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# Social justice and the formation of a social justice message by some churches

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## **Abstract**

*Social justice has filled the globe and its agenda and push on humanity have become evident. This 'justice' does not portray the justice of the Bible yet many Christians have fallen prey to this worldly justice, believing it to equate to biblical justice and therefore it is necessary to submit to its tenets. As a result, a modified gospel to accommodate the social justice agenda has been created. Unfortunately, this 'justice' presented as the modern redeemer of the inequalities of humanity is flawed and nothing more than a creation of the reprobate mind of sinful mankind that can never attain harmony and equality set out as its goals. This article points out that its agenda has infiltrated the church and led to some movements to redefine and reinterpret central biblical doctrine to accommodate the tenets of social justice. It further points out that the church has the calling to expose and oppose the misleading meaning that is approved by social justice and to continue to preach the undiluted gospel of Jesus Christ the only justifier.*

## Opsomming

*Die sosiale geregtigheid agenda en doelstellings is aan die orde van die dag. Die tipe 'geregtigheid' wat deur die beweging voorgedra word is nie kenmerkend van die geregtigheid in die Bybel nie nogtans glo talle christene dat dit verband hou met geregtigheid in die Bybel. Die druk om te konformeer met die sosiale doelstellings het gelei tot die skepping van 'n "ander evangelie". Die hedendaagse sosiale geregtigheid word beskou as 'n godsdiens wat die mensdom kan bevry van die ongelykhede wat daarin heers. Dit bly in gebreke en is niks meer as die skepping van die verwronge verstand van die gevalle mensdom wat nie harmonie en gelykheid kan verseker nie. Die artikel toon aan dat onkunde omtrent die doelstellings en oorsprong van sosiale geregtigheid tot gevolg het dat die valse leerstelling subtiel die kerk ingevoer is. Verder dat die Christelike kerk die roeping het om die valsheid in die term "sosiale geregtigheid" en die doelstellings daarvan te onbloom as vals en misleidend. Daarmee saam moet die kerk voortgaan om die suiwer evangelie te verkondig wat in staat is om die mensdom te bevry en te regverdig voor God.*

## 1. Introduction

The active propaganda of social justice over the last few years has reached a point where its impact on the world population is felt more tangible through legislation, protests, celebrations, and media coverage. The persistent presence of social justice propaganda and its demands have not only applied pressure on society to conform but more specifically also on the Christian church and the traditional Christian faith. The social justice movement promotes the seemingly noble idea of redeeming the disadvantaged from any form of slavery and oppression. To be more specific: to redress the oversight of certain dimensions to the concept of justice displayed in the incomprehensive principles of civil and criminal law, economic supply, and demand of the traditional framework. The premise of this movement is founded on several mortal theories critical of the unjust structures and functioning of society. In the view of some, the goals of social justice are encompassing principles that need to become part of a "universal religion" that must replace traditional Christian beliefs (Real Stories, 2022). A new social-religious doctrine that embodies the goals of social justice has been absorbed by some churches now known as "social justice churches".

Although the 'social justice churches' claim to be Christian, their focus is not on faith but on moral action and are based on a perennial view that everyone shares the same truth. The goal of the church according to this view is to present itself as a more suitable and progressive religion for the age that is committed to taking action that will realign misdirected reality. They further predict that non-conformance to this view will lead to the eventual death of the church (Real Stories, 2022).

At face value, the term social justice seems to be a fair ideal and as a result, some 'Christian churches' without determining the real meaning, underlying agenda, and goals of social justice have fallen prey to amending the gospel to be in solidarity with the social justice movement. The wave of the social justice movement sweeping across the world must not be underestimated as it aims not only to unite those of the same mind but also to bring to subjection those that hold different views. Continuous propaganda by the media and other interventions demand adherence to this movement. Anyone of a different belief is labeled as intolerant, judgmental, divisive, and even violent. The Christian church and Christian beliefs upholding true justice are viewed as elitist and an oppressive and judgmental enemy of this movement.

This article endeavors to find out what lies behind this movement, why it is driven so forcefully and what the Bible says about justice, and how it has infiltrated the arena of Christianity. More importantly, it explores how Christians should respond to social justice and its demands.

## **2. What is Social Justice all about?**

In a secular sense, justice in general means fairness. Rules for fairness are grounded either in human consensus or societal norms to ensure fair treatment of all members of society (Maiese & Burgess, 2020).

### ***2.1 Definition of Social Justice***

Social justice can be defined as the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and privileges in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability, status, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual background (Van der Boss, 2003). The motivation for social justice in society is that it will ensure the healthy functioning of society in different forms. Firstly, the overall physical and mental health and well-being that will reduce vulnerability to illness (Ayala, Hage, and Wilcox, 2011). Secondly, it will ensure relational (family), political, and social (communities and society)

wellbeing (Kenny, M., & Hage, S. M, 2009; Prilleltensky, I., & Nelson, G, 2002).

