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# The Digital Divide: A Consideration of Justice and Pastoral Care in Moral Spaces in Response to Underserved Communities Experiencing Inequity in Technology- The Bible Dictates Our Christian Response

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The Digital Divide: A Consideration of Justice and Pastoral Care in Moral Spaces in Response to Underserved Communities Experiencing Inequity in Technology- The Bible Dictates Our Christian Response

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Director of Doctor of Ministry Program



A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of

Perkins School of Theology

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

Lael C. Melville M.Div., Psy.D.

November 5, 2021

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Melville Family Foundation understands that poverty in underserved communities' fuels economic instability fostering inequality in education. The COVID19 pandemic highlighted poverty as a breeding ground for injustice. The Pandemic drove life as we knew it online, further highlighting inequities in the technology space or the "digital divide". Christians have a responsibility to the digital divide in a way that facilitates justice while responding with the love of God.

**Aim:** The aim is to explore the digital divide in the consideration of justice and pastoral care in response to underserved communities experiencing inequity in technology.

**Method:** The researcher of this study will use current statistics on the digital divide and the history of inequality in Dallas balanced with a theological perspective.

**Main Findings:** The Digital Divide is caused by three major factors lack of information on how to utilize the technology, lack of access because of the associated price, and lack of information on the advantages of the technology. A response must include the love of God in the form of pastoral care (proxemics) and the teaching of 8<sup>th</sup> century and modern-day prophet Martin Luther King Jr. to live rightly.

**Conclusion:** The Christian community has been faced with one of the biggest dilemmas in the recent past, shifting to the digital world. Many churches are left in a dilemma on what to do with either to join the digital bandwagon or to stay in the traditional methods of preaching the gospel. Christians must answer the question, 'can we see injustice and do nothing'.

*Keywords: digital, divide, justice, pastoral care, moral space, underserved communities, inequality, technology, Christian, bible.*

Name of Student:

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Title of Dissertation: Subtitle:

**The Digital Divide:**

**A Consideration of Justice and Pastoral Care in Moral Spaces In Response To  
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Christian Response**

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## Introduction

### Statement of the Question/Problem

Over the last year, my family's non-profit organization, The Melville Family Foundation, and its partners have spent a significant amount of time determining the best response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The high transmission rate of COVID-19 required physical distance, and Dallas communities as we knew them to shut their doors. Technology became more essential to daily life than even a few months before. Transitioning the foundation's work online proved challenging, but revealed a larger problem within our communities – the digital divide.

The digital divide, or the limited presence of technology, is most present in underserved communities. These communities already face high rates of food insecurity, lower levels of literacy, and impoverished education. The denial of these basic needs, which now include digital access, creates social injustices that are inconsistent with the Christian tenet that God's work is justice. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in an interview, "there is a profound connection between life issues [poverty] and social justice."<sup>1</sup> God loves justice, and therefore the disparity of the digital divide is an unacceptable inequity. Christians must intervene with the personal love of God in pursuit of social justice aligned with the self-directed needs of the community.

Why do we need to be concerned about the absence of justice in impoverished communities during a pandemic? And more importantly, is God present when social justice is absent? We should be concerned because disadvantaged communities, largely made up of black and brown Americans (including natives), are experiencing the impact of COVID-19 at far greater rates than affluent white communities. According to a 2020 study from the Pew Research

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<sup>1</sup> William Newton, "The Link between Life Issues and Social Justice," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2012): 449.

Center, nearly 52 percent of Black and Hispanic families have experienced “some type of job upheaval,” during COVID-19, suggesting job losses or pay cuts.<sup>2</sup> Further contributing to the dilemma, low-income families are unlikely to have a safety net of “rainy day” funds to fall back on. Thus, communities that were already facing great financial difficulty are now under more pressure due to the pandemic.

Further contributing to the dilemma, low-income families are unlikely to have a safety net of “rainy day” funds to fall back on. Thus, communities that were already facing great financial difficulty are now under more pressure due to the pandemic. Beyond digital access, one Princeton University research study argues that the digital divide creates “digital inequality” that includes the lack of equipment, lack of skills, lack of support, and lack of purpose necessary for technology use.<sup>3</sup> This definition expands and articulates the needs of these communities beyond simple internet access. The internet, as we have seen across the country in the last year, is a powerful channel to achieve social justice. Technological access provides opportunities for those inside the community to reach out and vice versa. Therefore, when underserved communities have limited technological access, particularly during a time when God’s work is predominately being shared electronically, individuals have limited access to God’s [His] work outside of the church.

The solution to closing this gap begins with pastoral care. Pastoral caregivers interact with people's efforts oriented towards a decent life, a worthwhile life, or a full life—when they

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2 About Half of Lower-Income Americans Report Household Job or Wage Loss Due to COVID-19," Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, last modified August 26, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/04/21/about-half-of-lower-income-americans-report-household-job-or-wage-loss-due-to-covid-19/>.

3 Paul DiMaggio and Eszter Hargittai, "From the 'Digital Divide' to Digital Inequality': Studying Internet Use as Penetration Increases," (Princeton University, 2001).

view pastoral care as working in moral spaces. In this context, a “good life” entails a strong appraisal and relates to what is crucially important or of basic value to persons and is a part of their identity.<sup>4</sup> However, this definition of pastoral care as interacting with people's effort oriented towards vital goods applies to other occupations and therefore does not reflect the unique aspects of pastoral care. Social workers, psychiatrists, and physicians, for example, all assist people in (re)orienting themselves toward goods and goals that are important to them, like (mental) wellness. What, therefore, is the pastoral nature of pastoral caregivers' interaction with people's moral space orienting mechanisms? However, the moral space orienting mechanism is a mental function process that has a link between person, time, and behaving self to space. In this way, the moral space orienting mechanism plays a vital role in the pastoral caregiver's interaction with people. As representatives of the good, pastoral caretakers view the individuals' realities with love and empathy and, therefore, listen closely to their tales. Moreover, they recognize that their efforts to see the individuals' realities are never complete. As a result, rather than providing pre-existing answers, they must tailor their responses to the uniqueness of each individual's experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the significance of the internet in our society and simultaneously our spirituality. If God calls on us to serve the underserved, yet the underserved do not have access to the vehicle we can reach them with, what happens? The answer is that social justice is minimized, and within the lack of opportunities is often the presence of poverty and unequal access to education. The modern church recognizes the importance of technology in our society, but recognition is not enough if those most in need do not have digital access.

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor. Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1989.

## **Methodology**

This study will balance the issue of the digital divide and historical inequality in Dallas with a theological perspective. My argument is that God's work revolves around justice. First, I will develop this premise alongside writings of eighth-century prophets and modern-day civil rights activists who used God's word to speak truth against injustices. Second, I will examine the digital divide, specific to Dallas within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will also highlight the unique role that technology serves and has historically served in terms of social justice movements. The goal of my research will be to illustrate what I know to be true – the full benefits of God's presence are interrupted by poverty and inequality. In particular, social injustices that leave individuals digitally isolated are now the most in need of God's justice. The goal of the intervention is to determine how to grant these communities digital access and knowledge that allows God's justice to exist.

## **Contribution to the Scholarly Field**

As a modern-day Christian and philanthropist, I understand the power of technology, particularly during this challenging time. My work will focus on bridging the digital access within the communities I serve, a gap that has become more apparent in light of COVID-19. This study will draw upon the work of scholars across many fields, but has been influenced heavily by the following three works:

The first is Jim Schutze's *The Accommodation: The Politics of Race in an American City*, which details how Dallas communities were historically designed to be oppressive to residents of color. His examination of these historical disadvantages is relevant as these are the communities that I serve in the present day. Schutze presents a detailed account of how injustices in these communities were formed and perpetuated, but because it was published in 1986, he was not

able to predict how such injustices would be mirrored technologically.<sup>5</sup> The second source, Theologist Antonio Spadaro's book *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, relates the importance of technology to the modern church:

In the development of communication, the Church sees the actions of God, who moves humanity toward completion. The Internet is, at least in its power, a space of communion that is part of our journey toward this completion. In Christ, we must therefore have a spiritual look at the Web, seeing Christ who calls humanity to be ever more unified and connected.<sup>6</sup>

While this is true, Spadaro fails to consider those in society without digital access – and how the church can reach them. Finally, Robert Linthicum's *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* provides Christians an excellent guide on how to engage and encourage community members to take control over injustices.<sup>7</sup> His only shortcoming is advising readers how to do so virtually, which is particularly necessary during a global pandemic.

Overall, these scholars have done their best within their respective fields to illustrate historical injustices, the importance of technology to the modern church, and the power of community engagement. My research will confirm that the injustices Schutze presented are

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5 Jim Schutze, *The Accommodation: The Politics of Race in an American City* (Citadel Press, 1986).

6 Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (Fordham University Press, 2014), x.

7 Robert Linthicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* (DownersGrove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

indeed longstanding and continue to be present in the communities I serve. My own experience and that of Spadaro illustrate how crucial digital access is as one of the many avenues of God's work of justice. Linthicum's *Transforming Power* is essential to my research because it demands we open and ensure channels of communication to fulfill God's purpose. To remedy continuing injustices, we must bring impoverished communities into the digital age.

My scholarly work will not only be a dissertation, but also an action plan to better connect with the communities God has brought to my heart to serve. In my findings, I intend to determine a replicable model that is helpful to lower-income public schools. Overall, the question of God's presence through and in social justice creates an opportunity to help the community live and see the principles of God at work i.e. justice equity, democracy, participation, transparency, and inclusion.

## Chapter 1: Historical Injustices and COVID-19

Historical injustices are extremely prevalent in underserved communities. Exposure to such injustices makes keeping up with life hurdles a struggle for members of these communities. God, being a God of justice, the form of injustices experienced can only be linked to the actions of humankind. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, our government's failure to act was passively unjust. As a result, the calamity of the crisis became an injustice. Judith Shklar, a political thinker, dissects the artificial line between "human-made" catastrophes and "natural" catastrophes.<sup>8</sup> Some of the climate crises we face are palpable examples to support Shklar's statement.

### History of Low-income in Dallas Communities

As previously mentioned, Schutze's book *The Accommodation* maps out how inequalities for communities of color in Dallas came to be between the 1950s and the 1980s. The following analysis will demonstrate that the injustices Schutze documented have not only continued for these communities but worsened in the modern age. Over the years, Dallas has seen glorious moments and economic triumphs. Yet despite the level of resilience that the city has demonstrated, the state of poverty in Dallas leaves nothing to be proud of. There is a very wide disparity between the wealthy families of Dallas and its poor residents.<sup>9</sup> Currently, many families residing in Dallas live on incomes below the federal suggested poverty line of \$24,300 in a family comprised of four people. This definition accounts for 23 percent of the population living

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<sup>8</sup> Finn, Janet L. *Just practice: A social justice approach to social work*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Carpio, G. G. (2018). Racial projections: cyberspace, public space, and the digital divide. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(2), 174-190



in poverty.<sup>10</sup> Low-income levels and gender factors have continued to devastate Dallas residents, and this issue is becoming direr as the population of poor residents increases.

In 1970, approximately 215,000 residents lived in the low-income areas of Dallas. At that time, this number accounted for about 26 percent of the city's population.<sup>11</sup> A business boom from 1975 to 1985 attracted many to Dallas, which increased the population by a large margin. However, the recession period that followed afterward (1986-1995) contributed to an increase in low-income families as many lost their jobs and homes. Several other factors have contributed to the current state of low income among Dallas residents, and these can be seen in the following paragraphs.<sup>12</sup>

Racial gaps can be termed as one of the significant challenges leading to low-income issues in Dallas. In the city, the population comprising of the white non-Hispanic groups seems to be highly favored in terms of employment opportunities and income. It is unfortunate that whites who only hold a high school diploma earn the same or sometimes even more than Hispanic or Black Americans who hold an associate's degree.<sup>13</sup> This shows how the level of income is unfavorable to these minority groups, who also happen to make up a more significant

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10 Maric, Josip. "The gender-based digital divide in maker culture: features, challenges and possible solutions."

*Journal of Innovation Economics Management* 3 (2018): 147-168.

11 Nyahodza, Lena, and Richard Higgs. "Towards bridging the digital divide in post-apartheid South Africa: a case of a historically disadvantaged university in Cape Town." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 83, no. 1 (2017): 39-48.

12 Tewathia, N., Kamath, A., & Ilavarasan, P. V. (2020). Social inequalities, fundamental inequities, and recurring of the digital divide: Insights from India. *Technology in Society*, 61, 101251.

13 Van Deursen, Alexander JAM, and Jan AGM Van Dijk. "The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access." *New media & society* 21, no. 2 (2019): 354-375.

percentage of the population of Dallas. When it comes to securing jobs, whites are more likely to get employed than Hispanics, Blacks, or other minority races. This likelihood is one of the reasons for the increasing gap between the income levels of Dallas families on racial grounds. By the year 2017, the population of those living in poverty comprises 83 percent Hispanic and Black residents.<sup>14</sup>

Another predictor of income, and therefore poverty, is the level of education an individual has attained. In most cases, those who have reached higher education fair better in gaining employment and therefore higher-earning patterns. In Dallas, most of the population is comprised of people with low educational attainment levels. This is partly due to the widespread poverty affecting the larger population of the city.<sup>15</sup> Those who cannot afford higher levels of education miss out on employment opportunities because they do not meet certain requirements.

Insufficient housing is another longtime challenge within Dallas. Following the 2008 housing crisis, many Dallas homeowners lost their homes and were forced to become renters.<sup>16</sup> High prices have forced Dallas residents to spend most of their meager income on housing alone, reducing the income spent on other living expenses. This, in turn, has sent the residents' income further down the income ladder.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding the efforts by the federal government to

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<sup>14</sup> Zheng, Yingqin, and Geoff Walsham. "Inequality of what? An intersectional approach to digital inequality under Covid-19." *Information and Organization* 31, no. 1 (2021): 100341

<sup>15</sup> Yu, Biyang, Ana Ndumu, Lorri M. Mon, and Zhenjia Fan. "E-inclusion or digital divide: an integrated model of digital inequality." *Journal of Documentation* (2018).

