

## **SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PROGRESSIVE PUBLIC POLICY**

While the major religions of humankind may differ in significant respects, we affirm that common to all foundational scriptures and interpretive traditions is an emphasis on social justice, on the divine will for earthly human community marked by compassion, inclusive justice, and peace. Beginning with a brief summation of guiding principles for interpreting the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, we gather here various scripture quotations and comments from Jewish and Christian interpreters in support of this affirmation.

### **1. Understanding the Bible--guiding principles and affirmations**

- The composing and collecting of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures was a historical process.  
--- Scripture needs to be interpreted with respect to its varied historical contexts.
- The Hebrew Bible tells of holy wars and stringent legal codes (Exodus, Judges, Deuteronomy, Leviticus),  
--- but its prevailing motif is a call to compassion, justice, and peace (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea).
- Jesus teaches that human behavior is measured by our compassion, justice, and love (Matthew 25).
- God's ultimate destiny for the entirety of creation is not destruction and punishment,  
--- but the fulfillment of creation as one holy, beloved, interwoven community.  
(Revelation 21).
- The Bible's deepening moral theology affirms such core values as community and both individual and corporate responsibility.

### **2. Scripture quotations supporting progressive religion and public policy**

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

#### ***Moses, Jesus, and Paul - A common vision of basic biblical law***

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

--- Deuteronomy 6:4-5

[and] “[Y]ou shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

--- Leviticus 19:18

Being asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

--- Matthew 22:36-40

“The commandments. . . are summed up in this word, Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

--- Romans 13:9-10; cf. Galatians 5:14

### ***Manner of life in response to God’s reign***

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

--- Micah 6:8

“Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.”

--- Jeremiah 9:23-24

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

--- Matthew 5:3-10

(In Luke’s briefer version of the Beatitudes, Matthew’s “poor in spirit” and “hunger and thirst for righteousness” become more concretely “you who are poor” and “you who hunger now”; and Luke adds some “woes” “to you who are rich,” “you who are full now,” “you who laugh now,” etc.)

--- Luke 6:20ff.

“You have heard that it was said. . . , but I say to you. . . .” (Matthew 5:21-48) For example, vv. 43-48: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on

the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. . . . Be perfect [in love], therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

--- Acts 11:9, in Peter’s vision

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. . . . Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

--- Romans 9:12-13, 16, 21

### ***Social ethics***

“You must not oppress a resident alien [or stranger]; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

--- Exodus 23:9; variously, the most repeated injunction in the Hebrew Bible

“New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation--I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. . . . Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

--- Isaiah 1:13, 16-17

“He [God] shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

--- Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. . . . They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

--- Isaiah 11:6-7, 9

“Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right” . . .

--- Isaiah 56:1: cited by Rabbi Joseph Talushkin (*Jewish Wisdom*) as Isaiah’s summary of the 613 commandments in the Hebrew Bible

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

--- Isaiah 56:6-8

“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

--- Amos 5:21

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

--- Luke 4:18-19: Jesus, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”

--- Matthew 23:23

In Matthew 25:31ff., the righteousness befitting the kingdom is compassionate care for those in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”

--- Luke 17:20-21

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

--- Hebrews 13:1-2

### **3. Theological quotations supporting progressive religion and public policy**

#### ***Jewish tradition***

“The world endures because of three activities: Torah study, worship of God and deeds of loving-kindness.”

--- Talmud, *Ethics of the Fathers*, 1:2

“‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ this is the major principle of the Torah.”

--- Rabbi Akiba, great scholar and teacher of the Talmudic era, quoted in the Talmud, Nedarim, 9:4

“The purpose of the laws of the Torah is to bring mercy, loving-kindness and peace upon the world.”

(Moses Maimonides, pre-eminent philosopher and rabbinic scholar of the Middle Ages, in *Mishneh*

--- *Torah*, Laws of the Sabbath, 2:3

According to contemporary Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, what matters most to God is man's ethical behavior. In his book *Jewish Wisdom*, he cites the Talmud:

In the hour when one is brought before the heavenly court for judgment, the person is asked:  
 Did you conduct your [business] affairs honestly?  
 Did you set aside regular time for Torah study?  
 Did you work at having children?  
 Did you look forward to the world's redemption?  
 --- Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Talushkin notes that the first question asked in heaven is not, "Did you believe in God?" but rather, "Were you honest?"

"Justice, people seem to agree, is a principle, a norm, an ideal of the highest importance. We all insist that it ought to be—but it may not be. In the eyes of the prophets, justice is more than an idea or a norm: justice is charged with the omnipotence of God. What ought to be, shall be! Righteousness is a vast and mighty stream because God is its unfailing source."  
 --- Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 272

### ***Christian tradition***

"In a struggle between those who enjoy inordinate privileges and those who lack the basic essentials of the good life it is fairly clear that a religion which holds love to be the final law of life stultifies itself if it does not support equal justice as a political and economic approximation of the ideal of love."  
 --- Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 120

"The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and. . . mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way. . . . This world must not be prematurely written off; in this the Old and New Testaments are at one. Redemption myths arise from human boundary experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life."  
 --- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 336f.

"The myth of redemptive violence is nationalism become absolute. This myth speaks for God; it does not listen for God to speak. . . . Its God is not the impartial ruler of all nations but a biased and partial tribal God worshiped as an idol. Its metaphor is not the journey but a fortress. Its symbol is not the cross but a rod of iron. Its offer is not forgiveness but victory. . . . Jesus denounced the Domination System of his day and proclaimed the advent of the kingdom of God. . . . The gospel is not a message of personal salvation *from* the world, but a message of *a world transfigured, right down to its basic structures.*"  
 --- Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 30, 82f.

“The reign of God. . . evokes an image of a topsy-turviness in which the first shall be last and the last will be first (Matt. 19:30). . . . Beyond any doubt, *justice* is the primary distinguishing theme and hallmark of the new order envisioned by the reign [of God].”

--- Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity*, 126

“The basic core of the New Testament message is that Jesus preached salvation to the outcasts. Peel back layer after layer of theological excursus and dogmatic formulation and you find Jesus announcing the coming kingdom of God to those who, by virtue of moral deportment or occupational choice, were viewed as sinners by the society in which they lived.”

--- William Coats, *God in Public*, 122

“Jesus appears announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand. . . . A total repentance to a cosmic kingdom is not *merely* political, but it is, nonetheless, certainly political. . . . The implication, then, is neither the Zealot prescription of hate and violence nor the pacifist prohibition of political power and coercion. The implication is rather a ‘great reversal’ for political power itself. To welcome the coming kingdom of God and its present effectiveness in this humble king calls for a disposition to construe power as a vocation to humble service.”

--- Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal*, 30f.