The United Nations (UN) views social justice in the contemporary sense as more definitively described as distributive justice. Their conclusion hinges on several academic and legal works that include international instruments such as the Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Copenhagen Declaration, and the Program of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. The crux of their view is based on the first chapter of 'A Theory of Justice', by John Rawls (1971) commonly known as the "principles of social justice" (UN, 2006: 13). The two principles referred to in this book are (1) Each person is to have an equal right as well as equal liberties and opportunities. (2) Social and economic inequalities in society are to be arranged in such a way that they (a) will benefit the least advantaged more and (b) positions and offices will be made available to all based on fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971).

Rawls (1971) proposed a non-utilitarian system that would be fair, equal, and consider individual rights. An effective way to establish such a system would be from a position of "ignorance", meaning that those that are tasked with determining how society should be organized must not be aware of what position they will hold in that society. In other words, if they would be poor, or rich, from a high or low class, or advantaged or disadvantaged. This state of being "ignorant" of where a person or their family would be placed in the system would cause them to make decisions that would be fair to everyone despite class, race, or gender in the name of self-interest. The principle of doing unto others as you want to be done unto yourself will apply. The following principles would originate: (1) an equal degree of liberty for everyone (equal liberty principle); (2) an [equal opportunity](#) for everyone (equal opportunity principle); and (3) equal distribution of wealth in society (equal distribution principle) based on the condition that such distribution will benefit those who are least well-off so that they will be better off than they would be under any other distribution, whether equal or unequal (Dahl, n.d.). Inequalities in society should be arranged in such a way that they benefit the less advantaged the most. This may mean that unequal distributions of wealth can be permissible to ensure that the least well-off are better off than they would be under an equal distribution (Dahl, n.d.).

Although these principles of Rawls's seem noble, they were met with some critique (Powers 2014). One of Rawls's critics is Hayek (1976) who argues that although Rawls is concerned about the well-being of humans, his principles are distinct from humanitarian assistance. Social justice has

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a different focus, namely the norms, institutions and conditions that create an opportunity for humanitarian assistance. Human assistance refers broadly to the transfer of resources to meet acute needs in society. One objection raised against Rawls's principles is that they are distinct from moral concerns. Hayek (1976:3) argued that "only human conduct can be called just or unjust". Justice is linked to the actions of an individual which they have performed or neglected to perform. Social justice instances refer to states of affairs that show inequalities for which there is no identifiable agent who can be held accountable. Social justice is therefore not addressed to individual action but to society, which in turn is incapable of acting for a specific purpose (Powers, 2014:2968).

The United Nations is an international organization predominantly leading the way to social justice and promotes distributive and redistributive justice based on the principles of Rawls. The United Nations has identified three critical areas of distribution where equality and equity need to be restored: (1) Equality of rights without discrimination of race, color, gender, language, religion, politics, nationality, social origin, property birth, or another status. (2) Equality of opportunities – each person should have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential and to contribute in society. Also, to correct any "unnatural" inequalities through public policies. (3) Equity in living conditions – the shift is from equality that has not been able to achieve equality in living conditions to equity. Equity according to the UN is based on "The truly egalitarian Marxist principle – "from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs" that would only prevail (with any success) in the distant and quasi-Utopian "end of history" referred to in Communist theory. In short, equity is the most logical reference point in determining what is just and what is unjust concerning living conditions and related matters within society" (United Nations, 2006:16). What the exact definition of equity is, in their context, is not clear as they admit it is "an inherently vague and controversial notion" (United Nations 2006:17).

*Equity* is generally understood as a reward that is equal to the contribution to society and differs from *equality* which means an equal share to everyone regardless of their input. It is also clearly distinguished from *need* that is based on the principle of those who need more will get more and those that need less will get less (Maiese & Burgess, 2020). It seems that the interpretation of social justice is based rather on needs according to rights that are afforded to a certain class in society. Young (2013) describes this 'equity' as a distribution not based on the evaluation of what the individuals earned or deserve through their efforts, but on the rights of a group to equal communal sharing of what individuals of society produce.

Who will determine the criteria for distributive justice based on equity, what agreement will be in place, and against what will it be tested? Answers to these questions are not clear and thus they create the opportunity for improvised resolutions. Hayek (1979:4) describes what he terms the incapability emptiness of social justice "... the phrase 'social justice' shows itself [incapable] in the fact that no agreement exists about what social justice requires in particular instances; also that there is no known test by which to decide who is right if people differ; and that no preconceived scheme of distribution could be effectively devised in a society whose members are free, in the sense of being allowed to use their knowledge for their purposes. Indeed, individual moral responsibility for one's actions is incompatible with the realization of any such desired overall pattern of distribution".

The statement of the UN that the term equity is vague and controversial seems to have been hijacked by those that promote the need and rights for identity politics. The focus of social justice seemed to have shifted from the underprivileged in a social and economic sense to the victims (needy) of identity politics based on gender and race ideologies. Maiese & Burgess (2020) warn that distributive justice is no easy feat and that poor handling of it may result in intractable conflicts.

## ***2.2 The evolution of the concept of Social Justice and the modern-day concept of Social Justice***

Reisch (2002) provides an overview of how the concept of social justice has evolved from the concept to redress the effects of hierarchical inequalities of a particular people or nation to a system that would ensure harmony through the distribution of goods based on a person's position in the class system. This distribution should be sanctioned by law to ensure social order. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, social justice was to be maintained by the authority of absolute rulers in society (Reisch, 2002:344). In the nineteenth century, the concept of a social contract was birthed that included individual liberty, property rights, and social equality (Tomasi, 2001, Barry, 1989). The utilitarian concept of social justice followed in the twentieth century promoting "the greatest net balance of satisfaction for society" where contribution is based on contribution in the past or present (Mill, 1971). In 1986 the Catholic Bishop's conference in the United States suggested that economic and social institutions should be organized as channels that can contribute to justice across race, gender and class of society. In recent years social justice is based on the belief that race and racism, and sexuality are social constructs that are deeply rooted in the formation of political, economic and social systems, as well as culture. This view led to debates that focus

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on the nature and functioning of social relationships, communities, and the structure of the economy, politics, and history to constitute a healthy society (Reisch, 2002).

As was indicated above, the modern-day concept of social justice has changed over time and the contemporary focus is no longer on social class but race, gender, sexuality, and disability (Griffiths, 1998:103). In this latest shift, identity politics and the transformation of structures have become prominent. Barto (2021) points out some of the manifestations of identity politics. It resulted in the formation of exclusive political alliances based on religion, race, social background, sexuality, and gender to secure political and social freedom for only a specific constituency: the disadvantaged. It functions exclusively and does not engage with anyone outside of their specific circumstances. Disagreement with their position is not tolerated. Identity politics has become the glue that binds together a collection of goals of various social groups. Identity politics will not settle for less than the dethronement of the oppressors needed to transform society. Identity politics proponents do not show commonly shared human attributes nor are satisfied to be respected despite differences but demand unquestionable respect for themselves as different (Kruks, 200:85). The “white privileged” are the oppressors, more specifically defined as heterosexual, Caucasian males responsible for free capital markets, slavery, segregation, gender discrimination, and many other oppressive acts. Identity politics deviate from the initial noble idea of realigning distribution and fairness in society to divisive acts visible in disruption, misinformation, smear campaigns, insurrection, acts of violence and reverse discrimination. Christians are viewed as elitist and narrow-minded with an archaic Judeo-Christian system of justice that must be eradicated. This view of social justice has led to violence that has brought a bigger divide between class, political parties, religion, and nationalities. This is all far removed from one of the desired outcomes of social justice, namely harmony and equality in society (Barto, 2021).

### ***2.3 Foundation of Social Justice***

Several mortal theories provide the basis for the justification of social justice. Some of these theories that give impetus to the social justice movement will be discussed briefly below.

The foundation of social justice is cultural Marxism, based on the dynamic of oppressor versus oppressed no longer in an economic context but in the cultural context (Lindsay, 2020b). Culture is viewed as central to the legitimization of oppression and therefore cultural Marxism and conspiracy

explain the progressive cultural change many Western countries experienced since the counter-culture revolution in 1960 (Busbridge, Moffitt & Thorburn, 2020:3). The proponents of this conspiracy to transform society explain that it is not merely a critique of the culture but a deliberate calculated plan to dismantle Western values, traditions, and civilization (Berkowitz, 2003; Breitbart, 2011). Several other mortal theories such as critical theory, critical race theory, and intersectionality are based on this notion of cultural Marxism.

**The critical theory** originated from several sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany who referred to themselves as the Frankfurt School. Critical theories aim at critiquing and changing society as a whole. The critical theory aims to expose the assumptions that are lying beneath the surface of social life that create a “false consciousness” of how the world functions. This false consciousness limits and undermines people’s progress toward true democracy (Crossman, 2020. Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The critical theory’s objectives are: to find what is wrong in society, identify what needs to change and set out practical goals for transformation (Horkheimer, 1992). The critical theory according to Aloiai (2021) has two important elements: first, the critical component assumes that society is made up of oppressor groups and oppressed groups. “The theory element is built upon postmodern epistemology and functions to bolster the claims and accusations levied by the critical branch of the system” (Aloiai, 2021). Critical theory is visible in feminist theories, cultural theory, gender, queer theory, and abortion theory as well as in media theory and media studies and approaches to conducting social sciences (Crossman, 2020).

**Critical race theory** is a movement of scholars, activists, law, educators, and others that study the relationship between race, racism, and the power to transform it. The movement argues that society is fundamentally constructed on race. As a result, all economic, political, and historical interactions with institutions and social processes are race-based. Critical theorists are needed to uproot this underlying systemic racism wherever it is found. It does not follow a process of step-by-step progress but instead questions the foundations of the liberal order, including equality, legal reasoning, enlightenment, rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Delgado & Stefani, 2017; Thompson, 2015). Critical race theory holds that race is a socially constructed concept and is not a natural, biological feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings. This socially constructed race is used to oppress and exploit people of color. The principles of critical race theory are based on power, not truth, and are about identity politics, especially racial identity as is evident in The Black Lives Matter movement (Lindsay, 2020a).



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**Intersectionality.** The Centre for Intersectional Justice (n.d) defines intersectionality “[As a] concept [that]describes how systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects. All forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and must therefore be analyzed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another”. Intersectional justice aims at the equal and fair distribution of opportunities, rights, wealth, and political power in society. The driving force behind it is equality and human rights. Intersectional justice takes into account how privileges as a result of societal structures can lead to the disadvantage of others. The focus of intersectional justice is on disadvantaged people and groups of people that face limitations as a result of societal structures. To address the inequalities brought about by systemic discriminatory structures, institutions need to be established that can allocate opportunities and resources, whether directly or indirectly. The focus of these institutions is far and wide and includes the education system, labor market, health and social insurance systems, taxation, housing, media, the bank and loan system (Centre for Intersectional Justice, n.d.). The following principles form the bedrock of redressing inequalities: access, diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and human rights (Khechen, 2013).

All of the above theories have several principles in common such as the distinction between oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressors are in control of the political, historical, and economic structures that deliberately suppress certain categories of identity. This has led to corrupt systems and inequality in the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges and the enrichment of certain humans. The structures in the society invented a false consciousness of the function of society that needs to be exposed, uprooted, and replaced. The transformation of society must be established by subverting the Western institutions like schools, universities, media, entertainment industry, and religion, that are all plagued by this systemic corruption.

Although the notion to address corruption in society is a noble idea, the strategy and premises of the contemporary social justice movement have shifted to the rights of certain identities based on race and sexuality, instead of focusing on social and economic disadvantaged groups across the board. The demands of these neo-identity political and socially excluded collectives find expression in different social movements of the day.

## **2.4 Some modern-day social movements of identity equity**

In the modern day, one aspect of the social justice movement that has intensified is its promotion and more vivid presence of an invented identity category of collectives that form part of the social movements. It has become the norm to address inequalities of this group through protests, propaganda, censorship, and legislation that outlaws discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, class, or religion. The pressure for society to conform is further increased through frequent revolutions, celebrations, non-institutional strategies, and tactics in sustained campaigns by those excluded collectives of society to bring about social change (Chase-Dunn & Nagy, 2019). These social movements can be described as collective actions that either challenge or defend existing structures or systems of authority (Snow & Soule, 2009).

As a result of being disadvantaged and marginalized in society, many social movements have sprung up over time. Some prominent movements that have emerged are the feminist movement, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQIA2+, marriage equality, racial equality, bodily autonomy, abortion rights and many more.

## **3. Some prominent modern-day identity-centered social movements**

Although there are many social movements, this article will focus on two prominent movements that have arisen of late, grouped around the idea of rights based on certain identification categories, namely the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and LGBTQIA2+ movements. It will establish the traces of the social justice tenets and goals by providing a brief overview of each one's beliefs and aims.

### **3.1 Black Lives Matter**

The Black Lives Matter movement was started in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Parisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Mireles, 2020), and describes its mission as follows: *"Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc. is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives"* (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). The movement affirms black people from all spheres and gender spectrums, including Queers, transgenders, disabilities, people with criminal

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records, women, and all other black lives. It works towards eradicating the systems that target and oppress blacks (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, n.d.). The goals of the BLM are: to expose unfair treatment by institutions in society, fight racism, combat police brutality, defunding of Police, provision of funds for these communities, and greater involvement in elections (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, n.d.).

### **3.2 *LGBTQIA2+***

The National LGBTQ task force sets as a goal the full freedom, justice, and equality of LGBTQ people. They envisage a future where they all can be themselves in every aspect of life. To eradicate discrimination in terms of housing, employment and basic human rights through the mobilization of millions of activists across the nation. Their goal is not only equality but a transformed society (LGBTQ Task Force, 2022).

