Christians and Social Action
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What is the church’s mission?
What is the church “sent” into the world to do?
What is the relationship between evangelism and social action?
Was Jesus political?
What is “kingdom work”?
What is the goal of social action?
What is the best strategy for engaging a pluralistic society?
What kinds of social action should the church engage or not engage?
Is resistance OK? Civil disobedience?
How do we avoid paternalistic ministry or social action?
“Mission is the church preaching Christ for the first time; it is the act
of Christians struggling against injustice and oppression; it is the
binding of wounds in reconciliation; it is the church learning from
other religious ways and being challenged by the world’s cultures”
BeBevans: Constants in Context pg. 9
“Therefore, Jesus’ mission laid out in Luke 4 is not a mission of structural change and social transformation, but a mission to announce the good news of his saving power and merciful reign to all those brokenhearted – that is, poor – enough to believe.
“The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.”
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Reasons the Church Should Engage in Social Justice/Action:

• The mission of God is to restore all of creation to a state of “shalom”.
• Scripture, in all its complexity and diversity, tells the story of God’s redemptive work to redeem all things.
• The mission of the church is to participate in the redemptive work of God.
• The redemptive work of God is consistent with His character, which is one of justice and mercy.
• Justice is relational and structural.
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

Genesis:

Harmony

• Between humankind and God
• Between man and woman – naked and no shame
• Within creation – humanity tended/cared for creation
• Shalom – it was as it should be – all was “right”
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

Genesis:

Brokenness

- Strife on all those levels
- Sin affected all of creation – shalom is broken
- Every area of life was affected: spiritual, physical, emotional, economic, social
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

Genesis:

Redemption

- God sets in motion the plan to redeem all things – all of creation; not just individual souls but to restore all he has made to this state of “shalom”
- We see this movement and this redemptive work and plan all through scripture
- Particular to universal
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

Genesis:

Particular to universal
Temporal: fall through history to the final fulfillment of redemption
Geographical – from Israel to the ends of the earth; all physical places
Social – from one man to one nation to all the nations on the earth
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament

Exodus

- Exodus is the guiding paradigm for Israel’s understanding of liberation or salvation
- Exodus was liberation in every area of life: EX 6:2-9
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Exodus 6: 2-9
2 God also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. 6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”
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Exodus 6: 2-9
7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’” 9 Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament
Exodus

- Spiritual - relationship with the God of all Creation – a spiritual liberation
- Physical and Emotional – they were under oppression and physical slavery
- Economic – no participation in the community, in the economic life of Egypt
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament
Law: Exodus 19: 3-6

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”
Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 
Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. 
When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament
Law: Deuteronomy 24: 17-22

20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.
21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.
22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament
Law: Deuteronomy 24: 17-22

What do you see in this passage about how Israel was to live out their freedom in every area of life? How do you see social action even here?
5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?  

6 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?  

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
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Themes of Engagement - Old Testament
Prophets: Isaiah 58: 5-10

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."
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Themes of Engagement – New Testament
Luke 3: 3-18

3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.’”
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7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?
8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.
9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”
10 “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.
11 John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”
12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”
13 “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.
14 Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”
15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.
16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.
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Themes of Engagement: New Testament

- Full reign was in the future
- Full reign would bring: interior change and social/political implications
- Full reign would be marked by justice
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Themes of Engagement: New Testament

“Actions keeping with repentance”
• Societal justice
• All the groups in the crowd are addressed
• Vs 11: return to common good – enough and not too much
• Everyone’s needs being met
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Themes of Engagement: New Testament
Luke 4: 16-19

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,
17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
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Doing Justice through Societal Institutions:

1. Churches:
   - Relational
   - Programs
   - Not primarily systemic
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Doing Justice:

2. Non-Profits:
   • Can be relational or systemic
   • Professional – using skills from education or experience
   • Usually addresses one specific issue
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Doing Justice:

3. Corporate/Business:
   • Charitable giving
   • Investing, or fundraising in support of individuals, organizations or causes
   • Social Enterprises
   • Social Entrepreneurship
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Doing Justice:

4. Public Sector:
   • Advocating at the structural level of society
   • Changing public opinion or cultural norms
   • Policy-making/legislation
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Questions: