contribute to them being wealthy at that moment in time and or put them on a path to obtain generational wealth. Slavery did not compensate Black people for their labor, thus impeding the income generation and intergenerational wealth transmission needed to combat poverty (Baker, 2020, p. 9)

By contrast, even poor white people could own land and purchase businesses that could lead to current and long-term financial stability, while Blacks could not own anything, not even themselves; they were the property of their slave owners.

Another prominent oppression system in place that impeded the progress of blacks was the Jim Crow law, which my ancestors from Missouri, who lived under this law, often remind me of. Under the Jim Crow Laws, blacks were legally discriminated against.

In twenty-one states, the Jim Crow laws endorsed racial segregation through legislation making economic, educational, and social segregation between people of color and Whites legal (Hswen et al., 2020, p.1).

Slavery and Jim Crow were different past manifestations of the U.S. racial regime at various times. They served as institutional state mechanisms of inequality. (Baker, 2020, p. 17).

Poverty in the United States, well over eleven percent, is measured by a threshold (Siddique, 2023, Introduction), which can be minimized if we work together to address it. In an article published in the Desert Sun, my local paper, Smythe, the columnist quoted Nelson Mandela, who said, “We can change the world and make it a better place” (Smythe, 2024, p. 7b). In addressing poverty (and racism in the wealthiest country in the world), we can and should move towards Mandela’s vision of working together to make the world a better place for all. Most impoverished people are people of color. Although there are a variety of factors that could lead to people living in poverty, one that should not be ignored is the history of racism, which is a significant contributor. Moreover, if America’s poor founded a country, that country would have a more significant population than Australia or Venezuela (Desmond, 2023), and based on my research, that country would consist of more Blacks (and Hispanics) than Whites.

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