

The Role of the Church: A Grassroots Effect
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Introduction

The single greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door, and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.

- Richard Francis Xavier Manning

Throughout history, interactions between the church and the political realm have caused a significant amount of pain and horror: they have also momentarily benefited societies across the world. Today, this interaction contributes to society in a variety of ways, some beneficial, some not. Across the board, however, the public perception of the church has consistently traveled down a negative spiral. It is important then to ask: when and how does the church positively affect society? In what ways does its leadership initiatives improve the quality of life on all levels? When, and how far, can it safely enter politics? This paper will argue that the church's potential for leadership in society is realized when individual members have a personal faith in – and obedience to – the teachings of Jesus Christ.

As evidence for this statement, this paper will first look to the lives of two men in history, William Wilberforce and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. These two men are used for this paper as both had a personal conversion experience: they gave their lives to Christ, had faith in God, and pursued a life of obedience to Christ's teachings. As a result of their obedience to Christ, larger societal changes developed. Through their obedience to Christ and their sacrificial commitment to God, the church was able to influence society for the better. After examining the lives of Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer, the paper will then discuss why the church should follow their examples today. In following their example, the church will have a positive effect on society as individuals fully submit themselves to Christ and His teachings. When the church is following Christ, it will naturally point all people to follow Him as they recognize His goodness, and the benefits of following His teaching.

William Wilberforce

The first example of leadership takes us to pre-Victorian England where William Wilberforce was a member of parliament from 1780-1825. At twenty-one, his political career began with all the glamor and success for which a young politician could hope. Fellow members of parliament praised his political charisma and his display of wit in the House of Commons. In October of 1782 William Pitt, Wilberforce's good friend and colleague, was appointed the youngest Prime Minister of England at the age of twenty-four. Wilberforce was his greatest ally and supporter in the House, and soon became known for his incredible ability to transfix crowds of thousands with his brilliant voice

(Metaxas, 37). Pitt would owe much of his success with winning support of parliament to Wilberforce (Metaxas, 40) and described Wilberforce as possessing “the greatest natural eloquence of all the men” he ever knew (Metaxas, 41).

With great political success came all the pleasures of the upper class. Wilberforce and Pitt were not shy in the House, and neither did they hesitate to enjoy the full advantage of their wealth (Metaxas, 29). They frequented clubs on a near-daily basis, playing cards and enjoying fine cuisine (Metaxas, 27). Thus, Wilberforce began his political career entrenched in the expected behavior of the upper class. During this period of history, the upper and lower classes contrasted sharply. Where the upper class enjoyed numerous memberships at extravagant country clubs, the lower class was rampant with prostitution, child labor in extreme conditions, a tremendously high level of crime, and alarmingly harsh punishments for petty crimes (White, 166).

In 1784, a great change began to take root in Wilberforce’s life. He began to feel a conviction within him that there was more beyond his inner circles of wealth and privilege (Metaxas, 49). In his diary, Wilberforce wrote of this growing conviction: “What madness is the course I am pursuing. I believe all the great truths of the Christian religion, but I am not acting as though I did.” (Metaxas, ###). During this time of conviction, he lamented over the way in which the rich, he included, selfishly reveled in their wealth.

It was out of this time of immense conviction of his own disobedience to God that his future political career would unfold. In those moments, however, Wilberforce was not making plans to continue his political career. He wrote to Pitt in November, telling him that he must leave politics in order to live for God. To the benefit of English history, Pitt’s response reflected a deep respect for his close friend, and would redirect Wilberforce’s intent:

I am indeed too deeply interested in whatever concerns you not to be very sensibly affected by what has the appearance of a new era in your life. . . . [F]orgive me if I cannot help expressing my fear that you are nevertheless deluding yourself into principles which have but too much tendency to counteract your own object, and to render your virtues and your talents useless both to yourself and mankind. . . . If a Christian may act in the several relations of life, must he seclude himself for all to become so? Surely the principles as well as the practice of Christianity are simple, and lead not to meditation only but to action. (Metaxas, 75-78)

This letter, along with encouragement from his father figure, John Newton, led Wilberforce to make an unprecedented decision: he would fully surrender himself to the will of God where he had formerly sought personal gain – his political career (Metaxas, 59).