Another organization for the advancement of LGBTQ rights, Human Rights Watch, echoes similar goals: namely to expose and document worldwide abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These include all killing, torturing, executions, arrests under unjust laws, unequal treatment, censorship, medical abuses and discrimination in health, jobs, and housing, domestic violence and abuses against children, and denial of family rights and recognition. This will be achieved through advocacy for laws and policies (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

The goals of the two above movements echo the goals that are outlined in the different theories, namely critiquing the current structures as inadequate and requiring their eradication to bring about a transformed society. Both movements distinguish between the oppressors (privileged) and oppressed of society and both have refined their ideology by the inclusion of identity politics. The definition of the oppressed in this context refers to those belonging to a class in society created through invented categories of identity (social constructs). This equity is known as identity equity where the role of race and other intersections such as gender are used to determine the better distribution of opportunities (Morton & Fashing-Varner, 2015:303). In the case of race, the term race, more specifically the race of color, has been changed to be understood not as referring to a biological, natural, physical distinguishable group of humanity but as a social construct of the privileged to be able to oppress. Similarly, gender has been redefined in such a way that it also denies the natural, biological, and distinction between male and female as comprehensive. The understanding of gender identification has little reference to the biological and natural state but refers to socially constructed

categories based on the individual right to identify according to impulse. The proponents of the gender ideology justify this classification by describing biological sex as nature and gender identification as nurture. One may have been born in sex – male or female – but as a result of raising and nurturing, identifies differently. This classification of gender is in direct opposition to the creative order of God who created males and females embedded in the genes of humans (Gen 1:27). Equity no longer means that the reward must equal the contribution to society but it is based on certain rights concerning their identity that deserves “different treatment” or even “special treatment”. It seems that the ideologies of identity in race and gender fit into what the UN described as “unnatural inequalities” (United Nations, 2006:16).

The notion of social justice to uproot the corruption of the political, economic, and historical systems and advance the lives of the disadvantaged seems to be a noble idea but the burning question remains whether the aims and precepts of social justice as explained above can be based on the concept of justice in the Bible?

#### **4. What is Biblical Justice?**

Although humans generally understand justice as either vindictive or distributive justice, proper discernment of the word justice shows it as a parallel or synonym of salvation. God is said to be just and saving (Is 45:21) and His justice is not far from His salvation (Is 46:13, 51:5). In the Old Testament justice is bestowed on the just man and the wrath is reserved for the unjust. Justice stands in the context of God’s covenant with His people of Israel and is neither vindictive nor distributive but salvific (Watson, 2004). God’s justice points to His faithfulness to realize the promises of salvation and deliverance. In the Old Testament the Messiah is the one that will bring about God’s perfect salvific justice (Is 9:6, 11:3-9; Jer 23:6). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul explains the five principles of justice in the book of Romans. First, God is faithful to His covenant promise of salvation (Rom 1:17). Second, even if humans are wicked and deserve the justice of God to inflict wrath on them, God’s fidelity and truth to his covenant are not changed by the unrighteousness of humankind (Rom 3:5). Third, the justice of God is revealed and manifested through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom 3:22-23). Fourth, the propitiation of Christ’s blood through faith and the remission of sins is proof of God’s justice and that He justifies those who

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have faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:25-26). Lastly, those who are ignorant of the justice of God and seeking to establish their justice are not submitting to God's justice (Encyclopedia.com. Religion, Justice of God, n.d.).

In the Old and New Testaments, God's justice is inseparably linked to His merciful fidelity to His promise of salvation. God is perfectly just; "... a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut. 32:3-4). The Lord is perfectly righteous and just (Psalm 89:14). "He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD" (Psalm 33:5). "God's will is the supreme rule of justice; it is the standard of equity. God wills nothing but what is just; and therefore, it is just because He wills it" (Watson, 2004). God is just in himself and is the cause of the justice or righteousness within sinful humankind and gives justice when he justifies the unrighteous (Rom 4:5). Justice flows from God's character, He loves justice (Psalm 45:7). God is judge and king and His judgment is according to the truth and He alone can justify (Rom 3:26, 8:33). If He justifies who can condemn? God's judgment cannot be overruled or modified and is secured in the death of Christ. The merit of his death paid our debt in full (Henry, 1953:426). God is the master of our judgment as sinful humans. "As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10). "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Humankind cannot justify themselves or others, but it is through the grace of God that they are freely justified (Rom 3:24). Justice does not originate from humankind and although humankind may believe that they can justify themselves, they walk in the vanity of the mind that is darkened and alienated from the life of God and have given themselves to lasciviousness to work uncleanness with greediness (Eph 4:18-19). Humans in their sinful nature are conducting themselves in the lusts of their flesh fulfilling the desires of the mind and flesh, and are by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:1-5). God's justice can only be attained through Jesus Christ: anything outside of that is in vain. Justice means that human beings have been made right with God through Jesus Christ.