<sup>16</sup> Tewathia, N., Kamath, A., & Ilavarasan, P. V. (2020). Social inequalities, fundamental inequities, and recurring of the digital divide: Insights from India. *Technology in Society*, 61, 101251.

<sup>17</sup> Seymour, Kathryn, Jennifer Skattebol, and Ben Pook. "Compounding education disengagement: COVID-19 lockdown, the digital divide and wrap-around services." *Journal of Children's Services* (2020).

provide affordable housing, there are only 19 houses available for every 100 low-income families in the city.<sup>18</sup> There is knowledge of the problem, and technology and resources necessary to tackle the housing crisis are available. However, many times energy is directed not towards those in need but other interests and therefore not much is accomplished.<sup>19</sup>

Low-income housing in Dallas has been historically segregated, both in terms of household income and race. Affordable housing funded by the federal government is built in neighborhoods comprised of mostly African American and Hispanic residents. These low-income neighborhoods are home to higher crime rates, which deters prospective business growth. As a result, economic progress in these areas lags and therefore the income gap widens. Residents continue earning low incomes and are not able to meet their costs of living.<sup>20</sup> Population increase also factors into the low-income crisis among Dallas residents. In the 1970s, Dallas's population was approximately 2,025,000 people. In 2020, the population had grown to approximately 6,301,000 people.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the population increase is realized among the Black Americans, Asian Americans, and the Hispanic dwellers of the city. Between the 2000 and 2012 alone, the population increased approximately 41 percent.<sup>22</sup>

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18 Seifert, Alexander, Shelia R. Cotten, and Bo Xie. "A double burden of exclusion? Digital and social exclusion of older adults in times of COVID-19." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 76, no. 3 (2021): e99.

19 Sanders, Cynthia K., and Edward Scanlon. "The Digital Divide Is a Human Rights Issue: Advancing Social Inclusion Through Social Work Advocacy." *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* (2021): 1-14.

20 Reisdorf, Bianca, and Colin Rhinesmith. "Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion." *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 132-137.

21 Tewathia, N., Kamath, A., & Ilavarasan, P. V. (2020). Social inequalities, fundamental inequities, and recurring of the digital divide: Insights from India. *Technology in Society*, 61, 101251.

22 Seymour, Kathryn, Jennifer Skattebol, and Ben Pook. "Compounding education disengagement: COVID-19 lockdown, the digital divide and wrap-around services." *Journal of Children's Services* (2020)

An opposite trend can be seen in the median income of Dallas residents over the years. The median income for families of single mothers fell by 30 percent. It fell from \$28,026 in the 1970s to approximately \$19,559 when the inflation rate is valuated.<sup>23</sup> This income drop is a significant blow to residents of Dallas. It is also important to note that the rise in the number of low-income families increased the dependency ratio on those fortunate enough to work, thus reducing the effectiveness of already low wages.

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23 Singh, Jang Bahadur, Sujeet K. Sharma, and Prashant Gupta. "Physical Learning Environment Challenges in the Digital Divide: How to Design Effective Instruction during COVID-19?." *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 48, no. 1 (2021): 18

## **Passive Injustice**

In *The Faces of Injustice* (1990), Judy Shklar stresses that the line amid misfortune and inequality is adjustable through history as well. According to Shklar, simple misfortunes of the past can become present-day injustices depending upon society's institutional and technological advancement level.<sup>24</sup> This acceleration occurs when society has the modern resources to resolve an issue, but the effort to do so is minimal or nonexistent.<sup>25</sup> Through this lens, Shklar recognizes that not all injustices are a result of active measures. Rather, many injustices emanate from neglect, unpreparedness, and smugness spearheaded by political ideologies that embrace a failure to act. Such failures of government action to contain situations due to negligence and contrary to people's expectations in a contemporary and liberal democracy can be identified as "passive injustice."<sup>26</sup>

## **Passive Injustice and COVID**

The historical injustices discussed in Dallas certainly qualify as passive, and the COVID-19 pandemic response was a passive injustice that further piled upon the existing injustices in underserved communities. When the pandemic first began, many international governments downplayed its dangers, and in some instances, even denied its existence.<sup>27</sup> It follows that there was an ineffective response to the outbreak, and life-saving measures were also executed sloppily. As a result, we saw the results of passive injustice exhibited globally at the highest

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24 Bailey, Maddie. "What is Social Justice?." (2018).

25 Bollman, Tad. "The Bible and Black Identity: Israel United in Christ and the Hebrew Israelite Movement." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018

26 Brett, Mark G. *Locations of God: Political Theology in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

27 Karcher, Owen Paul. "Sociopolitical oppression, trauma, and healing: Moving toward a social justice art therapy framework." *Art Therapy* 34, no. 3 (2017): 123-128.

levels. Governments wealthy enough to tackle the pandemic at its earlier stages who neglected to act quickly created a high level of passive injustice that profoundly impacts the most impoverished of our society.

The COVID-19 pandemic confirms that passive injustices and liberalism of fear are harmful practices with severe consequences to society as a whole and even more so detrimental to those communities lacking basic needs before the pandemic. Despair has become commonplace among the impoverished communities, and the state's role in lessening their impacts is apparent.<sup>28</sup> The chaos the pandemic created is a good place to begin assessing how we as Christians can be able to handle situations with empathy, compassion, and mercy in comparison with the ideas raised in Shklar's work. This method reveals present inequalities and allows us to envision a society that would have handled the situation better by considering all the necessary fundamentals of Christian values and principalities— the rudiments necessary for living free of fear and unending despair.<sup>29</sup>

The pandemic has shown us that the injustices we already experience are prone to heightening when disaster strikes. The COVID-19 lockdown, social distancing, and government preventive measures have negatively impacted poor communities at a greater rate. Social injustices are heightened with catastrophes, whether they be deemed natural like the COVID-19 pandemic or systemic such as the recurrent economic collapses that are more often referred to as “natural” by many people to cover their failures to mitigate the situation before its occurrence.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Mathews, Jeanette. *Prophets as Performers: Biblical Performance Criticism and Israel's Prophets*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020.

29 Lewis, Hannah. "Deaf Liberation Theology and social justice." *Religions* 8, no. 10 (2017): 232.

30 Marmot, Michael. "Social justice, epidemiology and health inequalities." *European journal of epidemiology* 32, no. 7 (2017): 537-546.

Shklar directs us to the truth that there are no actual natural adversities and that each catastrophe welcomes passive injustices from the roots to the branches.<sup>31</sup> This also opens us to the fact that the calamities affecting us are not the will of God, but a result of humankind's own doing – for God is a just God, and His will is to ensure justice prevails.

### **The Impact of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic required change for everyone around the globe. Because we were used to a different way of life, the world had issues adjusting to the new norms required to meet the safety measures of the pandemic. These adjustments are not unique to COVID – changes in the way of life are required to counter the effects of any calamity. However, when speaking of COVID-19, there was some level of uniqueness in the number of measures put in place to curb its spread.<sup>32</sup>

All institutions in our society were affected and felt the impacts of COVID-19 deeply.<sup>33</sup> The nature of the pandemic called for a wide range of measures that affected all aspects of life, ranging from the economic spectrum to the social spectrum to the medical. Lockdown measures affected the flow of goods and services and transitioned education, jobs, meetings, financial transaction, and social events, etc. interactions to virtual platforms.<sup>34</sup> Besides putting the lives of

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31 Morrow, William. *An introduction to biblical law*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017.

32 Seifert, Alexander, Shelia R. Cotten, and Bo Xie. "A double burden of exclusion? Digital and social exclusion of older adults in times of COVID-19." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 76, no. 3 (2021): e99-e103.

33 Pandey, Neena, and Abhipsa Pal. "Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102171.

34 Lai, John, and Nicole O. Widmar. "Revisiting the Digital Divide in the COVID-19 Era." *Applied economic perspectives and policy* 43, no. 1 (2021): 458-464.

the citizens in danger, COVID-19 placed immense pressure on our healthcare system, which was entirely unprepared for such a devastating health crisis.

In early December 2020, the number of recorded COVID cases in Dallas alone had reached 328,338 people, and the number of recorded deaths had reached 2,814.<sup>35</sup> Weekly hospitalization rates had doubled since September 2020. Residents aged 65 and above years composed nine percent of the total cases reported locally; those between the ages of 18-40 made up 45 percent.<sup>36</sup> The medical community of Dallas could not keep up with the pressure – at that time, there were only 31 ICU beds in the entire city available to take care of the most severe cases.<sup>37</sup>

The economic hit fell hard upon the service industry, and therefore low-income communities. In response to the pandemic, these businesses reduced hiring, which decreased economic output and job availability. Pandemic restrictions halted consumer spending in the service industry, with hotels, recreation facilities, and the performing art venues suffering the most impact. We can see this dramatic change from 2019 to 2020: sales tax dropped five percent; the oil production tax dropped 45.5 percent; the natural gas tax dropped 25 percent; the alcoholic

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35 Iivari, Netta, Sumita Sharma, and Leena Ventä-Olkkonen. "Digital transformation of everyday life–How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102183.

36 Iivari, Netta, Sumita Sharma, and Leena Ventä-Olkkonen. "Digital transformation of everyday life–How COVID- 19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102183.

37 Goedhart, Nicole S., Jacqueline EW Broerse, Rolinka Kattouw, and Christine Dedding. "'Just having a computer doesn't make sense': The digital divide from the perspective of mothers with a low socio-economic position." *New media & society* 21, no. 11-12 (2019): 2347-2365.



beverage tax fell 28.5 percent, and the hotel occupancy tax plummeted 48.5 percent.<sup>38</sup> In one year, the pandemic resulted in a \$23 billion loss in real gross product and another \$15 billion loss in personal income.<sup>39</sup>

In some cases, businesses outright decreased the number of employees leading to a high rate of job loss and unemployment. Within the first five months of the pandemic, more than 370,000 people had lost their job in Dallas alone and the unemployment rate had risen by 4.3 percent. This mass job loss destabilized the low-income families in Dallas. Many families were devastated and did not know where to turn for help.<sup>40</sup> As a result, residents of low-income communities were forced to live on the little savings they had and outsource help from family and friends.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Esteban-Navarro, Miguel-Ángel, Miguel-Ángel García-Madurga, Tamara Morte-Nadal, and Antonia-Isabel Nogales-Bocio. "The Rural Digital Divide in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Europe—Recommendations from a Scoping Review." In *Informatics*, vol. 7, no. 4, p. 54. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2020.; Fox, Grace, and Regina Connolly. "Mobile health technology adoption across generations: Narrowing the digital divide." *Information Systems Journal* 28, no. 6 (2018): 995-1019.; Iivari, Netta, Sumita Sharma, and Leena Ventä-Olkkonen. "Digital transformation of everyday life—How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102183.

39 Azubuike, Obiageri Bridget, Oyindamola Adegboye, and Habeeb Quadri. "Who gets to learn in a pandemic? Exploring the digital divide in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria." *International Journal of Educational Research Open* (2020): 100022.

40 George, G., Lakhani, K. R., & Puranam, P. (2020). What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8), 1754-1758.

41 George, G., Lakhani, K. R., & Puranam, P. (2020). What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8), 1754-1758.

Beyond bank accounts, COVID-19 dramatically changed the social lives of people across the world. Necessary gathering restrictions reduced socialization and monetary earnings through gig performance and church attendance. To connect with friends and family, people had to communicate solely via the internet or phone calls.

### **Current Response and Effectiveness**

When the pandemic first hit Dallas, local non-profit organizations were under increased pressure to cater to those in need with minimal funds. Because the virus containment measures were so new to people, they generated fear and confusion. The uncertainty around the beginning of the pandemic also reduced the number of volunteers, who worried about contracting the virus.<sup>42</sup> With time, non-profit organizations in Dallas found creative ways for volunteers to participate in programs as advocates/supporters.<sup>43</sup> One example of this creativity was demonstrated by the Crossroads Community Services (CCS), a food bank that operates in southern Dallas and provides meals to the needy. A few months into the pandemic in April 2020, the 2,346 CSS visitors in need the year before had increased 600 percent to approximately 17,113.<sup>44</sup> These new visitors were people working in house cleaning sectors, construction, or customer service who had either lost their jobs or had their working hours reduced significantly. In response to the increase of those needing assistance, CSS adopted a drive-through model that

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42 Pandey, Neena, and Abhipsa Pal. "Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102171.

43 Seifert, Alexander, Shelia R. Cotten, and Bo Xie. "A double burden of exclusion? Digital and social exclusion of older adults in times of COVID-19." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 76, no. 3 (2021): e99-e103.

44 Singh, Jang Bahadur, Sujeet K. Sharma, and Prashant Gupta. "Physical Learning Environment Challenges in the Digital Divide: How to Design Effective Instruction during COVID-19?." *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 48, no. 1 (2021): 18.

allowed clients to receive food while socially distant. To ensure the safety of the staff and volunteers, they were all asked to take temperature measures before entering the premises and thoroughly wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.<sup>45</sup>

The city of Dallas is also closely working with partners in the health sector at Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to guarantee maximum protection of the public's health concerns.<sup>46</sup> To counter the economic toll caused by the pandemic, Governor Abbott issued safety guidelines and allowed businesses to resume operations while maintaining the minimum safety requirements for COVID-19.<sup>47</sup>

Like CSS, the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is another non-profit working closely with leaders of the community, school districts, partner organizations, and donors to help bridge the economic gap COVID-19 brought on. So far, its program has been effective and has raised 3.3 million dollars, which has been spread to over 230 non-profits to help alleviate the short-term and long-term problems of over 1.3 million Dallas residents.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the non-profit United to Learn is working closely with Dallas ISD leadership to evaluate the resource need of the district's 27 partner schools. United to Learn aims to

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45 Subudhi, Rabi, Srikant Das, and Sonalimayee Sahu. "Social Inclusion of Older Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic." *Parikalpana: KIIT Journal of Management* (2020).