The decision to follow Christ immediately produced significant alterations in Wilberforce’s lifestyle. His attitude changed toward money and time, both of which he

decided were not his own, but God's. He now realized that scripture was plain in commanding that his wealth, talents, and time be used to bless others, according to God's will (Metaxas, 63). Though he did immediately remove all his club memberships, his change in conviction did not stop at affecting his personal life. It would affect the focus of his political ambition (Metaxas, 68).

Wilberforce had his share of the pleasures of wealth. He was now beginning to see all the evils that came from such selfishness, affecting both the upper and lower class. The society he observed had suffered a downward spiral of morals. Wilberforce saw the teenage pregnancy and alcoholism as a sign of a deeper social condition. He set out to begin a "reformation of manners," or the changing of habits and attitudes of British society. Wilberforce spent the summer of 1787 traveling across the country to meet with members of the upper class. While some mocked, many joined his efforts, forming local proclamation societies at his encouragement (Metaxas, 86). Over the next fifty years, numerous other reformed societies were established in a variety of forms: hospitals, educational work, missions, relief of distress and poverty, and other genres of social reform (White, 171).

Wilberforce's appeals for moral change among the middle and upper class came at the time of the French Revolution, in which the upper French class was overthrown. In this time of insecurity, the English were more than willing to listen to Wilberforce's suggested reforms. Over 7,500 copies of his book "Vital Christianity" were sold, and the call for the commitment to spiritual values spread through the upper class (White, 169). Remarkably contrast were the effects of Christianity on England when compared to the political turmoil experienced by France after the revolution. And Wilberforce's insight and leadership played no small role in that contrast.

Wilberforce's most significant accomplishment of his political career was the abolition of the slave trade in England. His father figure, John Newton had been a slave trader before giving his life to Christ. It was Newton that revealed the evils of the slave trade to Wilberforce. His conviction to obey Christ's commands to "do justice" led Wilberforce to take political action. Though it may have been sufficient, Wilberforce did not wish to appeal to the House of Commons only with rhetoric, and he did not wish to appeal to only the House.

Wilberforce recognized that society must be convinced from the bottom up. Change in the mind of Parliament would have little effect if the people themselves were not convinced. Thus, Wilberforce unprecedentedly used newspapers, as well as other forms of public media, to pressure the members of parliament to vote with him on different moral issues, including slavery. For Wilberforce, reconciling the culture with the morals of the Bible was the most effective way to positively influence politics (White, 169).

On May 12, 1789, Wilberforce called on the members of Parliament to reason rather than appeal to their passions (White, 169). In preparation for this address to Parliament Wilberforce organized the "Clapham Group." This group was made up of

businessmen, politicians, lawyers, churchmen, and researchers who each worked toward compiling detailed information on the condition of slavery and the slave trade (White 169). Using the findings of the Clapham Group, Wilberforce detailed the horrors of the slave trade to Parliament. He described their savage treatment, the means by which they were so cruelly transported, and the number of deaths that resulted in merely transporting the slaves. Wilberforce's research also revealed that the treatment of the slave traders, and the harsh working conditions of the white sailors working on the slave ships had produced an annual mortality rate of 25 percent. Wilberforce poignantly countered that the slave trade was not a producer of well-trained sailors as had been argued: rather, it was a "nursery of seamen, [it] may rather be termed their grave." (Metaxas 117).

In 1807, after four years of research, lectures, petitions, and boycotts, Wilberforce finally accomplished passing a law to end the slave trade (Windschuttle, 18). After this accomplishment, he remained involved in the abolition movement, taking opportunities to make an international impact. At every opportunity, he incorporated relevant clauses to discourage the use of slaves internationally in treaty negotiations with other European countries (Windschuttle, 22). His work came into final fruition a year after his death in 1833 when the British Empire granted all slaves emancipation (White, 171).