God's justice is also applied most broadly to God's action towards creation and particularly towards humans in so far as He renders to each and all their due. God's justice is shown forth in the manifestation of the universe in both the physical nature and the endowment of all human beings with a will. This universal mercy of justice of God is visible in that He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and unjust (Matt 5:45). He will render to every man according to his works (Prov 24:12; Rom 2:6; Heb

6:10). God is an impartial judge who judges the cause. People on the other hand often judge the person, and not the cause; which is not justice, but malice.

Justice firstly refers to the vertical aspect of justification through Christ and reconciliation with God and secondly, the outliving of that justification on a horizontal level is described as benevolence towards other human beings. Bonino (1987:14) describes it as follows: “Justice can therefore be understood only as related to covenant, the relation which God himself has instituted by creating a people for himself – calling it, bringing it from captivity, introducing it into the land, as the early “creeds” confess. These acts of deliverance are acts of justice in which Yahweh proves himself faithful to the relationship he has established. It is this same faithfulness that is required from the partners in the covenant both in the relation to God and in the communal relations of everyday life. Thus “justice” is realized, created ever anew in the interconnected and changing relations of life constantly qualified by that all-encompassing common relation to Yahweh”.

#### ***4.1 The disparity between God's justice and social justice***

According to Bassey (2016:1356), the early Christian church's understanding of true justice was to submit to the sovereignty of God and trust in Jesus Christ as savior instead of trusting in a government of mortal beings and social contract. Jesus's involvement in day-to-day political, social, and racial issues was based on the message of salvation. Although He reached out to those who were mishandled, disregarded and abused, He offered profound healing to the brokenhearted, deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberty to those who were bruised (Luke 4:18). Real deliverance starts with being justified through Christ and being set free from the bondage of sin that entered humankind through the unjust and sinful actions of Adam. Those that have experienced the salvation of Christ are not called to reach out to the needy in the worldly way as prescribed by mortal fallible interventions but through compassion that originates from God's justice as is evident in Deut. 15:7-8: “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be”. Matt 25:31-40, confirms the calling to take care of the hungry, naked, and thirsty without differentiation or preferential treatment based on race, ethnicity, gender, or class. In the sight of God, there are no male or female, free or slave, Jew or Gentile, they are all the same in accepting the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28). Justice

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in the Bible is selfless and not for gain, recognition or self-enrichment. This act of justice – to do right, is based on two important biblical principles (a) do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matt 7:12) and (b) do not show partiality to a certain class or identity of society. The Bible is clear that no partiality must be shown to the poor nor favoritism to the great and successful but our neighbor must be judged fairly (Lev 19:15; 1 Pet 1:17; James 2:1-9). These biblical principles of justice are founded on the foundational command to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 23: 37-40). If you love God with your whole being there will be no room for injustice and second, if you love your neighbor as yourself, you will tend to act toward your neighbor in a way that you consider acceptable to yourself (Bassey, 2016).

The disparity is further the result of Post-Modern society's redefining of biblical justice according to Hampshire (2020): First, different standards of morality exist, promoting the idea that everyone's judgment of right and wrong is sufficient. Second, God's character is accepted partially and only as it fits the circumstances. Last, justice and fairness are misunderstood and God's justice is downplayed against attributes such as kindness, grace, mercy, and love.

Biblical justice cannot be equated to distributive social equity that is based on everybody's needs. Biblical justice does not promote only distressed and poor people to show justice but justice is sufficient to address also the deep need of humanity for salvation. It does not teach liberal and free giving and welfare through state-subsidized high-tax assessments (Bassey, 2016:1358). Justice in the Bible is not covetous of what your neighbor has nor is it a means to obtain that. It is not unequal justice as God sends rain on the believing and unbelieving. It does not promote sameness but acknowledges diversity for which God's grace is sufficient. It is founded on loving God above all else and obeying His commands as is clear in the first four instructions in the ten commandments and the rest giving instructions on how to adore our neighbor as ourselves (Ex. 20:1-18).

Social justice measured against the above explanation of justice in the Bible falls completely short of the true meaning of justice. It cannot be described as any different than being an invented idea to advance the lustful desires of the corrupt human mind. Unfortunately, a misinterpreted concept of justice and more specifically social justice has misled many Christians. As a result, the Word of God has been minimized, watered down and modified, rendering it powerless (2 Tim3:5) to accommodate the aims of social justice into their "false gospel" (Gal 1:8). Having said that, the Bible does call believers to show

compassion to the needy and struggling and perform acts to assist them as an expression and extension of the love of God. These tenets of compassion and benevolence make no distinction but offer without prejudiced kindness.

