

RACE AND VIRTUE: THE VIRTUOUS MEAN AS VEHICLE FOR THE INTEGRATED CHURCH

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Gone are the days of legal slavery and segregation in the United States, and as a result, many—even within the church—believe racism followed suit. However, this sentiment, carried predominately by white evangelicals unable to recognize the struggles of their brothers and sisters in the minority, is primarily due to an ignorance surrounding the reality of their fight.² Further, there is difficulty in the conversation towards progress as “evangelicals have a tendency to define problems in simple terms and look for simple solutions” and the race conversation is anything but simple.³ The answer can neither be found in pretending that it is not needed or in dismissing the desired results as unattainable.

This paper will argue that the best answer for lasting societal reformation regarding the issue of race and racial prejudice must begin in the heart of the individual.⁴ To that end, this paper will explore the implementation of virtue. Beginning with the idea’s historical roots as an independent philosophy to a more Christocentric expression, the paper will move to an address of virtue’s ability to effect change, then more specifically to its application to the racial divide and conclude with the development of two key virtues for lasting change.

Before moving on, it seems appropriate to first give the scope and definition of this conversation. First, the topic at large in discussion will be referred to as a conversation, issue, divide, or concern, all of which should be viewed interchangeably as reflects the varying language among a number of authors within the field. Secondly, while the broad category spoken of

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² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Kindle Location 429.

³ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 18.

⁴ This is not to say that it is an issue of individualism alone as there must be an address of systemic injustice and corporate culpability. That said, for these to take lasting effect and for individuals to work within and against broken systems, there must be a foundational integration in the heart of the individual. This foundation will be explored herein.

here is referred to primarily as race and ethnicity,⁵ specific address will be given to prejudices within the social framework. Mentions of prejudice should be seen as racially specific but not limited to admitted or overt racism alone. Finally, while there are a great number of ways to approach and understand the topic of virtue, this paper is written from an ecumenical Christian perspective and will interpret all things accordingly.⁶

I. A HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF VIRTUE

This world is fractured. The effects of sin can be traced into every facet of life in the separation from what is good and true. In the same sense, issues of the modern social construction of race are magnified by a similar degree of separation, or apartness, in which the further from truth one moves, the further towards pain and death they are found. It would be terribly dangerous for any Christian to believe that they have arrived at the virtuous life. Christ has indeed justified those who have taken hold of his promise, but the work of final sanctification is a slow one. The believer who polishes the mirror of their life to better reflect the virtue of God does so each day, from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). This act of holiness works two effects—it puts off the “glittering vices” of the world and puts on the eternal virtues of Christ.⁷ In order to gain a proper understanding of virtue, it is best to understand its historical foundation. This history can be traced from ancient Greek philosophers, through the church fathers, and into modernity. While the term virtue may be ambiguously large at times, the usage in this paper will be understood through the following development.

⁵ Used here interchangeably to mean a “socially defined manner of identifying and categorizing individuals into groups on the basis of actual or perceived differences . . . [the] basis for defining similarities and differences, and subsequently establishing collective group identities [being a combination of] physical/biological traits and social/cultural traits.” Justin D. García, Ph.D., “Ethnicity,” *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (Pasadena: Salem, 2014).

⁶ Ecumenical, as it is intended here, is the expression of these virtues in any number of Christian traditions, broadly considered with a humble orthodoxy. The present writer’s perspective comes through general principles of autonomy and cooperation in the Southern Baptist Convention, which may bear itself in remote specificities, but the application of these virtues can and will be found in much wider circles of Evangelicalism and the Christian tradition, at large. As a point of interest, varied traditions have strengths and weaknesses in both the ability to make sweeping changes (more consistent with high church traditions) and to embody the more unique realities of an immediate community (more consistent with low church traditions).

⁷ “Glittering vices” from the Latin Phrase “*Virtutes paganorum splendida vitia*,” often wrongly attributed to Augustine, expresses the worldly standards of virtue which are at odds with those revealed by God. See Søren Kierkegaard, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, and Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks: Volume 11: Part 1, Loose Papers, 1830–1843* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019),: 564–565.