Underlying the decorum of powdered wigs and dances was a violent reality in pre-Victorian England. Slavery, alcoholism, child prostitution, child labor were rampant. Punishments far exceeded the crimes to which they answered, and public executions were commonplace. From the year of his conversion to the end of his career in politics, Wilberforce dedicated his life and work to redeem the horrific world in parallel existence to the propriety in which Wilberforce had so long thrived. Wilberforce never limited himself to one issue, but pursued all of the issues listed here, and more. He sought change both in and outside of Parliament – wherever he saw moral deficiency. When he followed the teachings of Christ, he had an unarguably positive effect on English society, and the oppressed across the world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

William Wilberforce reformed and revolutionized an entire culture from which he himself had grown. When he gave his life to Christ, he dedicated his life to redeeming the evils he recognized in the culture around him. Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer's story is another example of a life lived in pursuit of the will of God. Rather than grow up in a fallen culture, Bonhoeffer would have a culture grow around him. As a dedicated Christian, he recognized the sins of the Third Reich as German society crept farther and farther from Christ.

Though he pursued theology from a young age, Bonhoeffer did not become a Christian until some years after he had already begun preaching and teaching about and in the church. He described his past self as using the doctrine of Jesus Christ to his personal gain. Only after he encountered God with sincerity of heart did he begin to consider every decision in the light of the Gospel and teachings of Christ (Metaxas, 123).

In 1936, Bonhoeffer realized his calling. The life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and it was then Bonhoeffer dedicated his life to the revival of the church.

This newly dedicated life had an affect on the way Bonhoeffer read the Bible. He now saw that when reading the Bible, one must read it as the living word of God. This meant that the teachings of Christ should have practical implications for how a Christian life is lived. Theology was worthless if it did not affect one's life (Metaxas, 129). In 1936, Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter to his brother-in-law:

First of all I will confess quite simply – I believe that the Bible alone is the answer to all our questions, and that we need only to ask repeatedly and a little humbly, in order to receive this answer. One cannot simply *read* the Bible, like other books. One must be prepared really to enquire of it. Only thus will it reveal itself. Only if we expect form it the ultimate answer, shall we receive it. (Metaxas, 136)

It is from this line of thought and method of reading the Bible that a greater social movement would grow in Germany.

Like William Wilberforce, Dietrich did not accept the common line of thought that suggested the Christian faith and politics be mutually exclusive (Metaxas, 128). Fully engaged, he interpreted his surroundings in light of the Bible. Though methodical, Bonhoeffer did not compartmentalize his life: his Christian faith was not separated from his views on politics. Instead, his faith permeated the way he interacted with politics. Engaging in politics did not mean choosing a side and adjusting his source of political commentary accordingly. In Hitler's Germany, engagement meant much more, and for Bonhoeffer it was a choice between passivity and pursuing complete obedience to the Bible. His choice to submit to the Christ's teachings would mean resistance to the Third Reich.

For Bonhoeffer, confrontation began much earlier than most others in the resistance to the Third Reich. In 1933, Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor and the Nazi Party came to power. On Wednesday February 1, just two days after Hitler's election, twenty-six-year-old Bonhoeffer gave a radio address entitled, "The Younger Generation's Altered Concept of Leadership." Though his speech was taken off the air, Bonhoeffer was invited to give it again at the College of Political Science in Berlin the next month. It discussed the danger of the Fuhrer Principle – the heart of Bonhoeffer's initial opposition to Hitler. Bonhoeffer explained that the need for a Fuhrer had sprung from an unsettled ground searching desperately for leadership in a time when Germany had failed. Bonhoeffer reasoned that the idea of the Fuhrer was self-driven, autocratic, and essentially false leadership. Eric Metaxas explained the idea of leadership:

Real leadership derived its authority from God, the source of all goodness. Thus parents have legitimate authority because they are submitted to the legitimate authority of a good God. But the authority of the Fuhrer was submitted to nothing.

It was self-derived and autocratic, and therefore had a messianic aspect.... A true leader must know the limitations of his authority. (Metaxas, 141)

The people of Germany, ready for a new face, welcomed their Fuhrer. Meanwhile, Bonhoeffer continued to voice warnings against unquestioning obedience to the new leadership.

Within the first few months of their victory, the Aryan Paragraph went into effect. Out of this came a series of laws excluding those of Jewish descent from government employment, and anti-Semitism had begun. In a time when the idea of races being “separate, but equal” held widespread popularity, many Christians and non-Christians alike were easily persuaded to accept the Aryan Paragraph. In response, Bonhoeffer made it his mission to produce a logical argument against the ideas behind the new policy (Metaxas 152).