Ascol (2019), a pastor of America's largest Evangelical denomination Southern Baptist Convention points out the disparity between social justice and biblical justice. The pressure to conform to the social justice of the age has led to a "new universal religious doctrine" across some evangelical denominations. The new religion replaces the traditional Christian doctrines and dismisses the truth of God's word whenever it contradicts the tenets of social justice. God's creation that includes various hierarchies and boundaries for the functioning of society is rejected in the name of equity. Political correctness has now also become the motto of the new religion instead of obeying the Word of God. Those that speak out will be labeled a heretic, even violent. Holiness in this religious doctrine is how many victim statuses (or disadvantages) you have accrued. Those without victim statuses must become allies with those that have victim statuses. Conversion in this new religious doctrine is to awake and incorporate the cultural Marxist ideology into your belief thus becoming 'woke'. Original sin is to be privileged and the biggest sin is to be of "white privilege", more specifically a white, able, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender male – this sin must be rooted out. Salvation or redemption is to be delivered from your victim statuses. There is no atonement for white privilege since white men can never be free from their systemic guilt (Baucham, 2021:78). Submission to this universal religious doctrine is almost mandatory and applied through laws. A classic example is the conversion therapy law passed in countries that makes conversion practices intended to change or suppress someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression illegal. This law is a direct attempt to shut out the gospel, the only means by which humankind can be saved and set free.

## **5. The impact of the new religious doctrine of Social Justice in some Christian churches and teaching**

The agenda and influence of the new religion of social justice has resulted in a "social gospel". Rev. Meyers of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma refers to these churches as "social justice churches" (Real Stories, 2022). In this documentary called 'American Heretics: The politics of the Gospel', Jones the CEO of Public Religious Research Institute in Washington, points out that the traditional church is dying and that the new direction is that of social justice. The influence of social justice on Christianity



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cannot be denied whether sporadic or in the formation of new “Christian doctrines” present as part of Progressive Christianity and the Emerging Church.

### ***5.1 Progressive Christianity***

The homepage of the progressive Christian movement defines themselves as workers for social justice: “Being a constructive force for social and environmental justice and peace in the world. We continue to seek out allies in the struggle to bring social and environmental justice and peace to all people, especially those who have been oppressed and are powerless” (Progressive Christianity.org, 2022).

Childers (2021) gives a summary of the modified beliefs of progressive Christians. Their gospel is nothing more than the fabrication of their re-interpretation of the Bible, through which they had to re-assesses historical doctrines and re-define core tenets of the Christian faith to suit their social gospel in line with the tenets of social justice. The Bible, according to progressive Christians, is merely a book written by ancient people in an attempt to understand God in their particular circumstances. It is not authoritative because of its contradiction and is internally incoherent. In the light of this view of the Bible and against the backdrop of social justice and critical theory the atonement is seen as a horrific act and the father requiring a blood sacrifice of his son makes Him a divine abuser. They deny the concept of original sin and claim that humans are not separated from God as a result of their sin but through self-imposed shame (Kruger, 2020). Deliverance comes through the realization that they are not separated from God and that He accepts them just as they are. The gospel is not about salvation but moralism (Kruger, 2020). Progressive Christianity denies the deity of Jesus and sees Him as a “Cosmic Christ”, one who has been christened. He is a moral example to follow that will lead to finding the divine in ourselves (Childers, 2021; Kruger, 2020). Some progressive Christians deny Jesus’s resurrection, it is not important if Christ was resurrected however, the meaning of the resurrection is more important. The virgin birth is also not that important to them. The Trinity is downplayed and some hold the pantheistic view – the universe is God. Others hold a panentheistic view that God and the universe are interrelated – God is all and all is God. This makes God somehow dependent on the universe. They focus more on the humanity of Jesus and point to imperfections in his life, for example, in Matthew 15, Jesus’s interaction with the Syrophoenician women is judged as racially biased for which Jesus had to correct his actions.

This modified and false gospel or new religious doctrine of the progressive Christians opened the door to affirm the social justice agenda and its “victims” such as the LGBTQ movement, racist ideologies, and universalism that promotes that all will be saved denying Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. They affirm pluralism that acknowledges that different roads lead to God and no religion is superior to another, also pantheism, panentheism, and hold a perennial view – everybody from whatever belief has the same source, they share the same truth (Childers, 2021). This is heresy and makes the work of Christ to no avail.

## **5.2 Emergent Church**

Slick (2007) describes the Emergent Church that started in the late 1980s as a movement which claims to be Christian and uses a broad controversial culturally-sensitive approach that would be attractive to reach the post-modern unchurched generation with the message of the Bible. Not all Emerging Churches are the same; some may use props in their services such as candles, statues, incense, poems and videos, while others may be more formal. The approach of the Emerging churches is that they aim to reach people through developing relationships and through “a journey of life”.

