Christianity and Social Reform

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* 1. Select One (1) Core Essential Element from the Syllabus Outline:
  2. Create a 350-word original discussion paper (with cited sources) during the first week of the term. Post this document in DIAL.

Despite the current rhetoric espoused by some American evangelicals, Christianity and social reform have historically been intimately connected. Since God's creation of the earth and humanity, built into His plan, has been the idea of social justice and social reform. At the very foundation of Christianity are the teachings of the Prophets, Jesus, His apostles, and the early Church on love, justice, compassion, and ensuring God's people were always mindful of the less fortunate, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus would set the thesis for His ministry when He quoted from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18,

"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED…". These biblical teachings spurned a movement among many Christians to promote a cause for human dignity.

The Wesleyan faith tradition is one such movement that made these principles central to their theology. John Wesley, for whom the faith tradition is named, theology was shaped by these ideas. Daniel Dei (2024), writing about Wesley, stated, "He subsequently developed a theology oriented around the notion that faith in Jesus and an embrace of the spirit makes salvation achievable and that promoting social justice and ethical living is a sacred responsibility of all believers." Dei would continue, "The Wesleyan tradition also emphasizes the importance of social responsibility. Believing that all believers have the responsibility to improve their communities, Wesley participated in various forms of Christian activism, such as the campaign for reform in prisons and the abolition of slavery."

John Wesley is just one example of Christians throughout history whose theology has influenced their will to fight for the reformation of society rooted in biblical teachings. Throughout history, many well-known Christian figures have led movements heavily influenced by their theology and belief that the gospel's power to transform individuals would inevitably change communities and society. Figures such as William Wilberforce, who detested and fought against the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was the face and champion of the American Civil Rights Movement, would draw inspiration from their theological faiths to be advocates for social reform and justice.

The influence of Christianity on social reforms extends beyond the borders of the United States and even North America. Social reforms through the lens of Christianity are apparent on the continent of Africa, specifically the country of Nigeria. The faith tradition of Pentecostalism heavily saturates Nigeria and has been integral in the reforms seen throughout the country. As attested to by Akanbi and Beyers (2017) in their article, "Through their social interaction and religious sphere, the Pentecostal movements have made their contributions to the well-being of society. For example, the establishment of rehabilitation centres, hospitals, providing centres for youth empowerment, and so on. "

Recognizing how Christianity has influenced different cultures across different demographics, continents, ethnicities, and even eras, Jesus's divine plan for His teachings to the end of the earth is seemingly being manifested before our eyes through the work of the Church. Social reform that is underscored by the foundational principles of Christianity demonstrates, in very practical terms, the ability of Christianity to inspire individuals and communities to be diligent in the work of moving toward a world that is defined by compassion, love, justice, and truth for and towards all of humanity just as God intended.

Works Cited

Akanbi, S. O., & Beyers, J. (2017). The church as a catalyst for transformation in the society. HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies, 73(4). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4635>

Dei, D. (2024). Wilberforce, Nightingale and King Jr: The Wesleyan Tradition as a Basis for Social Justice and Ethical Living. Holiness, 9(2), 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.2478/holiness-2024-0014>

New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). The Lockman Foundation.