In criticizing the Aryan Paragraph, Bonhoeffer addressed the role of the church. He concluded that it was to hold the state accountable for its actions. It was to continually question the state as to whether its actions can be justified – whether it is in line with its purpose. In questioning the Aryan paragraph, Bonhoeffer reminded the public that to “confess Christ” mean to do so to the Jews as well as the Gentiles (Metaxas 154). The Aryan Paragraph would effectively defy Galatians 3:28 which says, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Basing his argument on biblical principles of equality before God, Bonhoeffer called the church to stand up for the Jews, even if that meant standing in opposition to the state.

Much of the church, however, struggled to be as decided as Bonhoeffer. In theory, God was supposed to have authority over their lives, but it was unclear to those sitting in the pews what this obedience was supposed to look like. This lack of direction in the Church was the direct consequence of the lack of intimate connection with Christ, and dedication to hearing and obeying His commands: this conclusion is made by comparison. Bonhoeffer read the Bible as his ultimate authority and direction, and thereby made the decision to resist Hitler. Contrastingly, many of those who were not in complete obedience to the teachings of Christ fell to compromise and conformity. Not all were lost, however. Fulfilling his role as a pastor, Bonhoeffer pointed young individuals to Christ who would then respond to the teachings of Christ by joining the resistance against Hitler (Metaxas, 277).

Many churchgoers in Germany slowly began to alter the Christian faith in order to conform to the Nazi ideology as its popularity rose in Germany. These were known as the German Christians (Barnett, 1994). Their conformity was profound. The day after Hitler announced Germany’s succession from the League of Nations, the German Christians celebrated by staging a massive rally where they waived banners which declared, “One Reich. One People. One Church.” Twenty thousand gathered to hear the leader of the Berlin German Christians, Reinhold Krause, demand that the German church, “once and for all divest itself of every hint of Jewishness.” He called for the Old Testament to be

discarded, and for the New Testament to be revised to show a Jesus “corresponding entirely with the demands of National Socialism” (Metaxas, 193).

This violent support of the Third Reich by the German Christians did not sit well with the devoted Christians observing from both Germany and abroad. At the end of May 1934, the leaders of a movement called the Pastors’ Emergency League held a synod, the product of which would be the Barmen Declaration and the birth of the Confessing Church. In his biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eric Metaxas writes:

The purpose of the Barmen Declaration was to state what the German church had always believed, to ground it in the Scriptures, and to differentiate it from the bastardized theology that had been coming from the German Christians. It made clear that the German church was not under the authority of the state; it repudiated the anti-Semitism and other heresies of the German Christians and their “official” church led by Muller. The principal of the Barmen Confession was Karl Barth. (Metaxas, 222)

The document was published on June 4, 1934, thanks to the connections and aid of Bonhoeffer. However, a mere declaration was not the end goal for Bonhoeffer. While the declaration succeeded in committing the Church in Germany to a defined identity, there were some who took this defining to a fault. According to Victoria Bartlett, the signers at of Barmen were so resolved to keep the church free from political pressure that they failed to see the necessity of a more explicit political response to the catastrophe that was the Third Reich (1994).

In the years that followed the Barmen Declaration, Bonhoeffer would become impatient and frustrated with the lack of follow-through of the Confessing Church. Repeatedly slow to act, the Confessing Church limited the extent to which it should be involved with the state. The idea of limiting the influence of the church to a specific sphere of influence was absurd to Bonhoeffer (Metaxas, 280). It was in obedience to the command of Christ that the body of Christ, the church, should exist in the service of others, and to speak for those who could not speak (Metaxas, 281). Though he was given the opportunity and encouragement to leave the church struggle in Germany and pursue safety and prosperity, Bonhoeffer remained in Germany.

Bonhoeffer was the embodiment of Christ’s prayer that His followers be in the world, but not of the world. Fully in the world, and fully counter to the movements surrounding him, Bonhoeffer committed himself to a conspiracy – an odd route for a Protestant pastor. Eberhard Bethge, a close friend and theologian, described Bonhoeffer’s transition from confession to conspiracy:

Bonhoeffer introduced us in 1935 to the problem of what we today call political resistance. The levels of confession and of resistance could no longer be kept neatly apart. The escalating persecution of the Jews generated an increasingly hostile situation, especially for Bonhoeffer himself. We now realized that mere confession, no matter how courageous, inescapably meant complicity with the

murderers, even though there would always be new acts of we would preach “Christ alone” Sunday after Sunday. During the whole time the Nazi state never considered it necessary to prohibit such preaching. Why should it?

Thus we were approaching the borderline between confession and resistance; and if we did not cross this border, our confession was going to be no better than cooperation with the criminals. And so it became clear where the problem lay for the Confessing Church: we were resisting by way of confession, but we were not confessing by way of resistance. (Metaxas, 361)

At the time Bonhoeffer committed to the conspiracy, Hitler was swelling with triumph. After the humiliation and disgrace of World War I and the League of Nations, Germany was finally taking its revenge: Hitler marched on Paris and the German people went mad with victory (Metaxas, 361). In a near-sickening way, Hitler and the National Socialist party reveled in their success, and their power in the community became more exploitive. On July 14, 1940, when the Gestapo broke up a meeting at which Bonhoeffer was preaching, and Bonhoeffer subsequently sought a different means of resistance. He joined the Germany’s Military Intelligence, Abwehr, the Gestapo’s only rival to power (Metaxas, 371). Officially, Bonhoeffer performed pastoral duties as a cover for doing Abwehr activities. Unofficially, his work for Abwehr would be a cover for his work as a conspirator against the Nazi regime. To most, Bonhoeffer appeared to be a dedicated supporter of the Third Reich.

As a member of the Resistance, Bonhoeffer’s involvement, with his freedom as an official member of the Abwehr, was to create and maintain contacts within influential British circles, and to communicate with other resistance groups, including the Kresiau Circle (Saunders, 10). Throughout his work for the resistance movement, Bonhoeffer looked to Christ for his guide and reason until the very day he was hung for his participation in the conspiracy against Hitler. In his book *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer wrote:

Only one thing has force and permanence, and that is Christ Himself. Only he who shares in Him has the power to withstand and overcome. He is the centre and the strength of ... the Church ... but also of humanity, of reason, of justice and of culture. (Bonhoeffer, 56)

The life and death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer points to the role of the Church in society. As a body of individuals submitted and dedicated to Christ, the Church has the opportunity to affect society by pointing the government and individual groups to the Gospel. Early on, Bonhoeffer recognized the direction of Hitler’s politics, and acted accordingly. Using the Bible for is guide, Bonhoeffer encouraged the church, politicians, and rebels to the government to take on the burden of the people groups oppressed by the Third Reich. By individual faith and obedience, Bonhoeffer lead the Confessing Church to play a significant role in a society in dire need.

Application

The lives of William Wilberforce and Dietrich Bonhoeffer serve as models to be followed by the individual members of the church in the United States and abroad. When individuals sincerely dedicate their lives to Christ, it means that they try to imitate Christ for the rest of their lives. They pursue complete obedience to the Gospel. When individuals obey the teachings of Christ, the church naturally finds its place in society. This is currently seen in a small scale in the United States as the church has certainly impacted a significant number of areas of society through service and advocacy. However, the wider perception of the church across society is negative. As a result, church membership has fallen significantly. Many people do not want to associate themselves with church. However, there is still hope for the church, because the hope of Christ remains. It is when individuals practice obedience and submission to Christ (like Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce) that the church can change society for the better by pointing it to Christ, therefore fulfilling its role in society.

The gospel of Christ is not simply beneficial to society: it is essential. What is the gospel? Dr. Timothy Keller summarizes:

The gospel is the true story that God made a good world that was marred by sin and evil, but through Jesus Christ he redeemed it at infinite cost to himself, so that someday he will return to renew all creation; end all suffering and death; and restore absolute peace, justice, and joy in the world forever. (quoted in Boggess, 2012)

Because Christ offered all of Himself for all mankind, the response of an individual submitted to Christ is to seek redemption of culture as well. Simply put, to redeem culture is to bring God's creation (mankind and environment) back God's original and perfect intention. This is done by following Christ's teachings and example just as attempted by Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce. Christ's life on earth was to show man a better way to live. When the church follows his teachings, it can – by example – guide all people to the teachings of Christ, and in this way benefit society. The basic notions of diligence, stewardship, and generosity found in the gospel are the notions vital to a myriad of societal issues, including development and justice.