A. VIRTUE IN ANTIQUITY

It was nearly four hundred years before Christ when Plato first introduced the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance,⁸ but it was his student Aristotle who developed a fuller understanding of what virtue is at its core. The goal of these philosophers was a complete life—namely for Aristotle this was the magnanimous man's life as “the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life.”⁹ Aristotle posited that every good virtue that man could be or attain lies between two vices as a golden mean.¹⁰ In essence, both the virtue in deficiency and in excess are a detriment to the character of the virtuous man. Hauerwas and Pinches explain that,

The doctrine of the mean serves to introduce us to the important ideas that virtues are not extremes, that there are extremes on *both* sides of a virtue which we must avoid, and that virtues govern appetites which must be felt “at the right times, with reference to the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, which is both intermediate and best.”¹¹

Taking the virtue of courage for example, Aristotle explained that a deficiency of courage is the obvious vice of cowardice, which is useless when courage is needed. However, an excess of that same principle is also detrimental as the man with an abundance of courage becomes rashly foolhardy, which could be just as much or even more dangerous than cowardice. The final principle is referred to as the Aristotelian mean, the virtuous mean, or the golden mean and will be considered here in this paper.

Whether a vice is deficient or excessive, two things typically bring it closer to the mean: awareness and action.¹² Action is obvious since the more often and rightly the virtue is practiced, the more it will exist. This is the base idea of virtue theory expressed in habit.¹³ But on the same token, the virtuous

⁸ Plato, “The Republic,” in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), book IV, line 428a, page 381.

⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 149.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic Press, 1984), 26–29.

¹¹ Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 21. Though a departure from the purposes of this paper, the reader may note that the extremes described here may be rightly applied well beyond these conversations as a danger to rightly measure and avoid.

¹² Others may divide this task further, such as Porter et al.'s use of purgation, illumination, and union in the Relational Spirituality model, but the emphases of cognitive and active remain the same. See Steven L. Porter, Steven J. Sandage, David C. Wang, and Peter C. Hill, “Measuring the Spiritual, Character, and Moral Formation of Seminarians: In Search of a Meta-Theory of Spiritual Change,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 12, no. 1 (2019): 16.

¹³ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 27.

path can only be willfully taken if it is seen, and in order for it to be seen, it must first be illumined. This is the difference between habituation and internalization. Virtues are formed and honed through disciplined habits. Seldom, if ever, does a person stumble into virtue. Rather, the virtuous must acquaint themselves with truth before committing themselves to its beauty.

B. VIRTUE IN THE CHURCH

While Plato and Aristotle each were able to observe truth in the world, their minds were still unable to grasp the fullness of revelation and truth that came with Christ. Salvation brings with it a regeneration of the mind and an understanding that can only be given by the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”¹⁴ The Spirit’s role can never be reduced to convicting, leading, or calling alone but must be seen in every component of his manifested power. As Bernhard Anderson notes, “the Holy is not just power—the awesome power manifest in the storm, ‘earthquake, wind, and fire,’ but is power manifest in relationship with people, saving power and ethical concern.”¹⁵ This ethical concern is developed into a distinctly Christian virtue through Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶ True scholars and arguably the two most famous pastor theologians in history, Augustine and Aquinas recognized the cardinal virtues raised but added to them in the theological virtues seen in 1 Corinthians 13: faith, hope, and love. Peter Kreeft notes this addition as necessary because, “Without the supernatural virtues, the natural virtues fail.”¹⁷

The addition of the theological virtues, with the Christian understanding of inner transformation, reveals the full meaning of a virtue ethic system. Dallas Willard explains that “the effort to change our behavior *without* inner transformation is precisely what we see in the current shallowness of Western Christianity that is so widely lamented and in the notorious failures of Christian leaders.”¹⁸ In the same way that ignorance or surrender to the difficulties of the task sell the issue short, so do faulty systems and empty rhetoric. Alasdair MacIntyre offers his classic definition stating that, “a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which

¹⁴ All Scripture quoted will be in the New American Standard Bible translation unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 48.

¹⁶ Augustine, *The Writings Against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists*, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: C. Scribners, 1901), ch. 15, par. 25. Clarified further by Aquinas, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. John A. Oesterle (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), Q. 62, Art. 1–3.

¹⁷ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986), 72.

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 79.

tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”¹⁹ This definition expresses the concept of ethical being better than most. Virtue ethics is an ethic of character.²⁰ The weakness of this definition is that it fails to offer the source of virtue. For Plato, virtue finds its fullness in the world of the forms.²¹ For the Christian, however, the fullness of virtue is found in the character of God. This ethic could be bound up in the echo of Leviticus 19:2, as God declares, “Be holy, for I am holy.” This call to holiness is the content of morality. Man is called to express and reflect the holiness and character of God. T. B. Maston explains that

God’s ultimate ideal or will for us is our holiness or sanctification. . . Sanctification involves separation from the evils of the world to a dedication to God. . . The ultimate goal of the Christian’s life, which is a glorious one, is that he shall awake at the end of life’s journey in the likeness of the resurrected Christ.²²

Concerning the aforementioned virtues then, it is insufficient to be just only as man conceives justice. Holiness requires that true justice reflect the justice of God (2 Chr 19:7). This connection to the source of God is the case for all virtue. The virtuous is only such to the degree it reflects the fullness of God’s character.

II. VIRTUE AS A SOCIETAL ALLEVIATION

Having established a basic understanding of virtue, the question is now raised of the efficacy of a change in individuals towards a change in culture. Many would argue that legislating morality is the most effective approach to quick societal change as in the case of desegregation.²³ This is a necessary component of wider applied virtue, but with the issue of underlying prejudices there are no hard and fast solutions. Even as legislation is a key part of ensuring justice, lasting change must begin concentrically from the individual since “culture is what *we* make of the world. Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as

¹⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

²⁰ It should be noted at this point that ascription to the virtuous described here does not necessitate ascription to the wider Virtue Ethics as a moral system or framework. Those holding to traditional Natural Law Theory, Divine Command Theory, or other systems consistent with the Christian faith ranging the deontological-teleological spectrum, are each able to affirm the fruit here expressed in either the act’s innate goodness or produced benefit. Only systems which would cling to “glittering vices,” such as Cultural Relativism or Ethical Egoism, would here be excluded. As a point of transparency, the present writer holds to Deontological Virtue Ethics. See Mark Liederbach, and Alvin L. Reid, *The Convergent Church: Missional Worshipers in an Emerging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009).

²¹ Plato, “Phaedo,” in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), 102a, page 138.

²² T. B. Maston, *God’s Will and Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1964), 48-49.

²³ See Olatunde C. A. Johnson, “Legislating Racial Fairness in Criminal Justice,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 39, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 233.

it's given to us and make something else."²⁴ This change and creation is not of words alone but requires action and growth. Kreeft describes culture as sliding towards a precipice from which it cannot recover, and the only solution is seen in actionable virtue as simply "crying 'progress' as we die will not raise us from death."²⁵

Concentric change as actionable virtue on the other hand offers a restoration first on an individual level and then builds to social groups at large. This is particularly necessary within the conversation of race, as race is a socially constructed grouping much like culture itself. Richard Niebuhr in his famous work, *Christ and Culture*, defines culture as "the 'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values."²⁶ Within this definition, the individual holds the potential to influence nearly every part of what culture is as a whole by what they choose to sustain or dismiss.

The elevation of virtue in the life of the individual becomes increasingly effective as that individual models virtue winsomely and inspires others to do the same. This is especially important as internal, or private, virtue is not sufficient in itself. Private virtue must express itself publicly. And public virtue must be held privately. There is no room in the faith for Machiavelli's Prince shirking private virtue or Aristotle's coward fleeing it publicly.²⁷ The virtue envisioned here calls for consistency internally and externally within the individual, who is then positioned for cultural impact. While many would see this as a fault of the approach, in light of more expedient pragmatism, it carries a particular strength within the church. The church carries a distinct ability to influence and shape thinking and to confront the vices of sin behind the authority of Christ revealed in Scripture.²⁸ Sin is to blame for all social woes and is the single enemy of virtue leading each person away from holiness and the complete life. It is easy to tie sins together and attempt to trace lines of influence or gateways, but in the end, it is a comprehensive nature which is to blame. In short, "Sin survives, takes root, and hangs on. This is part of what it means to say that human beings are all sinners. But social sins, in particular, survive, take root, and hang on because people benefit from those sins—often without being willing or able to notice either that they are sinning or that they are benefitting."²⁹ Racism, partiality, and prejudice persist as some of these beneficial pains and require special attention.

²⁴ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 23. Emphasis added.

²⁵ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 56.

²⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, expanded edition (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 32.

²⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas More, and Martin Luther, *The Prince* (New York, NY: Collier, 1963); Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 48.

²⁸ John Holder, "The Issue of Race," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 49, no. 2, (1992): 45.

²⁹ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15.

III. VIRTUE WITHIN THE RACE ISSUE

The race issue carries great weight in both the internal integrity of the faith and the public witness of the church. The American church has largely failed to maintain either. “[In] reality the church set the pace, established the pattern, and provided for segregation in this country. For this the church must bow its head in shame.”³⁰ This does not mean the issue is without hope as there has been progress in the United States in moving away from slavery, to segregation, and then through the Civil Rights Movement, not to mention the great turns and repentance in the many who confronted the hatred of their hearts.³¹ While the church has not always had a majority on the right side of history in this area in various traditions and denominations, there have always been resolute voices standing on the truths of Scripture recognizing that “if Christians do not attempt honestly to apply the Christian spirit and Christian principles to race relations, how can they expect others to respect their Christian claims or to hear and accept the message they proclaim?”³²

With obvious ties to the ministry of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament to unity in the church, it almost seems odd that division would still characterize groups of people within the same context and language. In fact, some have posited that the divide Jesus overcame was even more stark than what exists today in most places where racism is prevalent. J. Daniel Hays recognizes this saying that “the distinction between [Jews and Samaritans] was one of the most apparent in the world of Christ as ‘the mainstream Jews of the New Testament era felt both a religious and racial superiority to the Samaritans.’”³³ However rich the Biblical material may be to explore in a demonstration of the equality present among all peoples, there is much to be said from a Biblical perspective of the inner man regarding the move forward, and virtue ethics can be the vehicle for this progress.³⁴

The portrait of virtue here is more than just the characteristics of the person of God, such as his roles as creator, ruler, or father. Instead, this is the discussion of the ideals in which each of these characteristics find root. If virtue is to be applied to the race discussion, it must be determined which virtues are the most relevant. A case could be made for each as courage is

³⁰ Gerald L. Thomas, “Achieving Racial Reconciliation in the Twenty-First Century: The Real Test for the Christian Church,” *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 561. See also Jemar Tisby, *Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (S.I.: Zondervan, 2020).

³¹ Curtis W. Freeman, “‘Never Had I Been So Blind’: W. A. Criswell’s ‘Change’ on Racial Segregation,” *The Journal of Southern Religion* 10, (2007): 1-12.

³² T. B. Maston, *The Bible and Race* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1959), 95.

³³ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 146.

³⁴ While the details of a Biblical Theology of Race would be beneficial for one unfamiliar with the details of this paper, this paper will first assume an understanding of Biblical personhood and then argue only for virtue ethics as actionable steps towards racial reconciliation and integration within the church. For more works on a theology of race please see Maston, Hays, or other bibliographical sources.

required for many to discuss, and wisdom would be an obvious requirement regarding any subsequent actions to that discussion. And surely others have their place, but it seems that two virtues in particular rise to the forefront and in their implementation, others can be satiated as well. These virtues are that of love and justice. The Cardinal Virtues, from the Latin *cardo* (hinge), imply that subsequent virtues hinge upon the first. In the discussion of race, justice and love become these cardinals, as the implementation of these virtues causes subsequent virtues to be assuaged. Before these can each be explored however there is one last facet of this conversation which cannot be afforded to be assumed: apartness.

IV. APARTNESS

Apartness is the basic idea that most of the prejudices of this world, conscious or otherwise, are due in part to an ignorance of separation. Essentially, there is no concern for a struggle that is not understood or experienced, and empathy is raised when there is a personal concern. This leads to a social indifference, not as a “total absence of feeling, positive or negative, but simply an unusually low degree of feeling, usually negative.”³⁵ An emotional apathy of sorts casts aside any that does not look or struggle in the same way. Apartness can be seen in nearly every vice in the conversation of race and is paramount for understanding the fullness of conversation.

Apartness today exists in part because of the climates that introduced it, namely in slavery and segregation in the United States. This is of course heightened in a post-civil rights era culture, but it is nothing new as it seems that,

instinctively we tend to gravitate toward people and cultures most like us. That is a safe place. But the moral choice, the one that shows the character of Christ, who resides in us, is to act out our ‘go ye therefore’ edict and open ourselves up to a diversity of cultures in order to reach them with the gospel and fellowship with them as our brothers and sisters.³⁶

Many that have crossed these lines or are standing against oppression of others do so because of a personal relationship with someone different than themselves. Whether it be growing up in a sport together or serving alongside another person in either the military or workforce, the realization of equality rarely finds its footing from intellectual discovery in a Bible study or lecture but rather from the everyday life away from apartness. As Porter et al. explain, “Encounters with diversity or alterity (experiences of otherness) can also prompt deconstruction of prior understandings and intensified seeking, which is crucial for growth in intercultural competence.”³⁷ To

³⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 33.

³⁶ Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts, *The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2011), 85.

³⁷ Steven L. Porter, et al. “Measuring the Spiritual, Character, and Moral Formation of Seminarians,” 17.

this end, the most effective thing for the implementation of the following virtues and life at large moving forward in an increasingly diverse society is to bridge the gap of apartness, intentionally and relationally.

V. JUSTICE'S PLACE

In order to bridge apartness, one must first build a framework for this bridge in a development and understanding of the virtue of justice since “the concept of reconciliation is empty of content unless it is built upon the sturdy foundation of justice.”³⁸ As each virtue lies between vices of deficiency and excess, justice is no exception.³⁹ While either could be referred to simply as injustice more detail can be given toward a fuller understanding. Most often, when justice is considered, it is accompanied with some payment of that justice. Simply calling attention to an injustice does not appease the demands of justice. Justice is the due reward for any action, positive or negative. Whether that be right payment for a task preformed or right punishment for a crime committed, justice is concerned with what is rightly due.

A. VICE OF DEFICIENCY⁴⁰

The first injustice is in a deficiency of justice which could here be more specifically called disregard. This is the most common reality of injustice and with it comes a recognition of some person or action going unseen or unpunished. The more apparent the slight, the greater the injustice seems. Unjudged disregard is a result of one of three causes; a double standard based on the person accused, an ignorance or apathy towards justice being done, or a delight in injustice and corruption. While the third cause is infrequent, the first two run rampant and often together. A double standard can be seen financially, in social classes, and notably to this discussion, racially. There is no shortage of statistics for a racial double-standard in drug prosecution based on the color of the accused’s skin as more Whites go unjudged or unprosecuted than any other people group, even when there are the same number of those culpable.⁴¹ Further, when partnered with an

³⁸ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 396.

³⁹ As a point of interest, it is unclear “exactly how Aristotle understands this arrangement, or the nature of the vices of excess and defect which this particular justice is to counteract.” The vices of deficiency and excess then in this case have been extrapolated accordingly. Mark LeBar and Michael Slote, “Justice as a Virtue,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016): 1.

⁴⁰ The vices considered here and in relation to love, represent those most pertinent to the issue of race. Admittedly, it is possible that there are other expressions of these vices along the spectrum in greater deficiencies or excesses of each virtue when examined more broadly or in relation to other specific issues.

⁴¹ Anthony Bradley, *Black and Tired: Essays on Race, Politics, Culture, and International Development*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 1. Further anecdotal evidence can be seen in cultural pictures of disregard. At the time of this writing, disregard has been recently seen in the delayed or absent arrests in the cases of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others.

apathy towards justice caused by apartness or the difficulty involved in resolution, the unjudged touches the race issue closely.

B. VICE OF EXCESS

The second injustice is in an excess of justice. This is not truly an abundance of justice as there cannot be in reality an excess of something that has been satisfied in the sense of a debt paid, but rather the excess here is an abundance of principle distorted by terminology. Excessive injustice inflates the results or payment of justice in either punishment or reward, which could here be more specifically called tyranny or, more commonly, oppression. The alternative to a deficiency of justice in non-minorities uncharged with drug possession can be transversely seen in an excess of punishment in the sentencing of minorities for the same crimes as their majority-culture counterparts.⁴²

Excessive punishment is often rooted in prejudices spurred on by apartness. This is a tragic distortion of the hatred that lies in the hearts of men: "A merely political abolition of slavery, desirable as it obviously is, would destroy only slavery's flower, not its root in the human heart, the desire to enslave, and that root would grow new flowers of evil."⁴³ Awareness here is driven into the heart of the individual. The sad reality is that many who deem themselves progressives regarding race, harbor prejudices and judgments they rarely think about on a surface level in stereotypes and presuppositions of people they have never met. The move to virtue is an attack of the inclination to be judge and jury and to go beyond what is right to what is vindictive. When change begins within the individual heart, the community can then be affected for good.

C. THE GOLDEN MEAN

Once awareness moves both vices towards the golden mean of justice, much must be done to sustain it. This is as much a task of the state (Rom 13) as it is a task of the church:

God's work in the world consists of more than churchy accomplishments like baptisms and filled sanctuaries. It consists of more peace, more justice, more reconciliation, more deliverance—through the church whenever the church makes itself available, through others when we are not available, or when we stand opposed.⁴⁴

The golden mean is one that seeks justice wherever it is absent. This is the continuance of acting justly. In private affairs, there is a call for right dealing and practice and publicly there is a call for justice in every school,

⁴² Bradley, *Black and Tired*, 12. See also, Anthony B. Bradley, *Ending Overcriminalization and Mass Incarceration: Hope from Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁴³ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 150-151.

⁴⁴ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 19.

courtroom, and political office. It is to point out deficiencies of justice and excesses of punishment, to create accountability among the likeminded, and to persuade the obstinate. As Paul writes, “Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong—not that we may appear to pass the test, but that you may do what is right,” (2 Cor 13:7). Justice for the issue of race is a concern against injustices made because of race. These can be seen in everything from base prejudices and discrimination which lead to apartness, to more overt forms of systemic injustices.⁴⁵ The goal then of implementing justice is to be just in character, to call for justice, and to move towards a just society.

VI. LOVE'S PLACE

Justice alone is insufficient, in part because it is not a uniquely Christian virtue. In addition to Plato and Aristotle's original lists, justice is recognized as a universal duty of governing authorities in Romans 13. Faith in the Triune God is not a requisite for justice to be handed down by those whom God has given the sword. In fact, often it is those from whom justice is expected who are the ones who implement it in great excess or deficiency. But those that abuse the authority given to them by God will stand in judgment before him. Love on the other hand, is a unique expression of Christian virtue insofar as it is tied to a relational knowledge of God (1 John 4). This is the difference between common and special grace. Justice reflects the common nature and standard of all men. Love reflects that unique picture of the nature of God revealed in Christ. Reinhold Niebuhr writes:

A rational ethic seeks to bring the needs of others into equal consideration with those of the self. The religious ethic, (the Christian ethic more particularly, though not solely) insists that the needs of the neighbor shall be met, without a careful computation of relative needs. This emphasis upon love is another fruit of the religious sense of the absolute. On the one hand religion absolutises the sentiment of benevolence and makes it the norm and ideal of the moral life. On the other hand, it gives transcendent and absolute worth to the life of the neighbor and thus encourages sympathy toward him. Love meets the needs of the neighbor, without carefully weighing and comparing his needs with those of the self. It is therefore ethically purer than the justice which is prompted by reason.⁴⁶

The virtue of love is one referred to in a number of ways, the most applicable here being compassion. For Aquinas, it was his overarching *caritas*;⁴⁷ for

⁴⁵ See Bradley, *Black and Tired*.

⁴⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2017), 57.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 65, 4. It should further be noted that Aquinas did not present *caritas* as necessarily lying between two vices. This is likely for the same reason Aristotle does not give explicit vices for justice, as it is the ultimate virtue in each of their minds. See John A. Hardon, S. J. “Meaning of Virtue in Thomas Aquinas,” *Great Catholic Books Newsletter*, volume II, number 1 (1995): 1.

others it is simply a facet of love. But the case remains that compassion is one of the greatest characteristically Christian virtues.⁴⁸ Compassion is the recognition, empathy, and regard for the lost and other believers as persons made in the image of God. Said another way, “Agápao love is . . . moral love, meaning to do the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons.”⁴⁹ Love is the fullness of life in Christ and the greatest hope for the issue of race.

A. VICE OF DEFICIENCY

The first vice of love is in a deficiency of compassion which could here be more specifically called apathy. Racial apathy is often a result of apartness, and awareness here must be in a cultural awareness rather than ignorance. Immersive behavior is greater than any classroom, and this modern life is rich with the opportunity to hear from wide perspectives. Scripture shows the diversity and beauty of all that are in Christ, as Paul draws the Ephesians to the unity of the body, “the point is not merely that all Christians are equal [or the same for that matter]; rather, the point is that all Christians have been joined.”⁵⁰ This is where compassion counters the status quo of apathy. There exists in Christ a regard for the full body, not just hands for other hands or feet for other feet, but fullness and diversity joined. Awareness of apathy calls for the individual to step out of their circle of comfort and into the shoes of others through empathetic action. This is in conversation, relationship, repentance when necessary, and intentional engagement with people of different backgrounds, especially in the immediate community.

B. VICE OF EXCESS

The second vice is in an excess of the principle which could here be more specifically called paternalism. Paternalism is an overstepping of compassion which goes to shelter and infantilize the receiving party to a detriment of their independence and responsibility. It is an excess of compassion which actually undercuts compassion’s desired result of the recipient’s wellbeing. Paternalism is the great fear of many seeking an excuse not to show compassion as the recipient might be enabled by this new kindness or take advantage of supposed nice men and women who do not know any better. An overstep of this fear justifies a continuance of apathetic prejudices and cripples progress. That being said, this vice remains a reality for the tenderhearted, but is nonetheless a vice. Overstepping compassion to become savior of the marginalized does more harm than good.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 69.

⁴⁹ Dirk Van Dierendonck, and Kathleen Patterson, “Compassionate Love as a Cornerstone of Servant Leadership: An Integration of Previous Theorizing and Research,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 128, no. 1 (2015): 121.

⁵⁰ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 151.

⁵¹ See, for example, critiques on such works as Robin DiAngelo’s New York Times best-seller, *White Fragility*. John McWhorter, “The Dehumanizing Condescension of White Fragility,” *The Atlantic*, July 15, 2020. <https://amp.theatlantic.com/amp/article/614146/>.

Awareness here is to see the bounds of compassion in fraternalism, namely that the recipient never be stripped of their personhood. Compassion is not charity in that it would pity the inferior. It is to recognize the deficiencies of the self and its egoism and reach out to value a brother or sister as an equal. Pity and paternalism in the issue of race offer no good to the marginalized. Showing concern and walking alongside the marginalized is a different thing entirely, one that moves ever closer to that virtuous mean. The action of moving towards a better understanding and embodiment of compassion then is fraternal service. This is to say that the movement shifts from providing a need or service for a child to joining an existent work alongside a brother or sister.

C. THE GOLDEN MEAN

Where justice can have a propensity of being cold, compassion's goal is warmth. The virtue of love is not an academic exercise or charity in the sense of building self-worth through service. Rather, it is concerned with walking alongside one another and loving as Christ. This is the command to bear one another's burdens. After all, "Christians must be those who are capable of sharing their suffering with others."⁵² The chief exemplar of this virtue is of course the person of Christ, who, time and time again, had compassion on those he encountered. Jesus's great illustration on compassion was within the bounds of prejudices and race. Describing the Jewish traveler beaten and robbed, Jesus says of his rescuer, "But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion," (Luke 10:33). This story demonstrates the deficiency of compassion in those who passed the man by and yet avoids the opposite pole of excess since the man's compassion was selfless, comprising actions borne out of care for his neighbor regardless of the division between them. Virtuous love, over against apathetic or paternalistic love, seeks to embody the love of Christ. This is a love that, in part, sacrifices self in order to seek the good of another.

VII. ADDRESSING APARTNESS

Expanding on this virtuous love as the unique and most effective response to racial prejudice and pain, it would be most helpful to offer not only movement for the individual to address the vices of their own heart, but also the outworking of social effect. Kierkegaard writes that "as Christianity's glad proclamation is contained in the doctrine about man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness to God. But God is love; therefore, we can resemble God only in loving."⁵³ As the image bearers reflect the person of Christ in their awareness and action, they move in the formation of the virtuous. They embody the moral action of Christ,

⁵² Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 50.

⁵³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. by Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 74.

empowered by the Spirit of Christ, to become more like the person of Christ. This is revealed both in the individual heart and character as well as the social expressions in which the person resides.

In the church, the virtuous believer is a voice of justice and an embodiment of love. As the virtuous gather together, there is a corporate nature of lament and repentance to vicious expressions of injustice and apathy. Ecclesial leadership does well to foster the tone of that lament through the rebuke of false ideologies and ethics as well as to promote the unity and godliness of that which is consistent with the virtues of justice and love evidenced in the faith.⁵⁴ As each believer then moves into the spheres of their influence, be that the academy or factory, political office or service industry—any and every arena of life and work—the salt and light of the kingdom loses neither its flavor nor its brightness. This movement is caused by and typified in the person of Christ, who integrates every tribe, nation, and tongue into a single body through his own sacrificial love. In participation in Christ's virtue, the individual and the church are enabled to root out racial prejudice in their hearts and pasts and work towards the ideal of the integrated church.

The embodiment of the Christlike virtues of justice and love work to emphatically narrow the gap of apartness. The two must work together. As John Perkins writes, "Justice and love are intimately tied together . . . We cannot have true justice unless it is motivated by love, just as God's greatest act of justice, sending Jesus to die for us, was motivated by love."⁵⁵ To embody justice in its virtuous mean is to demonstrate to the church and to the world that the gospel of Christ is a transformative force that gives full satisfaction of what is due. To embody love in its virtuous mean is to demonstrate the great well of forgiveness and compassion that reconditions affections and regard to love as Christ loves. Apartness is not an eternal state, but it need not be a temporal state either.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Racial tension is not an issue that will be solved by the mere passing of time. It is rooted in prejudice and sin and will persist in this world, but it does not have to persist in the individual or in the church. Virtue offers an answer to apartness and strain through justice and compassion. These virtues must be found between their respective vices of disregard, oppression, apathy, and paternalism. Christ is the example of perfect justice and perfect compassion and is the picture for virtue in the individual as he seeks to change the culture concentrically. The key lies in an awareness of apartness and vices and living out the virtues seen in the character of God. Only then can there be a lasting answer to the issue of race in the heart of the believer, the church, and society.

⁵⁴ See Mark Vroegop, and Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁵⁵ John Perkins, *Dream with Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2017), 30.