46 Tudor, Sofia Loredana. "E-inclusion versus digital divide—a challenge for Romanian educational system within the context of CORONAVIRUS pandemic growth." *Educația Plus* 26, no. 1 (2020): 374-381.

47 Yu, Biyang, Ana Ndumu, Lorri M. Mon, and Zhenjia Fan. "E-inclusion or digital divide: an integrated model of digital inequality." *Journal of Documentation* (2018).

48 Zheng, Yingqin, and Geoff Walsham. "Inequality of what? An intersectional approach to digital inequality under Covid-19." *Information and Organization* 31, no. 1 (2021): 100341.

distribute at least 4200 meals weekly and over 200 grocery gift cards to needy families. As part of the program, the organization works to support remote learning by providing necessary materials.<sup>49</sup> The Center for Survivors of Torture (CST) is also one of the many organizations on the forefront to ensure a smooth COVID recovery process for the citizens of Dallas. The CST provides basic needs such as food, shelter, personal hygiene items, home cleaning products, and other utilities to ease the transition after the pandemic to new beginnings.<sup>50</sup> With the effects of COVID-19 far-reaching, CST has increased the service delivery to meet the needs of the many.

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49 Hampton, Keith. "Neighborhoods in the Network Society: The e-Neighbors Study" *Information, Communication & Society* 10:5 (October 2007), 714-748.

50 Rhoades, H., Wenzel, S. L., Rice, E., Winetrobe, H., & Henwood, B. (2017). No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26(1), 73-77.

## Chapter 2: The Digital Divide

### Definition

The digital divide, according to scholars Ramsetty and Adams (2020), is the economic and social disparity created by access to, use of, or influence of information and communication technologies.<sup>51</sup> The global digital divide refers to the divide that exists between countries or regions with differing demographic conditions. This study focuses on the digital divide in the United States, which stems from economic disparities that create differences between people, families, industries, and geographical positions.<sup>52</sup>

In the past, scholars discussed the digital divide in terms of mobile phones, but 95 percent of Americans now have access to these devices, which requires an expansion of this original definition.<sup>53</sup> Presently, the digital divide can be better understood as inequality in access to the internet connection, devices, and the skills people have while using the internet. In conceptualizing the digital divide, it is important to note the "who," with which the characteristics connect to the "what." *Who* can be described as the subject that connects individuals, organizations, churches, and countries to the digital divide? This can be used to

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51 Ramsetty, A., & Adams, C. (2020). Impact of the digital divide in the age of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, 27(7), 1147-1148.

52 Choi, E. Y., Kim, Y., Chipalo, E., & Lee, H. Y. (2020). Does Perceived Ageism Widen the Digital Divide? And Does It Vary by Gender?. *The Gerontologist*, 60(7), 1213-1223.

53 Duplaga, M. (2017). Digital divide among people with disabilities: Analysis of data from a nationwide study for determinants of Internet use and activities performed online. *PloS one*, 12(6), e0179825.

conceptualize the characteristics of the distinguished attributes to describe the divide "which" includes income, education, and age.<sup>54</sup>

When discussing the digital divide, it is important to understand how sophisticated an individual's internet usage is, the extent of innovation, and the extent of interaction with information communication tools (ICTs).<sup>55</sup> It is also crucial to understand how the subject physically connects to a fixed or mobile internet, telephone, digital or broadband network, and many factors about the ICT department.<sup>56</sup> Numerous authors have studied the different aspects of the digital divide, which has led to the development of many definitions. For instance, three aspects are often considered in terms of defining the digital divide: individuals, organizations, and regions. Within each of these aspects are different characteristics, i.e., gender, wealth, geography, and sector, all contributing different meaning and definition to the digital divide.<sup>57</sup> The consideration and significance of these factors within the discussion of the digital divide depends upon the researcher's analysis.

### **Measurement and Factors**

Because of its broad nature, measuring the divide in digital access and use has been a subject of debate among scholars. As previously mentioned, the digital divide was originally determined by the number of mobile devices available. But when measured in this manner,

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<sup>54</sup> George, G., Lakhani, K. R., & Puranam, P. (2020). What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8), 1754-1758.

<sup>55</sup> Scheerder, A., van Deursen, A., & van Dijk, J. (2017). Determinants of Internet skills, uses and outcomes. A systematic review of the second-and third-level digital divide. *Telematics and informatics*, 34(8), 1607-1624.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>57</sup> Peroni, M., & Bartolo, M. (2018). The Digital Divide. In *Multidisciplinary Teleconsultation in Developing Countries* (pp. 101-109). Springer, Cham.

the digital divide appears to be constantly closing due to the growing number of available devices and their ability to connect to the internet. As a result, modern researchers have proposed several methods to measure the divide as it applies to the technological advances we have today. With new approaches, Heponiemi et al. emphasized that the digital divide is widening in terms of relative terms.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the research process, each explanation is assessed, and others must be controlled to remove the effects of interaction and the mediating variables. However, the explanations must stand as general stands and not direct causes.<sup>59</sup> For instance, the measurements for the intensity of usages, such as incidence and frequency, are different in many ways. Different studies explain these factors uniquely; for example, some studies describe usage as access to the internet, while other studies describe access as previously connected to the internet.<sup>60</sup> There is a new consensus that recognizes that the key question should be how to connect to a specific network through a digital device and how to extend the gains gained from the ICTs integration as the home can have Internet but the strength and stability are variants.<sup>61</sup>

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58 Heponiemi, T., Jormanainen, V., Leemann, L., Manderbacka, K., Aalto, A. M., & Hyppönen, H. (2020). Digital divide in perceived benefits of online health care and social welfare services: National cross-sectional survey study. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 22(7), e17616.

59 Goncalves, G., Oliveira, T., & Cruz-Jesus, F. (2018). Understanding individual-level digital divide: Evidence of an African country. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 276-291.

60 Mihelj, S., Leguina, A., & Downey, J. (2019). Culture is digital: Cultural participation, diversity and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1465-1485.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 58

Another proposed method is to calculate the number of digital divide kbits/s per actor. To measure the digital divide, different variables are considered, including the Integrated Iterative Approach General Framework and the digital divide modeling theory under the measurement model of DDG (Digital Divide Gap), which assess the gap between developing and developed countries and the populations in these countries. When measured this way, we can see that the digital divide has been opening (i.e., revealing a wider gap) alongside technological advancement, especially during the pandemic.

In 2010, the number of fixed telecommunication penetration was 70 percent within developed countries, including the US.<sup>62</sup> In the decade that followed, penetration in developed countries constantly increased to 85 percent. In developing countries, the rate of telecommunication steadily increased from ten percent in 2010 to 35 percent in 2020. Still, the gap between the countries is huge, and the digital divide between these countries is enormous. However, developing countries are increasing their penetration rates; it is taking place slowly and it is hard to project when the two types of countries can have similar penetration rates.<sup>63</sup> When broadband internet was first introduced, the fixed-line bandwidth gap was much wider than it is now. It was about 20 times more than the rate of penetration between developing and developed countries. This, however, does not give the exact standings on how the two types of countries are different, hence the importance of measuring the divide based on the kbits/s and not merely through devices.

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62 Wang, D., Zhou, T., & Wang, M. (2021). Information and communication technology (ICT), digital divide and urbanization: Evidence from Chinese cities. *Technology in Society*, 64, 101516.

63 Lembani, R., Gunter, A., Breines, M., & Dalu, M. T. B. (2020). The same course, different access: the digital divide between urban and rural distance education students in South Africa. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 44(1), 70-84.



Researchers have also noted that digital access is impossible to completely close due to the method in which technology is adopted in society. This can be attributed to the fact that new technology disseminates slowly; It is influenced by several characteristics such as an individual's income, race, and geographical location. These characteristics make the adoption of new technology unique for every member of society, and therefore the process is drawn out. For instance, communications in the 1990s was unequally distributed as compared to how internet advancements are distributed in the world at the moment.<sup>64</sup> The recent increase in the digital divide has been prompted in part by the increased diffusion of technologies such as the 5G and fiber optics technologies.<sup>65</sup>

The digital divide is higher and therefore technological adoption is slower for racial minorities, rural residents, and people with lower socioeconomic status.<sup>66</sup> Those who fall into these groups are often the last people to benefit from new technologies while those of the higher class and the urban life are the first to receive. As a result, individuals whose characteristics place them at a disadvantage will require more than the passing of time to catch up with the fast-moving train.

In the past, gender was thought to be the biggest factor of the digital divide as it was thought that technology was male-gendered. However this has been argued against and researchers have proved that the foremost contributing factors to the digital divide are

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64 Van Deursen, A. J., & Van Dijk, J. A. (2019). The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. *New media & society*, 21(2), 354-375.

65 Van Dijk, J. A. (2017). Digital divide: Impact of access. *The international encyclopedia of media effects*, 1-11.

66 Goncalves, G., Oliveira, T., & Cruz-Jesus, F. (2018). Understanding individual-level digital divide: Evidence of an African country. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 276-291.

differences in income levels, education, and employment, etc.<sup>67</sup> Economic factors, in particular, are most significant to an individual's digital access – research indicates that the digital divide is primarily caused by disparities in wealth and educational attainment.<sup>68</sup> In the United States, the digital divide is exacerbated by the country's economic disparity. The digital divide is heavily rooted in the increase in poverty. Research indicates that with the increase of income in American households, there is a resulting rise in internet use. This illustrates that economic barriers prevent lower-income groups from accessing the funds necessary to embrace new and emerging technologies.<sup>69</sup>

When the internet was first introduced in the 1990s, the US Department of Telecommunications and Information Administration published reports and articles emphasizing the importance of using accessible tools to learn about ICT.<sup>70</sup> The department predicted that the internet and ICT would be leading forces of American business, education, and communication. Their reports found that economic differences across the country would be the biggest threat to an increase in the divide among the middle class and

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67 Grishchenko, N. (2020). The gap not only closes: Resistance and reverse shifts in the digital divide in Russia. *Telecommunications Policy*, 44(8), 102004.

68 Peroni, M., & Bartolo, M. (2018). The Digital Divide. In *Multidisciplinary Teleconsultation in Developing Countries* (pp. 101-109). Springer, Cham.

69 Gran, A. B., Booth, P., & Bucher, T. (2020). To be or not to be algorithm aware: a question of a new digital divide?. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-18.

70 Hohlfeld, T. N., Ritzhaupt, A. D., Dawson, K., & Wilson, M. L. (2017). An examination of seven years of technology integration in Florida schools: Through the lens of the Levels of Digital Divide in Schools. *Computers & Education*, 113, 135-161.

low-class income population.<sup>71</sup> The digital divide has not been bridged since the publication of these reports over 20 years ago.<sup>72</sup>

It is recognized that this lack of progress in our community of Dallas. Ragnedda and Ruiu in one survey of 1400 parents, found that 47 percent of the parents had an income of \$75,000 and had downloaded apps for their children to use for education and interactive purposes, while only 14 percent of the family's income 14 percent and had not downloaded the apps for their children's.<sup>73</sup> The digital divide has been commonly referred to as the difference between the haves and the have-nots. The divide in digital access, especially during a pandemic, can result in a difference in people with high-income earnings and low-income earners, particularly for those who lost jobs due to COVID-19.

In addition to economic status and race, location is another major factor in the digital divide and access to information technology and communication. When it comes to geography, people in urban areas are more likely to use the internet than those in rural areas and the internet availability in rural and urban regions is high, increasing the gap between the two geographical locations.<sup>74</sup> New and advanced technologies often reach the urban

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71 Lupáč, P. (2018). *Beyond the digital divide: Contextualizing the information society*. Emerald Group Publishing.

72 Hong, Y. A., Zhou, Z., Fang, Y., & Shi, L. (2017). The digital divide and health disparities in China: evidence from a national survey and policy implications. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 19(9), e317.

73 Ragnedda, M., & Ruiu, M. (2017). Social capital and the three levels of digital divide." 21-34.

74 Nishijima, M., Ivanauskas, T. M., & Sarti, F. M. (2017). Evolution and determinants of digital divide in Brazil (2005–2013). *Telecommunications Policy*, 41(1), 12-24.

population first, and in urban areas, the internet is accessible in public places such as internet cafes, hotels, and transport agencies.<sup>75</sup>

The difference in access based on geographic location causes points towards another hindrance in digital access – infrastructure. Digital infrastructure involves the different ways people connect to the internet and how they can connect to the internet.<sup>76</sup> In the past, fewer infrastructures enabling people to access the internet were available. Today, the internet is accessible in various ways, including: desktops, computers, laptops, mobile phones, smartphones, and online gaming.<sup>77</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the necessity of these channels, yet many Americans did not have full access due to the factors previously discussed. This access is crucial and a necessary condition to closing the digital divide.

Income in particular is what makes the difference between ICT as a necessity and ICT as luxury.<sup>78</sup> Research shows that ordinary Americans will spend an average of \$30 on Internet per month. The world spends around three percent of its income on the internet alone.<sup>79</sup> This means that for too many, internet connection is a necessity and not an

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75 Aaronson, S. A., & Leblond, P. (2018). Another digital divide: the rise of data realms and its implications for the WTO. *Journal of International Economic Law*, 21(2), 245-272.

76 Philip, L., Cottrill, C., Farrington, J., Williams, F., & Ashmore, F. (2017). The digital divide: Patterns, policy and scenarios for connecting the ‘final few’ in rural communities across Great Britain. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 54, 386-398.

77 Fang, M. L., Canham, S. L., Battersby, L., Sixsmith, J., Wada, M., & Sixsmith, A. (2019). Exploring privilege in the digital divide: implications for theory, policy, and practice. *The Gerontologist*, 59(1), e1-e15.

78 Nishijima, M., Ivanauskas, T. M., & Sarti, F. M. (2017). Evolution and determinants of digital divide in Brazil (2005–2013). *Telecommunications Policy*, 41(1), 12-24.

79 Peroni, M., & Bartolo, M. (2018). The Digital Divide. In *Multidisciplinary Teleconsultation in Developing Countries* (pp. 101-109). Springer, Cham.

expenditure. Therefore, possible solutions to bridging the access divide could be lowering internet prices and therefore increase affordability for more of the population.

Though improved infrastructure and affordability would partially mitigate the problem, the digital divide is about more than just access. Regardless of the social or economic status, technology can increase productivity and knowledge. With more people accessing the internet daily, researchers also focus on how people are using the internet to gain knowledge.<sup>80</sup> Analysts suggest that the divide has now shifted from an access divide to a knowledge divide – meaning the large majority of the population can access the internet but do not have the necessary knowledge in terms of internet use.<sup>81</sup> This creates a second gap. Once individuals have the tools to link to ICT, they still must understand how to use digital information productively. Once a person can access the digital space and the necessary infrastructure to connect to the internet, he or she can be regarded as a digital citizen. Thus, mass connectivity requires educating all members of society on internet skills and use for them to receive the full benefit of resources available on the internet.<sup>82</sup>

Minority groups and Americans in rural communities do not have the benefits of full access because of additional factors such as cultural differences or poor education. The imminent shift to an increased use of digital platforms long-awaited by experts was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these factors further limited the connectivity

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80 Yu, Biyang, Ana Ndumu, Lorri M. Mon, and Zhenjia Fan. "E-inclusion or digital divide: an integrated model of digital inequality." *Journal of Documentation* (2018).

81 Rotz, S., Gravely, E., Mosby, I., Duncan, E., Finnis, E., Horgan, M., ... & Fraser, E. (2019). Automated pastures and the digital divide: How agricultural technologies are shaping labour and rural communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 68, 112.

82 Ragnedda, Massimo, and Maria Ruiu. "Social capital and the three levels of digital divide." (2017): 21-34.

capacity for these individuals.<sup>83</sup> Barriers to internet access deny sections of the population the freedom to learn about different things and access important services provided by the government.<sup>84</sup> Individuals must be able to properly connect and engage to achieve enhancement of social and cultural capital and overall gains in mass communication.

In the past decade, social media has become crucial to digital citizenship because it allows individuals to access knowledge while building social capital. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are global platforms with major influence. These platforms allow the exchange of ideas between people of different backgrounds, leading exchange of knowledge and ideas on national and global issues.<sup>85</sup> Beyond increasing social capital, social media has become a means to create financial gains as well. New technologies and software have led to many people creating content for their own use. This phenomenon creates an “output gap” which separates content and content producers.<sup>86</sup> Content creators with internet infrastructure and skills can share their content and create profit from doing

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83 Mihelj, S., Leguina, A., & Downey, J. (2019). Culture is digital: Cultural participation, diversity and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1465-1485

84 Philip, L., Cottrill, C., Farrington, J., Williams, F., & Ashmore, F. (2017). The digital divide: Patterns, policy and scenarios for connecting the ‘final few’ in rural communities across Great Britain. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 54, 386-398.

85 Rowsell, J., Morrell, E., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). Confronting the digital divide: Debunking brave new world discourses. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(2), 157.

86 Rhoades, H., Wenzel, S. L., Rice, E., Winetrobe, H., & Henwood, B. (2017). No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26(1), 73-77.

so.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, those who have no access to the internet cannot benefit from the digital platforms created. This social media phenomenon illustrates just one way in which opportunities can result from digital access and digital knowledge.

### **In Relation to COVID-19**

Information professionals tasked with bridging the knowledge gap should educate disadvantaged groups on how to access information and practice the digital skills they acquire to better their communities.<sup>88</sup> Global organizations such as the United Nations are trying to raise awareness on internet use through global programs, such as World Information Society Day, which has been active since 2006. In 2000, the UN launched the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program, an initiative aimed at helping the member nations understand the impact of Information Communication and Technology.<sup>89</sup> The program is designed to bridge the digital divide by helping its participants understand ICT. A large number of people have participated in the programming, indicating an increase in the number of people who have understood the importance of ICT.

While these UN efforts made progress towards closing the digital divide, the pandemic halted connectivity gains and eroded advancements made over the last 20 years. At the 2020

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87 Rotz, S., Gravely, E., Mosby, I., Duncan, E., Finnis, E., Horgan, M., ... & Fraser, E. (2019). Automated pastures and the digital divide: How agricultural technologies are shaping labour and rural communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 68, 112-122.

88 Lucendo-Monedero, A. L., Ruiz-Rodríguez, F., & González-Relaño, R. (2019). Measuring the digital divide at regional level. A spatial analysis of the inequalities in digital development of households and individuals in Europe. *Telematics and Informatics*, 41, 197-217.

89 Rhoades, H., Wenzel, S. L., Rice, E., Winetrobe, H., & Henwood, B. (2017). No digital divide? Technology use among homeless adults. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 26(1), 73-77.

United Nations General Assembly, the UN president stated that the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) and universal connectivity target had not been met. The president also remarked that the COVID-19 pandemic had underscored the depth and gravity of the digital divide.<sup>90</sup> In 2020, an estimated 3.6 billion people were offline and had no access to the internet.<sup>91</sup> Developing countries were particularly affected – one study found that only 19 percent of those living in developing countries could access the internet. This small percentage was projected to only decline as the pandemic continued.

Digital access is not a new issue, but rather the pandemic revealed our vulnerabilities as a society and the consequences of them. Society came to a halt with the start of the pandemic.<sup>92</sup> It has demonstrated how the world is divided into two groups: those who have an abundance and those who have little. The consequences of this division created as well as deepened inequalities in healthcare, jobs, and education. First, governments and international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) embraced technology as a method of communicating information about the pandemic. Individuals without the internet had limited access to this information, which was crucial to ensuring the safety of themselves and their families.<sup>93</sup> The unprecedented economic decline of COVID-19 caused many Americans to lose their jobs. At the same time, safety measures taken to limit virus exposure pushed businesses to embrace technology and

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90 Lupač, P. (2018). *Beyond the digital divide: Contextualizing the information society*. Emerald Group Publishing.

91 Peroni, M., & Bartolo, M. (2018). The Digital Divide. In *Multidisciplinary Teleconsultation in Developing Countries* (pp. 101-109). Springer, Cham.

92 Ramsetty, A., & Adams, C. (2020). Impact of the digital divide in the age of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, 27(7), 1147-1148.

93 Rowsell, J., Morrell, E., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). Confronting the digital divide: Debunking brave new world discourses. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(2), 157-165.



continue work digitally. Potential or former employees without access were left behind. Finally, school closures led to remote learning, which created an uneven playing field for students without the internet access at home.

### **Unequal Society and Digital Inequity**

According to 2017 data, 52 percent of families living in Dallas are middle-income, while 16.7 percent are high-income earners.<sup>94</sup> Nearly one-third of the Dallas population (30.4 percent) live in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>95</sup> This portion of the Dallas community earns six times less compared to those living in high-income areas. The pandemic affected these poor districts disproportionately; The economic crisis it caused has only increased poverty and inequality in the city.<sup>96</sup> Between January 2020 through August 2020, unemployment in the city rose from 2.1 percent to 8.6 percent.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the pandemic widened the inequalities that already existed between low-income earners and high-income earners in Dallas.

The digital divide is a result of these inequalities, and therefore it widened as well in the pandemic. In 2016, 96 percent of Dallas was connected to the internet.<sup>98</sup> In some of the poorest

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94 Seifert, A., Cotten, S. R., & Xie, B. (2021). A double burden of exclusion? Digital and social exclusion of older adults in times of COVID-19. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 76(3), e99-e103.

95 Subudhi, R., Das, S., & Sahu, S. (2020). Social Inclusion of Older Adults during COVID-19 Pandemic. *Parikalpana: KIIT Journal of Management*.

96 Pun, R. (2021). Understanding the Roles of Public Libraries and Digital Exclusion Through Critical Race Theory: An Exploratory Study of People of Color in California Affected by the Digital Divide and the Pandemic. *Urban Library Journal*, 26(2), 1.

97 Sanders, C. K., & Scanlon, E. (2021). The Digital Divide Is a Human Rights Issue: Advancing Social Inclusion Through Social Work Advocacy. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1-14.

98 Seifert, A., Cotten, S. R., & Xie, B. (2021). A double burden of exclusion? Digital and social exclusion of older adults in times of COVID-19. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 76(3), e99-e103.

places of the city, that figure was only 68 percent.<sup>99</sup> The study noted that the inhabitant's age, gender, education, and income level precisely determined their rate of access to the internet.<sup>100</sup> Further research in 2020 found that 20 percent of the population did not have a computer in their home, and 18.5 percent had no access to the internet at all. Sanders and Scanlon showed that households with an income of 500 euros a month, 42 percent of them did not own a computer while 28 percent of the group could not access the internet.<sup>101</sup> The factors surrounding the city's socio-economic models play a massive role in the increase in the digital divide, while capital plays a significant role.

### **The Digital Divide and COVID-19**

The pandemic magnified the existing effects of the digital divide that has been a problem in recent years. The Habitat3 foundation is a foundation that manages flats for families during social emergencies. It guarantees their tenants rent management and ensures that families get the adequate care they need during emergencies.<sup>102</sup> Data from a survey conducted on the tenants

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99 Zheng, Y., & Walsham, G. (2021). Inequality of what? An intersectional approach to digital inequality under Covid-19. *Information and Organization*, 31(1), 100341.

100 George, G., Lakhani, K. R., & Puranam, P. (2020). What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8), 1754-1758.

101 Sanders, C. K., & Scanlon, E. (2021). The Digital Divide Is a Human Rights Issue: Advancing Social Inclusion Through Social Work Advocacy. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1-14.

102 Iivari, N., Sharma, S., & Ventä-Olkkonen, L. (2020). Digital transformation of everyday life—How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?. *International Journal of Information Management*, 55, 102183.

shows the extent of the digital divide and its effects between March to June of 2020.<sup>103</sup> During the lockdown period, 26 percent of tenant families could not afford internet and had no Wi-Fi in their households; 16 percent lacked access to the internet through digital gadgets such as phones and tablets.<sup>104</sup> Half of the people surveyed could not access the internet through their phone, while 3 of 4 people in a family had mobile phones. Six percent of the tenants had internet access whatsoever.<sup>105</sup> The majority of those connected to the internet used it for education and work-related tasks. However, many people in the survey had problems performing their administrative tasks, learning online, and video conferencing. As previously mentioned, the digital divide is not only dependent upon the infrastructure and availability of the internet but also the skills and knowledge on operating digital gadgets. When the lockdown was announced, most of the population in Dallas believed that remote working would become the new normal of the labor market. Sixty-eight percent of people supported remote working in the public and private sectors.<sup>106</sup> It is noted that church technology enables email marketing, church management software, and various management task automation technologies that have helped the church

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103 Drane, C., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2020). The impact of 'learning at home' on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Literature Review Prepared by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Curtin University, Australia.*

104 Singh, Jang Bahadur, Sujeet K. Sharma, and Prashant Gupta. "Physical Learning Environment Challenges in the Digital Divide: How to Design Effective Instruction during COVID-19?." *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 48, no. 1 (2021): 18.

105 Kapetaniou, C. (2020). Learning in a pandemic: closing the digital skills gap during COVID-19.

106 Seymour, K., Skattebol, J., & Pook, B. (2020). Compounding education disengagement: COVID-19 lockdown, the digital divide and wrap-around services. *Journal of Children's Services.*

work better and more efficiently, but many Christians do believe that such interactions are ineffective or worthless.

### Chapter 3: A Christian Definition of Social Justice

Social justice is a modern term with interpretations that vary depending on the specific context. For the broader population, the term most often refers to efforts to bring reform to societal issues. Christians, however, take the word justice as a formality rather than using the Godly perspective in the social realm.<sup>107</sup> From a Christian perspective, social justice is where we get concerned about who is affected by high taxation, uncondusive labor laws, and safety concerns.<sup>108</sup> But, as followers of Christ, people should be concerned about who is impacted by our deeds and not the contentious issues of the materialistic world.

Biblical references to the term justice define the word as the call “to make it right.” Based on the scriptural perspective, justice implies showing love to one another regardless of the underlying differences. It is a relational term evident among the people who have good relationships with God, one another, as well as towards God’s reaction. Loving one another should be in equal measure. For instance, one should love the neighbor equally as he or she loves herself or himself.<sup>109</sup> Just as God is loving and just, we as his followers should be loving towards one another.

Social justice is a modern term but the Bible shows us that both God’s word and works predate this idea. A call to social justice is a call to serve God and vice versa. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you,” stated in Psalm (89:14). Thus, establishing a more specific Christian definition of social justice could

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107 Brett, Mark G. *Locations of God: Political Theology in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

108 Karcher, Owen Paul. "Sociopolitical oppression, trauma, and healing: Moving toward a social justice art therapy framework." *Art Therapy* 34, no. 3 (2017): 123-128.

109 Bollman, Tad. "The Bible and Black Identity: Israel United in Christ and the Hebrew Israelite Movement." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018.

encourage Christians to restructure their commitment towards serving God, as God [He] always cares for the vulnerable and the ignored. God's perfect righteousness and unconditional love is the primary source and example of social justice. In the Bible, social justice can be found in God's acts – He always demonstrates concern and care to the vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized.

Through scripture, it can be understood that social justice is composed of love, empathy, and hospitality for others. God requires that we lay down our desires and comfort for the purpose of serving others, as he did through his ultimate gift of giving Jesus to die on the cross.<sup>110</sup> The Messiah arrived to illustrate God's love, and also spread His greatest command to love: "You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. You shall also love your neighbor as you love yourself." Jesus was teaching people to love God love his creation.<sup>111</sup>

According to Psalms 33:5, the Lord is the provider of justice and righteousness, and the entire earth is filled with his unconditional love. Just as couples vow to continue loving one another in any situation, God vows that his love of his people continues. He loves not only those who uphold his commands but all of creation at large – and requires his people to do the same. This can be seen in Leviticus, where scripture commands people to love their neighbors as they love themselves.<sup>112, 113</sup> Selma explains the Law of Deuteronomy, which suggests that love is not

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110 Lohse, Eduard. *Theological Ethics of the New Testament* tr. M. Eugene Boring. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.

111 Reisdorf, Bianca, and Colin Rhinesmith. "Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion." *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 132-137.

112 Marty, Martin. *The Public Church*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1981.

113 Melchin, Kenneth. *Living With Other People: An Introduction to Christian Ethics based on Bernard Lonergan*. Ottawa: Saint Paul University, 1998.

just a simple act but a call to provide for a need and reach out to those in need. Alongside filling a need and reaching out to the needy, love entails the forgiveness of brethren:

Our heavenly God is truly and earnestly desirous over the welfare of the poor sinners and their salvation as well. He has abundantly proven that is good by giving his people time and space to repent their sins and change their ways.

The Bible shows us this concern for others is mandatory in faith and the radical factor within discipleship.<sup>114</sup> The pursuit of social justice among Christians, then, denotes submission to God's will and desire. Social justice entails the creation of a kingdom in the present day and facilitating the growth of a just society. Every time we compromise justice in society or support any act of injustice, the growth of God's kingdom will then be compromised in the ultimate end. Among how people can compromise justice is through human trafficking, human exploitation, and denial of the vulnerable in society.

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114 Galarneau, Charlene. "Getting King's Words Right." *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved* 29, no.1 (2018): 5-8.

## **Biblical and Modern-Day Prophets on Social Justice**

The scripture of the Bible was not entirely intended to prophesize the future. Rather, disciples wrote about injustices and human exploitation within the societies they lived, and the judgments that would follow. Micah, Isaiah, and Amos were among the prophets who spoke on and announced judgment against injustice. The Old Testament is rich with examples of these instances, as well as God's desire for change among the Israelites that he relayed to the prophets. Failures of these communities to carry out social justice implied severe consequences to the rest of the population.

### **Amos**

The prophet Amos grew up in Tekoa, a small town near Jerusalem where his ability originated and grew. In 760 AD, God sent him to warn the Israelites that wrath was coming following societal injustice. If the Israelites would not change their ways, the Assyrian invasion would be the formal punishment.<sup>115</sup> The economy in the northern part of Israel was growing, but the growth was unequal as some of the occupants were poor. Amos obeyed God and arrived to gather the Israelites in the region.<sup>116</sup> However, no one was willing to listen to him as he was considered a naysayer and a self-proclaimed prophet of God.

Amos spoke to the Israelites about a number of their transgressions, which God viewed as particularly unjust following their liberation from Egyptian slavery in Exodus. *Transgression* is a Hebrew word that refers to unfaithfulness from the people of God. This unfaithfulness was

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115 Ostwald, Connie Harris. "Defining Economic Justice: A Christian Perspective." *Journal of Business, Technology and Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2019): 18-19.

116 Legg, Kathryn. "Equal in His Sight: An Examination of the Evolving Opinions on Race in the Life of Jerry Falwell, Sr." PhD diss., Liberty University, 2019.



not limited to individual behavior but could be from society as a whole.<sup>117</sup> In Amos' critique, God's people were saved but chose to unjustly ignore their identity and later came to oppress the poor.<sup>118</sup> As such, the Israelites were violating their covenant with both God and one another. Moreover, the Israelites were responsible for their unjust behavior, considering God had chosen them as special and unique people.

According to Amos (2:6-8), the Israelites had committed multiple sins that were a total contradiction of their covenant with God. For instance, father and son would use the same prostitute and later lay at God's altar.<sup>119</sup> They would also worship idols and impose heavy fines to finance their desires for wine. Beyond these individual sins, the Israelite society sinned against God through their treatment of the poor. Amos, in his book, suggests that the Israelites would dust the poor and would also send away the vulnerable. The Israelites were trading goods for silver and the vulnerable for sandals. In other words, it can be deduced that the Israelites were oppressing the poor by trading them for other items. This implies that the Israelites valued the poor at next to nothing, and bought human beings for exploitation. Heavy taxation, regardless of economic status, was another form of injustice brought against the poor by wealthy elites. These elites would then use the collected taxes to build luxurious homes while the poor lived in ruins.<sup>120</sup> With these transgressions, it was evident that Israel had forgotten their past life in

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117 Unterman, J. *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*. U of Nebraska Press (2017).

118 Shenvi, Neil, and Pat Sawyer. "Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement." *J. Christian Legal Thought* 10 (2020): 10.

119 Reisdorf, Bianca, and Colin Rhinesmith. "Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion." *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 132-137.

120 Reddick, Christopher G., Roger Enriquez, Richard J. Harris, and Bonita Sharma. "Determinants of broadband access and affordability: An analysis of a community survey on the digital divide." *Cities* 106 (2020): 102904.

Egypt. It is observed that some people in the USA had forgotten God, God's [his] help, and what God [He] desired from them.

Amos reminded the Israelites that God knows the depth of the sins they had committed while afflicting the poor; the consequences would come. These practices of the Israelites were the opposite of the covenantal laws. In Amos 5:18, Amos declared wrath on those who do not desire to live in righteousness. Yet, some of the elite Israelites assumed that God was with them. Amos corrected them that God only is present if the deeds are good and not evil:

You will be shocked to find God acting against you. (Amos 5:18).

Are we rebellious to God through economic oppression? While waiting for God's punishment of our enemies, will we be surprised to see God turn against us due to our injustice towards the vulnerable?<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, to avoid God's wrath on their lives, the Israelites had to repent and change their ways. "It is an evil time," he warned, "where the prudent will keep quiet."<sup>122</sup> His words did not imply that one should keep quiet when witnessing injustices. Rather, he implies that the faithful should not engage in any act of social injustice.

In Amos 5:21, the prophet discouraged the Israelites from shallow and ignorant religious practices, which gave God no delight if the people failed to insure justice in their society. Amos tells them that God, on normal occasions, delights in worship and sacrifices. However, their

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<sup>121</sup> Reisdorf, Bianca, and Colin Rhinesmith. "Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion." *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 132-137.

<sup>122</sup> Hampton, Keith. "Neighborhoods in the Network Society: The e-Neighbors Study" *Information, Communication & Society* 10:5 (October 2007) 714-748. Harper & Row, 1983.

sacrifices would not be of the essence in their case, as they practiced economic oppression against the poor. God found it hypocritical and unjust for the elites to conduct such worship while harming the poor against his word.<sup>123</sup>

Instead, Amos advised the Israelites to seek good and not evil, for the good deeds would help them to live. To reconnect with God, they had to move oppositely following his will. God's blessings are tied to our deeds, and God [he] would not be with them if their acts did not bear his desires and will.<sup>124</sup> To do so, Amos instructed the Israelites to hate evil and continue loving good. Amos chooses to use the word “hate” towards evil as it is an ideal approach to be taken when responding to economic injustices in society.<sup>125</sup> Beyond this, Amos counseled Israelites on issues of justice and oppression using the metaphoric phrase. Amos announced to the Israelites that just behaviors had to be flow throughout the seasons like an overflowing stream rather than being seasonal like desert waters. In other words, the Israelites needed to remain righteous at all times. Notably, this Amos verse was frequently quoted by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as he sought racial justice during the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>126</sup>

When reading into Amos’ advice towards the Israelites, it is important to consider how his words apply today. For instance: In what way do Christians find themselves engaged in the kinds of sins that Amos had in his mind? What is the difference between our context and that of

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123 Hollenbach, David. *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

124 Harrington, Daniel J. and James F. Keenan. *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

125 Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco,

126 Käsemann, Ernst. *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene* eds. Rudolf Landau and Wolfgang Kraus tr. Roy A. Harrisville. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

the Israelites? Other questions that should be answered on a personal level include: How do we relate economic practices and biblical requirements? Is God happy with our practices as far as social justice is concerned? How do we relate our sacrifices and worship with God's appeal? These questions can best engage the gospel both in the story of Amos and another bible instances.<sup>127</sup>

Overall, two significant observations can be drawn from analyzing Amos' work. The first is that God is displeased with injustice. As Amos depicts, God is angry when the vulnerable are opposed, while [he] delights when their needs are considered. Regardless of the economic system in any country, Christians should take this message seriously. Second, Amos reminds readers that living within covenants must be paired with equality and just economic practices. Christian faithfulness will be a factor that determines economic conduct and its effects on the vulnerable in society.

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127 Leclercq, Vincent. *Blessed are the Vulnerable: Reaching Out to Those With AIDS*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2010.

## God's Love and Protection of the Weak in Society

Jesus taught his followers to worship God in spirit and truth. Like Amos, he suggested justice was essential to properly worship God.<sup>128</sup> Doing so without understanding justice, or while simultaneously committing oppressive acts, amounts to nothing. Repenting is necessary for effective prayer and worship; Prevention of abuse and protection of the vulnerable is also crucial.<sup>129</sup> This framework and desire from God for [his] people to practice social justice can be found in examining the prophet Micah's works. Micah wrote about God's displeasure with those who acted against the vulnerable in society, noting that "God cannot be understood if one does not have an intimate relationship with humankind." An intimate relationship with humankind requires understanding and championing the needs of the weak. Per the Old Testament, the weak are those who cannot defend their needs or voice their grievances. Caring for these groups of people is essential, and protecting them includes prevention of abuse as well as helping them meet their needs and dreams.<sup>130</sup>

The weak in society are exploited due to greed. As written in Malachi, the wealthy should take responsibility for their homes and their community at large. God's desire to see the less privileged being helped calls for the implementation of ethics and justice in the communities. Besides, God requires people to uphold righteousness in society and do away with a culture of negligence of responsibility. As for those who find prosperity in knowing God, they have to take

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128 Neyrey, Jerome H. and Eric C. Stewart (eds.) *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018.

129 Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation Volume I: Human Nature*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964.

130 Miller, Vincent J. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

the responsibility of risking everything, including their lives to spread the word of God.<sup>131</sup> Like Jonah did when God sent him to preach to the Ninevites who had wicked ways, they should also risk their lives and comfort.

Yet, the desire for material things and lust that is rooted in the hearts of human beings leads to wickedness and the destruction of human lives. Oppressors satisfy their lustful desires and greed for material things by dehumanizing the vulnerable in society.<sup>132</sup> Amos addressed this issue when he talked about the Israelites trading human righteousness for silver and the poor for footwear. The Israelites no longer cared for the needy and the vulnerable, as noted in Joel 3:3: "they have cast lots of people, traded a boy for a prostitute, also exchanged a girl for wine, and then drink it." The book of Amos also singled out the rich and licentious Samaria women as a group who oppressed the poor.

Social justice requires those who take advantage of such people to be exposed and rooted out of society.<sup>133</sup> The Hebrews had multiple interpretations of justice and righteousness. Justice is an attribute of Yahweh as he is always just when dealing with his people. In his covenant, Yahweh requires everyone to be just to one another. Ignoring these covenant requirements is not an excuse to evade judgment. The scriptures make it clear how to enact social justice and judgement.<sup>134</sup>

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131 Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.

132 Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros* tr. Philip P. Watson. London: S.P.C.K., 1954.

133 Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Power of the Powerless* tr. Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

134 O'Brien, Keith. "The Empathy Deficit" *The Boston Globe* (17 October 2010),

[http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/10/17/the\\_empathy\\_defic\\_it/?page=full&fb\\_ref=homepage](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/10/17/the_empathy_defic_it/?page=full&fb_ref=homepage).

Abusing others defies God and therefore prompts him to release his wrath upon the people. God sends sorrow to those who are unjust in society. These sorrows start from the small unit, that is, from an individual to the family unit.<sup>135</sup> Habakkuk also speaks about injustice in society and the dire consequences that follow any acts of injustice. Habakkuk 2:2, "You have devised shame in your house by cutting off many, this is a forfeit." Micah also highlights destruction sent upon Judah where Judean rulers were unjust to the poor. These rulers were also corrupt. These inhuman acts led to the destruction of both Judah and Jerusalem. A clear picture of dehumanizing acts is evident in the first four chapters of the book, where the leaders are brutal to the poor. In these chapters, it is clear that wealth comes with responsibility. God's desire is not necessarily to destroy, but when people refuse to turn away from their wickedness, God will send punishment upon them.<sup>136</sup> God intended everyone to be financially wealthy. He wants us to prepare (necessities) for our daily life. He also wants us to appreciate His generosity. Moreover, the Kingdom of God has many resources to provide everything we need but in the fallen world in which we live, many people do not experience God's full provision. Others felt that their needs were met. However, they make huge sacrifices (emotional, physical, relationship, environmental, moral, or spiritual) for themselves and those around them but it comes from hurting others and hurting yourself.

### **Israelite Injustice**

Immense social injustice is not a new thing as it has been witnessed since time immemorial. Social injustice and inequality would be a familiar occurrence for the Biblical

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135 O'Connell, Maureen H. *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019.

136 Osborne, Charlie. "Are College Students Dependent on Technology?" *ZDNet* (23 May 2012),

<http://www.zdnet.com/blog/igeneration/are-college-students-dependenton-technology/16299>.

prophets and Bible authors as these acts are similar. However, unrest is central, for instance, the story in the Bible about the origin of the ancient Israelites. The book of Genesis and Exodus accounts how Jacob travels to Egypt in the quest for food during a season of famine. However, his descendants are later made slaves in Egypt and later rescued by the masses and leads to Canaan. Moses' witness to the people's affliction is what sparked the liberation of the Israelites. The book of Exodus suggests that the Israelites left Egypt with gold and silver, which they acquired from their Egyptian neighbors. However, these items were procured in an uncertain manner, and has been a topic of disunion over the centuries. Ancient Christians and Jewish sources consider these items as fair wages – a repayment for labor over the years they had been working for their neighbors.<sup>137</sup> History highlights different accounts on the origin of the Israel nation, as some scholars argue that their settlement can be attributed to the regrouping of people in the urban areas.

The requirement for justice is evident in Old Testament prophecies where prophets such as Amos and Isaiah are called to enhance justice and social equality in society. Martin Luther King Jr. also frequently cited Bible prophets when he was talking about justice. He quoted phrases that are evident in the Bible. For instance, when speaking on injustice, he said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day be in a society with justice, rolling down like a river, a society with righteousness, like an overflowing stream."<sup>138</sup> King's dream was that society

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137 Osei-Tutu, Annabella, Glenn Adams, Darlingtina Esiaka, Vivian A. Dzokoto, and Adjeiwa Akosua Affram.

"The modernity/coloniality of love: Individualist lifeways and charismatic Christianity in Ghanaian worlds." *Journal of Social Issues* (2021).

138 Nygren, Thomas, and Brian Johnsrud. "What would Martin Luther King Jr. say? Teaching the historical and practical past to promote human rights in education." *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 10, no. 2 (2018): 287-306.



would one day have its crooked places made straight. These are some of the words that King pulled from the writings in Amos and Isaiah.

### **Early Christian Injustice and Unrest**

Social unrest in early Christianity has also been attested in the New Testament. In Matthew, Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but I have come to bring a sword." For instance, he confronted money changers in a temple in Jerusalem where he overturned tables and later whipped money changers who were unjust in their practices.<sup>139</sup> Some people may interpret this act as the destruction of property, while others might see it from the perspective that Jesus claims: that the Temple belongs to God and not an avenue for making money through unjust practices. According to scholars, religious unrest is only justifiable if it is meant for the good of the oppressed. Recently, Jeff Sessions, former US Attorney General, cited the Romans 13 to argue that strict immigration rules were in line with the Bible provisions. Michael stated "people should obey the government laws since God is the one who ordained those in authority."<sup>140</sup> However, Michael disputed this argument saying that the term law, has only been mentioned once in the book of Romans when Paul says that love does not go wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is a fulfillment of the law.<sup>141</sup>

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139 Mathews, Jeanette. *Prophets as Performers: Biblical Performance Criticism and Israel's Prophets*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> Marmot, Michael. "Social justice, epidemiology and health inequalities." *European journal of epidemiology* 32, no. 7 (2017): 537-54.

<sup>141</sup> Marmot, Michael. "Social justice, epidemiology and health inequalities." *European journal of epidemiology* 32, no. 7 (2017): 537-54.

## **Civil Unrest and The Role of Religion**

Historians argue that revolutionists in America are inspired by the apostle Paul, who licensed Christians to resist unrighteousness through violent approaches.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, the founding fathers also formulated a special canon to justify unrest whenever Christians witness injustice; for instance, the Boston Tea party was unrest which involved dumping tea in a harbor to rebel against heavy taxation among the poor.<sup>143</sup> Multiple narratives consider this approach as a heroic act. The Declaration of Independence is another historic example that injustice should require action. The declaration shapes the relationship between the British colonial masters and their colonies. However, the British tried responding to these rebellious acts but still got injuries.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, it can be deduced that injustice is the root cause of rebellion and injury.

## **Modern-Day Prophets and the Fight for Social Justice**

The racist killing of George Floyd ignited much unrest throughout the US. This is a reflection of King's famous observation that "a riot is a language of the unheard." Rioting comes when the oppressed are unheard of by those in authority.<sup>145</sup> In his speech, Martin Luther King Jr. condemned rioting from the people, but he also challenged the target audiences to consider that such actions occur as a result of the marginalization of a group of people. Social justice is a suitable approach to the prevention of rioting in society. This implies that peace can't live in

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142 Maskovsky, Jeff, and Frances Fox Piven. "We need a loud and fractious poor." *Antipode* 52, no. 2 (2020): 380-392.

143 Reagan, Timothy. *Linguistic legitimacy and social justice*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

144 King Jr, Martin Luther, and Peter J. Gomes. "Gospel of John." *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction* (2018): 161.

145 Fishman, Jon M. *Martin Luther King Jr.: Walking in the Light*. Lerner Publications™, 2019.

society if there is no justice. This is a conviction with in-depth roots that calls Christians to have to meditate further. The conviction can also be traced to other Bible stories as given by the authors. Prophetic fulfillment is witnessed when the elites oppress the poor and eventually get punished by God. Martin Luther King Jr was a victim of racism as he was born into a racist society with high discrimination in different institutions.<sup>146</sup> African Americans were mistreated and given little opportunity to express their grievances. King attended a racist school where segregation was too much. The school buses for the white children could not be boarded by a black child. Back in his neighborhood, there was a high level of poverty and brutality against black Americans. He encountered racial abuse and humiliation from whites in his neighborhood. Police brutality against the blacks was another common phenomenon, but in all these, King never had the opportunity or the capacity to do anything about it.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, King was an unknown; therefore, he had no citizenship rights in the region.

These acts of oppression can be compared to those of the Israelites in the Bible. The Biblical prophecies from prophets such as Moses emerged to criticize the oppressive systems established by the elites to sideline the poor in society.<sup>148</sup> King also emerged to challenge the authorities on how they were developing systems against the poor. He further grew his horizons

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146 Galarneau, Charlene. "Getting King's Words Right." *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved* 29, no. 1 (2018): 5-8.

147 Lewis, Hannah. "Deaf Liberation Theology and social justice." *Religions* 8, no. 10 (2017): 232.

148 Jahanbegloo, Ramin. "Mapping the individual and the community in Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2021): 0191453721998732

to intercede on behalf of the less fortunate in the society and African Americans at large. His main aim was to liberate black Americans from oppression by the elite group.<sup>149</sup>

A prophetic figure advocates for social justice in society regardless of the underlying diversities. King showed concern for the African Americans who were being oppressed and championed justice and racial equality in America. He conducted various events and participated in a protest against social justice while popularizing mass movements on racial equality. He spent his adult life engaging in nonviolent rebellion against social injustice throughout the community. He composed the slogan “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” to make the people understand the essence of social justice. He also defended the rights of segregated black Americans who were sidelined in every institution. His primary concern was to attain a just society where no one was oppressed. His acts can be compared to Moses’ acts as given in the Bible. After being approached by God, Moses accepts to deliver the oppressed Hebrew of Egypt.

King’s main concern was to see equality in America. Therefore, he interceded on behalf of the oppressed African Americans in the racist American system.<sup>150</sup> This racist system was rooted in the ideology of the white American Community.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, King also wanted to have all the justice laws for every American. Being an uneducated pastor, he used his position to champion solidarity among those who were the victims of oppression. His bid and advocacy for

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149 Maskovsky, Jeff, and Frances Fox Piven. "We need a loud and fractious poor." *Antipode* 52, no. 2 (2020): 380-392.

150 Nygren, Thomas, and Brian Johnsrud. "What would Martin Luther King Jr. say? Teaching the historical and practical past to promote human rights in education." *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 10, no. 2 (2018): 287-306.

151 Ostwald, Connie Harris. "Defining Economic Justice: A Christian Perspective." *Journal of Business, Technology and Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2019): 18-18

social justice reflected the requirements of the Bible on issues of social justice. As discussed earlier, Amos taught the people to hate evil and love good. He also condemned the inhuman acts of the elites against the vulnerable. He further emphasized that people learn to stick to righteousness all the time.

Therefore, it can be said that Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s advocacy for a just society is a practical application of what is contained in this scripture. However, the difference between Amos and King is that King did not condemn the oppressors the way Amos did. Rather, he advised the victims to love their enemies. This was manifested through King engagement in nonviolent protests against social injustices, despite the overwhelming oppression directed at him from white Americans in their neighborhoods. King was concerned with the advocacy of social justice without causing harm or avenging their enemies. In this act, it can be said that King was a leader whose decisions and actions were informed by the desire to have a socially just society.

The Biblical prophets got inspired in their mission through having a close relationship with God, as well as their religion. Being brought up in a Christian family, King grew up and got strong in Christian teachings from the Bible. He later began his pastoral ministry after getting deep in the religion. Therefore, it can be argued that King was very familiar with the teachings and what God calls his people to do. The Biblical prophets, on the other hand, were God's agents who were sent to articulate God's will and desire. Looking at King's entire life, it is clear that God was the Center Point in his life. It is also clear that his leadership was inspired by God's will and desires. King was essentially an intermediary between God and the people as he wanted the American society to have God's divine wisdom.<sup>152</sup> King, in his biography, stated that "he had

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152 Phiri, Isabel Apawo. "Reaching the Champions of Social Justice." *The ecumenical review* 72, no. 1 (2020): 62-72.

received an inner calling to stand for righteousness at all times, to stand for the truth and God will always be by his side.”<sup>153</sup>

An important aspect of prophetic activism is the calling on God. King found that he had been called by God to help the oppressed and to bear God's message of love and equality. This can be manifested in his acts, including the Civil Rights Movements that he imitated and led in America. Quoting from a scripture in the book of Deuteronomy, God's prophets play a significant role in executing God's commands. Such people act as God's mouthpiece as they help reach the message to the people.<sup>154</sup> King was a mouthpiece as the parties coated in championing for social justice, as God desired.<sup>155</sup> In the book of Deuteronomy, God says that he will put a prophet among his people that will minister to his people.<sup>156</sup> God will also put his words in the mouths of these prophets so that they can speak to the people as he commands (Deuteronomy 18:18).

God gave the Biblical prophets enough courage to minister to the people, even in a new land. God also gave them endurance over humiliation that came their way. Jeremiah suffered humiliation through beating, threats and was later imprisoned. King, on the other hand, suffered death threats and multiple acts of humiliation. However, he was courageous enough to face these

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<sup>153</sup> King Jr, Martin Luther, and Peter J. Gomes. "Gospel of John." *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction* (2018): 161.

<sup>154</sup> Shogunle, Nathaniel Oluwaseyi, and Solomon Taiwo Babawale. "Biblical and prophetic guidance for a nation at crossroad: the case of Nigeria." *KIU JOURNAL OF EDUCATION* (2019): 41.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 147

<sup>156</sup> Shenvi, N., & Sawyer, P. (2020). Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement. *J. Christian Legal Thought*, 10.

violations that he frequently encountered.<sup>157</sup> During his movement against social injustice, he indebted his courage from God and sought to use nonviolent approaches in the movement. This was entirely informed by Christian values that teach one to love their enemy, regardless of what they have done or what they are doing to them. King also encouraged his fellow activists to be passive rather than being violent during their protests. In the *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, King stated that he was thankful that nonviolence was central to their struggle for liberty from social injustice.<sup>158</sup> He further noted that if violence had taken the better part of the Protestants, there would be multiple killings in the streets.<sup>159</sup> Christian values informed King's actions when he was championing civil rights in America. In other words, King was inspired by Christian values in his leadership. He considered his work as both amoral responsibility and also his responsibility like any other servant of God.

Prophets were hopeful and had a vision for a better future. King once had a dream that the future would have equality and the oppressed would be liberated with the aid of civil rights for all American people, regardless of the diversity. King's prophecy about the future is seen in his speech, where he argued that the practice of racial democracy in any institution would eventually facilitate equality in the end. Besides, racial equality is a fulfillment of God's desire for justice among his men. He further shared his vision for the future. In his speech, "I Have a Dream," King states that he has a dream that his children would once live in a nation where they could not be judged by their color and diversity. Rather, they would be judged by the content of

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157 Unterman, Jeremiah. *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*. U of Nebraska Press, 2017.

158 Fishman, Jon M. *Martin Luther King Jr.: Walking in the Light*. Lerner Publications™, 2019.

159 Verney, Kevern. *The debate on black civil rights in America*. Manchester University Press, 2020

their character.<sup>160</sup> A future where little black children would be able to be united with the white children as brothers and sisters.

Amos, in his writings, evoked hope and the idea of change for a better future. King acknowledged this writing in his speech where he says, “let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a river, like a never-failing stream” (Amos, 5:24). King put this message into practice when he centered the Bible in all his messages whenever he is communicating hope. Consolation as a role of a prophet is also fulfilled in King's works when he gives hope to the hopeless.<sup>161</sup> He also empowers Africans and other blacks by sharing his message of hope for an equal future.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., based on his desire for change and dream for social equality, can be said to be a prophetic figure in America. King grew up in a racist and oppressive society with unfair political systems characterized by social injustices on the vulnerable.<sup>162</sup> This environment made him dream to be the source of change in society. He developed an intense passion to champion social justice just as Moses and Amos were dedicated to bringing change among the people. King's actions and career was also informed largely by his religious background, considering he was born to a Christian family. As a result, he developed a vision of a better and just society in the future. Additionally, King's vision was to have a society that embraces everyone regardless of their color or skin.

King's actions and assertions did not, in any case, supported or called for violence. He said that "the peace is not necessarily the absence of tension, but also the presence of justice." He

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160 Verney, Kevern. *The debate on black civil rights in America*. Manchester University Press, 2020.

161 Rounds, Christopher D. "“Dead Men Make Such Convenient Heroes”": The Use and Misuse of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy as Political Propaganda." *Journal of Black Studies* 51, no. 4 (2020): 315-331.

162 Phiri, Isabel Apawo. "Reaching the Champions of Social Justice." *The ecumenical review* 72, no. 1 (2020): 62-72.



further stated that “if peace means silence even in the face of injustice, then I don't want peace.”<sup>163</sup> King was not implying that rioting is the best approach to take in the face of injustice, but he was warning people against condemning rioting if the society does not condemn the root cause behind the rioting.

### **Pastoral Care**

Pastoral caregivers interact with people's effort oriented towards a decent life, a worthwhile life, or a full life—when they view pastoral care as working in moral spaces. A “good life,” in this context, entails a strong appraisal and relates to what is crucially important or of basic value to persons and is a part of their identity.<sup>164</sup> However, since it relates to other occupations, this definition of pastoral care as interacting with people's effort oriented towards vital goods does not entirely reflect the unique character of pastoral care. Social workers, psychiatrists, and physicians, for example, all assist people in (re)orienting themselves toward a good desired state of being that is important to them, like (mental) wellness. What, therefore, is the pastoral nature of pastoral caregivers' interaction with people's moral space orienting mechanisms?

First, pastoral caretakers do not appear to direct toward a defined quality of 'pastoral good' in the same way that psychiatrists or physicians assist toward mental or physical wellness. Pastoral caretakers do not use people's preconceptions of good as a goal for their work. Instead, moral space work entails determining which ideas of the good are of primary importance to

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163 Galarneau, Charlene. "Getting King's Words Right." *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved* 29, no. 1 (2018): 5-8,

164 Taylor. *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1989.

somebody at this time in his/her life, considering the situation.<sup>165</sup> Pastoral caretakers would not claim to know the solution to this issue, but they would help people in seeking and determining their responses in a caring and attentive manner.<sup>166</sup>

Rather than trying to identify distinct pastoral goods in an attempt to comprehend the special role of pastoral caretakers, we should concentrate on the incidents where pastoral care most clearly takes center stage. Pastoral caretakers play a particularly important role in 'ultimate' circumstances—circumstances of extreme confusion in which our conventional ideas of the good lose credibility. Ultimate events may elicit feelings of awe or astonishment that are inconsistent with our ordinary ideas of the good, rendering these ideas insufficient or meaningless. Ultimate circumstances can also be desperate circumstances; we may become terminally ill with no hope of recovery, or we may be violence victims and feel as though the world has no good left for us. We can't simply revert to our earlier notions of the good in such circumstances. In such awe-inspiring or circumstances of desperation, we need to look for new conceptions of the good that haven't lost all credibility. Pastoral care is especially important in situations where people are confronted with extreme evil and suffering; searching for realistic ideas of the good appears futile and hopeless.

This shows that pastoral caretakers, regardless of their traditions, do not advocate a rigid picture of the good, but instead the potential of finally relating to a certain good which is not declared completely meaningless by pain and evil. It is argued that a distinguishing feature of

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165 Schuhmann, C., & van der Geugten, W. Believable visions of the good: An exploration of the role of pastoral counselors in promoting resilience. *Pastoral Psychology*, 66(4), 523–536 (2017).. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0759-z>.

166 Doehring, C. *The practice of pastoral care: A postmodern approach*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.

pastoral caretakers in the domain of chaplaincy is that they express and reveal statements concerning objective reality.<sup>167</sup> The exact nature of these assertions is determined by the pastoral caregiver's individual (and quite often spiritual) heritage. Understandings of the good that are not tainted by sorrow and wickedness are associated with God in religious circles. Pastoral caretakers symbolize the opportunity of reaching out to God, even during dire circumstances.

However, the concept of a good that is not utterly discredited by evil and suffering is not limited to religious practices. For example, existential thinker Viktor Frankl (1959) built logotherapy on the premise that we can gain purpose in life even though presented with a bleak circumstance while confronting a destiny that cannot be altered, based on his encounters in a concentration camp.<sup>168</sup> Murdoch tackles the intellectual challenge of how to combine a pretty obvious observation of the world's pain and cruelty with a conviction of an incorruptible good.<sup>169</sup> She claims that we must maintain a sense of the Good being the center of a moral existence in the absence of God. These notions are useful for intellectually underlying the pastoral nature of pastoral care in a contemporary era.

I suggest interpreting the pastoral nature of pastoral care as 'portraying the Good,' adopting Murdoch's notions on Good as transcendental. This is the first step towards one common meaning of the term "pastoral" that is compatible with various faiths and belief systems. We recognize that when 'the Good' is viewed in a simplistic sense, the phrase 'representing the Good' can readily be misconstrued. As a result, I underline that "representing the Good" ought not to be mistaken with "enforcing a certain image of the good upon others" or

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167 Nolan, S. *Spiritual care at the end of life: The chaplain as a 'hopeful presence*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2011.

168 Lynch, G. (2012). *The sacred in the modern world: A cultural sociological approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

169 Murdoch, I. *The sovereignty of good*. London: Routledge. (1970).

"professing to be Good." As Murdoch sees it, the good is just a thing we can aspire for but not achieve, a thing that will always be enigmatic. We can't comprehend the Good or be "perfectly good," much less dictate it to everyone else. The good is related to human frailty and imperfections, as well as what Nussbaum refers to as "the fragility of goodness."<sup>170</sup>

Reflecting the Good, specifically, disagrees with pastoral care viewpoints that stress a kerygmatic approach in which the declaration of one single view of the good is the primary priority. Symbolizing the good is best comprehended as reflecting the belief that some good can be believed in extreme circumstances. Looking for it is sensible even while it is still a mystery. This aligns with the popular perception of pastoral caretakers as "agents of hope" and the faith.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, regardless of whether pastoral caretakers are inspired by religion or not, their job requires faith: confidence that not giving up goodness is sensible, despite its fragility.

Looking at how the concept of "representing the good" relates to pastoral care and how it integrates with existing pastoral care ideas requires focusing on three different dimensions of pastoral care: the pastoral interaction with people, the pastoral reaction to people's experiences, and the pastoral involvement in institutions and community as a whole. The conceptualization of transcendence as embracing the mysterious nature of the—nonhuman or human—Other is beneficial in all three areas. Reflecting on the Good inside this pastoral interaction entails acknowledging the mystery of individuals as Others. This emphasizes the importance of Levinas' work in comprehending pastoral relationships.

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170 Nussbaum, M. C. *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

171 LaMothe, R. A modest proposal: A pastoral political theology. *Pastoral Psychology*, 63(4), 375–391.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0557-1>.

On the other hand, Murdoch's good is not only hidden and far away but also necessitates a continual effort to get closer to it by lovingly gazing at realities. As a result, representing the Good necessitates acknowledging the diversity of individuals and taking a concerted attempt to link with them. Butler gives an ethical viewpoint on the relationship patterns of acknowledging the intrinsic otherness of others while concurrently striving to comprehend them, drawing on the works of Levinas and others. She advocates reimagining recognition as a constant cycle of seeking the knowledge of the other. A moral approach to the other, in this approach, entails repeating the query "Who are you?" and continuously asking it without expecting a complete or final response.<sup>172</sup> Butler claims that by doing so, we are allowing the other to survive; ethical behavior maintains and fosters living. Butler's theory appears to hold promise in terms of conceptually supporting pastoral relationships in ways of embodying the Good.

Acknowledging the mysterious nature of the Other concerning pastoral responses to individuals' tales relates first and foremost to the individual's otherness. As ambassadors of the Good, pastoral caretakers view the individuals' realities with love and empathy and, therefore, listen closely to their tales. Moreover, they recognize that their efforts to see the individuals' realities are never complete. As a result, rather than providing pre-existing answers, they must tailor their responses to the uniqueness of each individual's experience while also continuing to listen for the unsaid thus far and what could not be stated and remains unexpressed. As a result, activities of expressing the Good are case-dependent. Pastoral caretakers, as ambassadors of the Good, must not turn away from pain and sorrow, for example, by telling comforting tales that obscure the other's sorrow. Their answer must be rooted in real attempts to integrate with the afflictions of the other. Other also relates to other people in the individual's life. Reflecting the

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172 Butler, J. *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 43.

Good entails viewing actuality with empathy and respect, not simply the reality of a single client. Pastoral caretakers would never endorse views of the good that include aggression, exploitation, or unfairness. It's imperative to highlight this ethical practice of pastoral care since people might be hurt not just as a consequence of others' acts but also inflict pain on others. Pastoral caretakers who deal with inmates, for example, are frequently confronted with tales of individuals who have caused harm to themselves and others.

Finally, viewing pastoral care through the lens of reflecting the Good emphasizes the importance of pastoral caretakers in their institutions and the community. According to Taylor moral space orientation is never a simply individual activity. We do not generate our conceptions of what is good; rather, we accept them via our societal environments. What constitutes "good" varies depending on the situation. As a result, pastoral caretakers must consider whose views of the good are accessible to whom in a specific setting. In this case, expressing the Good entails first and foremost backing and participating in developing and enhancing views on a good that expresses a desire for the Good. Encouraging discussion and integrating underrepresented or easily ignored perspectives in the debate are examples of expressing Good habits. Pastoral caretakers, for example, may start moral discourse in the institutions where they operate. They may add to numerous existing public debates on decent life in public spaces.

## Chapter 4: Technology and Justice

### Technology and Social Justice Movements

Technology provides new avenues for political activism aimed at bringing social change to the community.<sup>173</sup> The backbone of this change in political activism has been brought about by social media, which allows people new methods and channels to demand and protest for social change.<sup>174</sup> With protests increasing worldwide, debates around political social media movements have risen in recent years, prompting a new understanding of the relationship between technology and social change.

Social media platforms support a new version of activism not present in the past. Social media is powerful as a tool of change because of the spontaneous and unpredictable ways in which protests can emerge through its networks. These platforms connect users despite geographic location, which has allowed organizers to increase participant interest at a wider range. Because of this, protests on or through social media are more inclusive yet remain autonomous.<sup>175</sup> These social media platforms tap into a much broader base allowing people to better mobilize and organize the public towards a common social goal.

### Social Media and Protests

The relationship between social media and protests has been the subject of research in recent years, with the relationship between the two proving to be instrumental. Academic

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173 Carpio, G. G. (2018). Racial projections: cyberspace, public space, and the digital divide. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(2), 174-190.

174 Elliott, Thomas, and Jennifer Earl. "Online protest participation and the digital divide: Modeling the effect of the digital divide on online petition-signing." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 2 (2018): 698-719.

175 Vartanova, Elena, and Anna Gladkova. "New forms of the digital divide." *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust, and discrimination* (2019): 193-213.

discussions centered around the relationship between social media and protests have focused on how social media platforms create communication. Hill et al. (2018) argue that social media communication, such as Facebook and Twitter, is critical and holds the key to broader interaction and social activism.<sup>176</sup> The global rise of technology and the resulting expansion of mass media and social networks has provided autonomous communication opportunities amongst the masses. The result is the potential for social power outside of traditional democratic channels. Gray (2017) notes that social networking sites and internet communications characterized their autonomous nature, horizontal networks, and leaderless organization and borderless solidarity have allowed increased material support for activism.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that social media creates the collective action of traditional political organizations such as political parties and trade unions.<sup>178</sup> Personalized and individualized connective actions to organize resources replace the collective identity framing/formal structures that traditional organizations formerly required such as race, economic status, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. Social media-created activism networks have transformed collective action through digital frameworks better suited for modern-day political engagement. As a result, these platforms have allowed political activism to flourish and expand across the globe. We have seen this activism directly and abroad, illustrating that social media is an important tool of social change.

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176 Hill, Christopher, and William Lawton. "Universities, the digital divide, and global inequality." *Journal of higher education policy and management* 40, no. 6 (2018): 598-610.

177 Gray, Tricia J., Jason Gainous, and Kevin M. Wagner. "Gender and the digital divide in Latin America." *Social Science Quarterly* 98, no. 1 (2017): 326-340.

178 Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, communication & society*, 15(5), 739-768.



Social media also sheds light on a wider number of issues, therefore increasing awareness and interest on topics of change. Technologies are affecting political imagination and practices in different ways, which speaks to the complexities associated with the political and the protest environment. The increased ability to follow issues has prompted discourse crucial to historical and social developments of protests. This discourse has itself become a topic of interest, as scholars studying the interactions research the impact of the shared space and the problems and autonomy that comes with the shift in the scope of communication.<sup>179</sup> Researchers argue that the emerging social media platforms and technologies are meant to contradict society as we live in an already contradictory society where the roles of individuals are not spelled out as they should be. Due to this aspect of society, the effects of the advances in social media can dampen, forestall or amplify protests or have no effect after all due to its contradictory nature.<sup>180</sup> The media also stand in a contradictory relation to power struggle to each other. The politics, culture, and ideology influence the environment surrounding the protests and their related issues.

The emphasis on a new environment and the emergence of social media as new social change tools aimed at providing a coherent and continuous narrative of the latest uprising have received enormous social media backing and reporting in news agencies.<sup>181</sup> The mainstream media has a huge responsibility to advocate for social change, and therefore report on issues and protests surrounding them. They will seek to amplify and find continuity in diverse, complex, and relative societal events due to the nature of media consumption and journalism. With social

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179 Flesher Fominaya, Cristina, and Kevin Gillan. "Navigating the technology-media-movements complex." *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 383-402.

180 Hill, Christopher, and William Lawton. "Universities, the digital divide, and global inequality." *Journal of higher education policy and management* 40, no. 6 (2018): 598-610.

181 Ragnedda, Massimo, and Maria Ruii. "Social capital and the three levels of digital divide." (2017): 21-34.

media as the point of simplification and continuity for social issues, technology has become an entry point for unbiased transmission or presentations where we can evaluate the nature of protests and emerging movements in the world.<sup>182</sup>

### **Social Media and Authenticity**

Ragnedda, Massimo, and Maria Ruiu's study identified the challenges associated with protests, particularly those motivated by social media or other technology, are the legitimacy and authenticity of the movements. As mistrust rises in contemporary democracies, social and political stakeholders have difficulty manifesting their desired societal positions based on legitimate and authentic grounds.<sup>183</sup> The increased use of social media for information purposes has prompted a debate amongst media stakeholders on how these information-gathering platforms influence social awareness practices.<sup>184</sup> Studies show that an increasing number of people rely on social media as an alternative source of information.

Consumers perceive news gathered this way as more credible because it is immediate and has a greater level of human emotion attached to it than traditional outlets.<sup>185</sup> In a world with a

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182 Rowsell, J., Morrell, E., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). Confronting the digital divide: Debunking brave new world discourses. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(2), 157-165.

183 Estacio, Emeé Vida, Rebecca Whittle, and Joanne Protheroe. "The digital divide: examining socio-demographic factors associated with health literacy, access and use of the internet to seek health information." *Journal of health psychology* 24, no. 12 (2019): 1668-1675.

184 Baerg, Andrew. "Big data, sport, and the digital divide: Theorizing how athletes might respond to big data monitoring." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 41, no. 1 (2017): 3-20.