The teachings of Christ encourage and enrich development in societies. One can see the effects of the gospel when looking to the development of the western world in contrast with the poverty of the developing world. The history of the western world is rooted and steeped in a biblical worldview. In contrast, the majority of poverty-stricken countries are those with the least access to the gospel (Miller, 65). This comparison is in no way made to discount the disadvantages this region has faced throughout history – and continues to face. Rather, it is made to offer hope for the future through the gospel. The Apostle Paul describes the hope of creation that has come to the earth as the result of Christ:

For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it – hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. For we know that the

whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Rom. 8.20-22)

Permeation of the gospel to individuals' minds fosters development. First, the gospel endows a new perspective on life that offers the very hope for development, and the encouragement to do good works. Ephesians 2 explains:

Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. . . . For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (*New International Version*, Eph. 2.3-5,10)

The biblical response to this scripture is that we, as humans, matter to God. He wants us to live in peace and do good works. Because we matter to Christ, our hope not only for the future and final judgment, as suggested by Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 19-20). If it were only hope of heaven, there would be little motivation to improve present circumstances. Contrary to Nietzsche's belief, Christ does offer hope for the present life as well as the future. Thus, for followers of Christ, there is no fatalistic mindset. It is not *que sera, sera*, whatever will be will be. Rather, Proverbs says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." (*King James Version*, Prov. 23.7) The Bible encourages one to be intentional and rational in all of life. One's life will be a direct and rational outcome reflecting the way it is thought through and approached.

Belief in God must lead to obedience to Christ's teachings in all areas of life. The apostle Paul encouraged believers in this when he said, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, II Cor. 10.5) Paul encouraged obedience in all things to Christ because he knew that obedience to Christ would ultimately lead to the ultimate benefit of the people who chose to follow Christ, as well as society as a whole. Basic themes are presented in the gospel that foster development.

Diligence is an example of one such concept – a theme throughout the Bible that is vital to economic development. Diligence is portrayed as sacred throughout the Bible as God himself is a worker. He created the heavens and the earth, and when Christ came to this earth, he worked as a carpenter. As a Christian, one is to do everything enthusiastically, as something done for the glory of God and not man (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Col. 3.23). With this motivation, work that leads to development is not an unfortunate means to an end of wealth, but rather is itself a glory to God.

The concept of stewardship is another repeated theme throughout the Bible. The biblical idea of stewardship suggests that humans have been given a responsibility to care for God's creation. We are to tend to His creation so that it bears fruit (Miller, 221). God assures us that obedience to Him brings blessing and bounty. From the beginning, God

told man to work in the garden, and to care for it. In the New Testament, Jesus tells parables of stewardship that imply that we are going to be held accountable how we care for His capital (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Luke 19.12-15). As we are made in the image of Christ, we have God-given creative minds that allow us to innovate and progress in spite of all barriers. In following Christ's teachings, we can put what we are given to good use, endeavoring to glorify God in everything He has given. Society is benefited as individuals strive to create and produce with the materials they have been given.

From stewardship stems two more biblical concepts: the idea that one must save as much as they can, and give much as they can. Because humans are mere stewards of the gifts that God has graced them with, there is an explicit call to be generous. The response to the blessing that comes from working diligently cannot be an extravagant lifestyle: everything is God-given; therefore even the hardest worker has no entitlement to live selfishly. In the same way, one must follow Christ's example, and surrender everything to the will of God, and in doing so, generously giving resources to the poor and disadvantaged (Keller, 15).

The church has the opportunity to follow the teachings of Christ into the political realm of society. Christ did by no means ignore politics. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Obery Hendricks describes the political revolutionary that was Jesus of Nazareth:

To say that Jesus was a political revolutionary is to say that the message he proclaimed not only called for change in individual hearts but also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in the political, social, and economic structure in his setting in life It means that Jesus sought not only to heal people's pain but also to inspire and empower people to remove the unjust social and political structures that too often were the cause of their pain. (6)

With a primary allegiance to heaven and biblical values, Christian's, with a mind after Christ, will seek to transform minds and hearts toward a thorough commitment to justice and love. The Church's role in politics then is fulfilled when individuals are committed first to Christ. The church is to stand for the world as it should be (Taylor, 76) and to pursue Christ's vision for the world.

The church's call to act as the body of Christ affects society as individuals in the church live lives of love and generosity. Societal development was seen as a result of the leadership of William Wilberforce as he recognized the waste and greed of the upper class. Following the teachings of Christ, he strove to forsake all of his greed for Christ. But primarily, he saw the greed in his own heart. This fostered an attitude of humility that monumentally affected all of British society. He humbly recognized broad societal issues that motivated the habits of the people. Basic biblical principles therefore encourage morality, hard work, justice, and generosity.

In following these principles, however, those in the church must be courageous enough to (like Wilberforce) be humble before God as they enter the realm of politics. In

doing so, this does not mean that one is a weaker or a lesser man. Humility is not a cover-up word for fear, as suggested by Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 22). It is not to devalue oneself in comparison to others: rather, to be humble is to recognize one's weakness and insignificance without God; it is to recognize how big God is, and how small we are. One can see the result of humility before God in the life of Wilberforce. And none deny the monumental effects of his courage as he transformed British society. Thus, a humble approach to following Christ's teachings produces the most capable leaders, as they are able to recognize their own fallibility.

The Church, as the body of Christ, is also called to answer the need for social justice. Where the judicial system is in place to maintain justice in society the church has its own unique way of contributing to this justice. Micah 6:8 says that God requires His people to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly" with Him. "Doing justice" materializes in a plethora of forms. It means treating people equitably and defending the rights of the poor and powerless. While one aspect of justice is to ensure that the law is kept, Galatians 6:2 proposes another way to do justice: "Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*)

"Doing justice" in this way is seen in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He did not merely speak out against the Third Reich. He went a step further in taking on the plight of the Jews as a burden of his own to carry. Rather than distancing himself from the oppressed, he left concern for his own life behind as he did everything he could to help those oppressed by the Nazi Regime.

Another command for social justice is found in the book of Zechariah:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the immigrant or the poor. (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 7.10-11)

In the pre-modern agrarian time that this verse was written, these four were the groups that no social power. They lived life at the bare minimum, just barely surviving in many instances. Dr. Timothy Keller suggests in his book *Generous Justice* that today this "quartet" could be extended to include the refugee, the migrant worker, the homeless, and many single parents and elderly people (4). Bearing the burdens of the vulnerable is a key element of the fulfillment of the church's role in society. The church is uniquely positioned to keep individuals and government accountable for caring for the needy. Dr. Keller later defines what is to do justice according to the Bible:

We do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God. Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs, but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable. This kind of life reflects the character of God. It consists of a broad range of activities, from simple fair and honest dealings with people in daily life, to regular, radically generous giving of your time and resources, to activism that seeks to end particular forms of injustice, violence, and oppression. (Keller, 18)

The church has indeed made a commitment to standing up for the world. Perception of the Church's intentions and sole purpose has, however been misinterpreted, both by society and, in some cases, the church itself. Surprising to some, the end goal of the church is not to end abortion and gay marriage. While these issues are important, they tend to distract the church from other central issues to the bible: fighting poverty, promoting peace, and being good stewards to God's creation (Taylor, 81). With humbleness, the church must remember that God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Jon. 3.17). As individuals pursue Christ's commands by personal obedience and faith, the church will fulfill its role in society by being Christ's representation on earth: not through condemnation, but through declaring Christ's saving grace.

Conclusion

The potential of the church lies in the life of Jesus Christ. His example on this earth, His teachings, and His grace are vital to development, social justice, and other issues addressed in the political realm. Political leadership is most beneficial when the teachings of Christ are humbly followed. We see this in the examples of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and William Wilberforce. Bonhoeffer stressed the role of the church to keep government accountable, while Wilberforce stressed redemption of the culture around him: both men looked to the gospel of Christ for guidance in their leadership. Both had remarkable effects on society.

The basic principles taught in the Gospel, are vital to the survival of not only the effectiveness of the Church, but of society in general. It is therefore, pertinent for all individuals to follow the example of Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce in obeying the teachings of Christ, and live generous and humble lives. As obedience to the gospel leads to generosity, justice, and social equality, it is beneficial for all to follow. While the church may fail to reflect Christ in some areas, Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce illustrate the value and benefit to all when his teachings are closely followed. Because the church is made up of humans, it often fails to reflect Christ. This does not, however, diminish the value of Christ Himself. It is therefore of utmost importance that individuals continue to come to and follow Christ, personally submitting to Him. Only then will the church fulfill its purpose and positively affect society.

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