There are three streams of Emerging Churches, namely: the Relevant stream that acknowledges the cultural change but sees no need for the church to change but to reach out with faith amidst the culture. Secondly, the Reconstructionists believe the structure of the church needs to be changed to house churches and neo-monastic settings. No budget or building is needed. Thirdly, the Revisionists question the key evangelical doctrines, finding that the church must change to accommodate the culture of the day and the motto of the church must be “to create a theology that dances with the culture” (Driscoll, et al, 2004).

The Emerging Revisionists show traces of Postmodernism and claim there is no universal truth but the truth is the product of own perception and interpretation. To claim to know the truth is arrogant, according to the Emergent Church. The truth is fashioned by culture and not scripture. Finding your way to God is personal and not through bibliolatry. Those who do not accept the gospel cannot be declared lost (Jackson, 2022). The leaders of the Emerging Church usually adopt the principles of social justice, liberation theology, and collective salvation. Elements of Universalism, the Seeker-Friendly Movement, and even New Age Spirituality are also incorporated by some leaders (Berean Research, 2017).

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The Emerging Church boasts a great number of influential people that deceive many. One of the most prominent figures is Briann McLaren (Kowalski, 2014). In his book, "A new kind of Christianity" (2010) McLaren denies all the core elements of Christianity, the fall, original sin, and sinfulness of humankind and hell. Although he believes that the Bible is inspired, he says one needs to be enlightened to read it in a new narrative structure to understand it (Challies, 2022).

Both of the above "Christian" movements had to adjust core elements of Christianity based on scripture to be accommodative to the social justice agenda and in creating a new universal religion. This demonstrates what the scriptures say about false teachers among the Christians that will bring in heresies' privily and many will follow their pernicious ways (2 Pet 2:1-3). Unfortunately, friendship with the social justice agenda is not exclusive to the two above-mentioned movements but is visible in other Christian churches and amongst church members of other denominations. One reason why Christians succumb to this false religion is to make a good external show in the culture of the day and because they want to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ similar to the Judaizes in Galatia (Gal 6:12-13). It is an abomination to reduce God's word to a level where it fits the mortal agendas of social justice. It signifies bending the knee before mortal institutions while arrogantly and proudly justifying it through a mutilated presentation of the word of God.

## 6. Conclusion

The agenda and strategies of social justice have infiltrated and captured spheres such as society, politics, education, law, academia, governments, business, and media. It will use who and whatever to attain its goal to subvert the institutions of society and transform them in the name of 'social justice'. Even Christianity has not escaped its onslaught and pressure to conform. The infiltration and propaganda are subtle and wide, applying convincing terminology to disguise a neo-paganistic religion in service of the evil one, and has led to the destruction of the biblical message by some. Social justice that is promoted is based on self-interest and fallen human reason and is in direct opposition to justice in the Bible. A lack of knowledge of the Word of God has led to many Christians already being deceived by this false justice. Their mantra is "there can be no justice without reconciliation". Baucham (2021) responds to this mantra "the death of Christ is that justice". Ignorance

of the Word of God and neglect to search and examine the scriptures for themselves as the Bereans (Acts 17:11) resulted in being easy prey for heresies. Social justice in the Bible is linked to God's fidelity with regards to His covenant and first and foremost addresses the need of fallen mankind in need of salvation and justification through Christ. In this regard, social justice that is based on self-interest and human reason is selfish and has no relation to biblical justice. Once the relationship with God is restored through the finished work of Christ, justification takes effect in the believer's life that will result in benevolence as instructed by the Word of God and not based on a mortal social contract. Benevolence is based on the principle of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Christians need to take heed of what Paul wrote when it comes to social justice "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

*What must Christians and preachers do about social justice? Social justice that displays a repeat of the transgressions of Israel in Isaiah 5:20-24? That overthrows the distinction between moral good and evil set out by God. That not only omit good but also condemn it, argued against it, and criticised others that do discern well. Instead, they did what was evil, promoted it, and applauded it as safe and good (Henry, 1953b). Christians need to clarify and expose the deceit by refraining from using the term social justice and refer to benevolence instead. Inform others that use the term about its true meaning and what the aims of the Social Justice Movement are. Pray for the church to realize the deception and return to the truth (Waner, 2019). But above all Christians need to study and know the word of God so that they can become believers whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil (Heb 5:14). Continue to share the true gospel of Jesus Christ as the only way, truth, and life (Joh 14:6) and never be ashamed of this gospel that is a power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:19). The hope of mankind is not in manmade interventions but to be reconciled to God. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). No mortal justice can restore, heal, and reconcile as well as the righteousness of God through Christ can.*

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