185 Cruz-Jesus, F., Oliveira, T., & Bacao, F. (2018). The global digital divide: evidence and drivers. *Journal of Global Information Management (JGIM)*, 26(2), 1-26.

hunger for authentic content, traditional media reporting has had to adapt to incorporate social media stories. This creates a difficult balancing act, due to the speedy nature of stories and the high rates of inauthentic material in several media stations and profiles. By including stories that originate on social media, mainstream media can counter the influence these platforms have as an alternative source of information for the public. The inclusion of user-generated content provides the traditional media sector with new authenticity, due to the proximity and emotional aspect found within it.<sup>186</sup> Most journalists use such content to animate the conventional news reports and build credibility with their audience. These strategic inclusions have allowed consumers to learn about different types of issues that involve them and the world at large.<sup>187</sup>

Beyond news media, consumers trending towards genuineness have influenced the cultural, social, and political processes of our society. A primary example of this phenomenon can be seen in modern advertising and corporate branding. There is a shift in focus from product and consumer to the relationship between its producer and the consumer.<sup>188</sup> Now, consumers can not only voice their concerns on particular products but also the integrity of the brands that develop or provide them. Through social media, consumerism has been given the power to scrutinize corporations and push them to uphold ethical and socially responsible standards. This direct communication of consumers to brands has been celebrated as a new dawn for consumer empowerment.<sup>189</sup>

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186 Dilmaghani, Maryam. "Religiosity and the digital divide in Canada." *The Communication Review* 21, no. 3 (2018): 181-211.

187 Purbo, Onno W. "Narrowing the digital divide." *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence* (2017): 75-92.

188 Ragnedda, Massimo, and Maria Ruiu. "Social capital and the three levels of digital divide." (2017): 21-34.

189 Rowsell, J., Morrell, E., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). Confronting the digital divide: Debunking brave new world discourses. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(2), 157-165.

This model of authenticity has prompted major changes to the operations of the corporate world. Recent data has shown that this aspect of consumer extends to different aspects of society regarding politics and political activism to obtain societal change. The contrast between the commercial and inauthentic and the noncommercial and authentic has been regarded as too simple for society. It has been widely concluded that genuineness and authentic spaces themselves are now becoming a brand such as Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and many more.<sup>190</sup> This includes spaces of politics and political activism with the growth of ethical consumption and new media technologies, which allow the consumers to reimagine and further validate the brand.

### **Authenticity of Protests**

The question of protests has not yet been able to form extensive parts of the debate. This fact is shocking because political protests are mainstream, which allows them to expand the parameters of the political and contemporary civil society.<sup>191</sup> Negotiations of recent protests in the US have formed upon their perceived legitimacy and authenticity among the general public. The audience often has a huge role to play, as news coverage presents protestors differently depending on the source and its agenda. They are tasked with distinguishing between established organizations representing sectional interests and the identities of less established actors. The latter appear more authentic to the public because they are less distorted by their vested interests. The conversation often shifts from the protests themselves to the legitimacy of the arguments made in the public sphere. In cases involving violence, social media and traditional media press the audience to look into organizational structures and the ability of protestors to present

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190 Carpio, G. G. (2018). Racial projections: cyberspace, public space, and the digital divide. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(2), 174-190.

191 Maric, Josip. "The gender-based digital divide in maker culture: features, challenges and possible solutions." *Journal of Innovation Economics Management* 3 (2018): 147-168.

themselves as victims with an emotional response to form an opinion about the protest's legitimacy. The audience creates judgments for or against activists by considering their arguments against political, organizational, and personal claims to be authentic, which often prove to be complex and even contradictory.<sup>192</sup>

The discourse on protests and social movements that is encouraged across social media platforms plays a huge role in legitimizing them. More often than not, social media-driven protests are abstracted from institutional architectures that censor and restrict political activity, underpinning protests and political activism.<sup>193</sup> Social media-based protests are part of the digital revolution, which seeks to make the world a digital platform based on new and emerging technologies. Social media protests and uprisings seek to eliminate social injustices.<sup>194</sup> However a problem arises when sectors of the population do not have access to the internet, the formerly referenced digital divide. Despite technological advancement globally, there is a significant gap in digital access, which bars individuals from the voice social media platforms can allow others.

### **Role of Christians in Fighting the Digital Divide**

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, aspects of daily life have shifted from physical to virtual, including work, school, and church. Social injustices and politics have been handled

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192 Nyahodza, Lena, and Richard Higgs. "Towards bridging the digital divide in post-apartheid South Africa: a case of a historically disadvantaged university in Cape Town." *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 83, no. 1 (2017): 39-48.

193 Mihelj, Sabina, Adrian Leguina, and John Downey. "Culture is digital: Cultural participation, diversity and the digital divide." *New Media & Society* 21, no. 7 (2019): 1465-1485.

194 Elliott, Thomas, and Jennifer Earl. "Online protest participation and the digital divide: Modeling the effect of the digital divide on online petition-signing." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 2 (2018): 698-719.

through social media and other emerging technologies.<sup>195</sup> Technologically, the church has been behind in both technology and social justice for a long time. Before the pandemic, church leaders did not need to rely on technology during their services. It is time for the church to recognize that the world is moving faster and embrace the digital revolution rather than be stuck in old ways of doing things. The digital divide had been an issue for Americans over the last decade, but the pandemic increased and therefore intensified the move to digital platforms.<sup>196</sup>

When COVID-19 required churches to embrace new technologies, responses differed. Some cannot access technology, others remained physically open believing that the virus wouldn't touch them. Throughout the pandemic, many churches have taken steps into the future and moved towards digital forums. Some congregations chose to learn streaming technology for the first time to share their services online.<sup>197</sup> Online churches are becoming the norm nowadays whether church leaders like it or not because of people's demands to use technology. Otherwise, many people do not attract such places and feel that it is backward from today's world.

The introduction of online services has led to the widening of the digital divide. Many churches carried out assessments and found that embracing technology would ensure that the gospel reaches many people while serving the purpose of providing spiritual nourishment. In one recent survey, 92 percent of Christians and 86 percent of Protestants reported that their respective churches now offer mainline streaming services through platforms such as Facebook

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195 YILMAZ, Sezen RAVANOĞLU. "The role of social media activism in new social movements: Opportunities and limitations." *International Journal of Social Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (2017): 141-164.

196 Adam, Taskeen. "Digital neocolonialism and massive open online courses (MOOCs): colonial pasts and neoliberal futures." *Learning, Media and Technology* 44, no. 3 (2019): 365-380.

197 Sargent, Jason, and Ashir Ahmed. "What Is IT for social impact?: A review of literature and practices." *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* 36, no. 4 (2017): 62-72.

and Zoom. Of these participants, 73 percent reported attending the services regularly. While this necessary step is encouraging, the digital divide still leaves behind many people the church seeks to help.<sup>198</sup>

The digital divide is particularly present in the church as the majority of congregants are older adults with little knowledge of using digital devices. In addition, churches in rural areas are made up of attendees less likely to have internet and device access. Beyond that, differences in income influence the ability of congregant access to devices and digital knowledge. With so many variables at play, churches are testing new ways to combat the digital divide amongst their congregants. First, the church is using human-based research to create awareness about the inequities brought by the digital divide. Digital platforms have become the norm of communication globally, and people without access to the internet are being denied their freedom of expression, and freedom of association, which increases social injustices. The main cause of the divide is poverty, low income, and lack of infrastructure.<sup>199</sup> While most research on the issue of the social divide centers on economic factors, age, and gender, most research has found that low income and low digital literacy are the leading widening digital gap.

As a result, further strategies center around improving internet access and digital knowledge for congregants. For example, churches in the Dallas City council have started to collaborate with church members to ensure that people, especially minorities, are connected to the internet. Similarly, some churches have launched initiatives to lessen the digital divide by

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198 Marcus-Quinn, Ann, Triona Hourigan, and Selina McCoy. "The Digital Learning Movement: How Should Irish Schools Respond?." *The Economic and Social Review* 50, no. 4 (2019): 767-783.

199 Chetty, Denzil, Sachi Edwards, Ravi Grover, Heinz Scheifinger, KS Arul Selvan, Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian, and Charu Uppal. *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media*. Lexington Books, 2017.

providing congregants with smartphones. However, research shows that many people who own smartphones lack the necessary skills to ensure that they can use the internet for self-development purposes.<sup>200</sup> To combat this, churches have provided training on using the internet for knowledge acquisition purposes. Through sensitization and training opportunities, the local entity church can provide digital opportunities for people in a world full of inequalities.

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200 Dilmaghani, Maryam. "Religiosity and the digital divide in Canada." *The Communication Review* 21, no. 3 (2018): 181-211.



## Chapter 5: Implementation

### Identifying One Transformation Point

Ever since the pandemic started, technology has become one of the essential tools for humankind. Technology has kept society and the economy moving even though interactions had to be limited. However, technology has brought uneven diffusion and inequity in terms of those who have and those who don't have.<sup>201</sup> Technology has brought about a digital divide that widens the income gap and hurts the chances of meeting most of the UN Global Sustainable Development Goal.

The digital economy has in recent years been responsible for the increased inequalities among individuals and companies. The pandemic has widened the inequality gap in terms of digital literacy and digital knowledge, the writing was on the wall a long time ago, and the pandemic has just accelerated the gap and made it significant that even the most ignorant of the population can see it.<sup>202</sup> Recently, the advancement in Information Communication and Technology (ICT) was perceived to be bridging the gap of inequality and justice; the improvement was seen as how the gap between the poor and the rich could be closed and the equality maintained in the world.<sup>203</sup> The digital revolution has changed how we conduct ourselves and how we interact with people in society, but the basic tenets of our global communities and economics have not changed at all; the digital revolution has brought about the accumulation of wealth and raised the level of disparities with the spread of the online economy.

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201 Tewathia, N., Kamath, A., & Ilavarasan, P. V. (2020). Social inequalities, fundamental inequities, and recurring of the digital divide: Insights from India. *Technology in Society*, 61, 101251

202 Van Dijk, J. A. (2017). Digital divide: Impact of access. *The international encyclopedia of media effects*, 1-11.

203 Fox, G., & Connolly, R. (2018). Mobile health technology adoption across generations: Narrowing the digital divide. *Information Systems Journal*, 28(6), 995-1019.

According to Forbes magazine, the world's wealthiest people are Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, the founders of Tesla, Amazon, and Microsoft. In fifth is Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook. These individuals have amassed wealth that amounts to \$600 billion but pays their workers meager pays that cannot sustain their families.<sup>204</sup> An Amazon worker in the US earns \$18 per hour while those in India and the Philippines earn \$5. The inequality brought about by technology is just overwhelming and makes the digital space and avenue of unequal pay.

The UN in 2007 designated the World Day of Justice, which was meant as a day to mark and address the level of inequities that had marred the world for a long time. The UN created the day to handle the different types of injustices, affirming a commitment to promote national and global economic systems bases on the UN's principles of justice equity, democracy, participation, transparency, and inclusion.<sup>205</sup> Accordingly, social development and social justice are indispensable for achieving and maintaining peace and security among the different societies that make up the world body.<sup>206</sup> The UN has often reiterated that there is no social justice without peace and security in the world. The quest for justice begins and continues with the foundation of prayer. It means getting out of the comfort zone and patiently being patient, and walking wisely. Our righteous God guides us and we obey Him because God strengthens us through the Holy Spirit.

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204 Fox, G., & Connolly, R. (2018). Mobile health technology adoption across generations: Narrowing the digital divide. *Information Systems Journal*, 28(6), 995-1019.

205 Reddick, C. G., Enriquez, R., Harris, R. J., & Sharma, B. (2020). Determinants of broadband access and affordability: An analysis of a community survey on the digital divide. *Cities*, 106, 102904

206 Tomczyk, Ł., Eliseo, M. A., Costas, V., Sánchez, G., Silveira, I. F., Barros, M. J., ... & Oyelere, S. S. (2019, June). The digital divide in latin america and europe: main characteristics in selected countries. In *2019 14th Iberian Conference on Information Systems and Technologies (CISTI)* (pp. 1-6). IEEE.

The two most powerful tools of our times are intensifying societal and political malaise, which increases income inequality. The digital space is giving rise to nationalist and populist sentiments and remarks aimed at destabilizing the economy and the social and political stability of the world. Domestic and International politics are in the new world being driven in digital platforms leaving the people with no access to the internet vulnerable and without knowing how their country can be made a better place.<sup>207</sup> These trends have led to advocating social inequity as a Christian moral duty and a practical and valuable measure that ensures social and political stability in the world. The world elites never understand this concept as they advocate for their interests.

The digital revolution has brought about new ways to generate income and create more working arrangements that allow people to be flexible when doing business. It has the potential to diversify the labor market and the world's economy by creating opportunities for and minority groups such as people living with disabilities, young people, migrant workers, and natives but this has oddly not been realized in the US. Not all people are connected to internet access, to some people internet connectivity is a secondary priority compared to a provision of basic needs such as housing, clothing, and food. These individuals live in inner cities and don't have the necessary digital infrastructure and equipment and a lack of training and knowledge capacity for the youths and the majority of the population, making it hard for people to reap the full benefits of the digital economy. It is often true that employment is a means of escaping the poverty level for many people; however, it is our moral duty as Christians to ensure that even within the digital divide, we should advocate for an all-inclusive system that will be on board all, regardless of

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207 Van Deursen, A. J., & Van Dijk, J. A. (2019). The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. *New media & society*, 21(2), 354-375.

their societal status.<sup>208</sup> The mission of the church partners as social justice is to embrace the cause of Christ. The bible's goal is to justice seeing eternal transformed and lives reconciled to God.

The digital economy was initially thought to provide a level field for all the people globally, but this has not been achieved as internet users in developed and OECD countries range from over 95 percent of the population to even less than 70 percent.<sup>209</sup> The pandemic for most people has led to switching to technology as an alternative for the ordinary lives we lived previously. The experience has generally been good for people with access to the internet, while those who have no internet access have had it rough and tough.<sup>210</sup> Technology ever since the pandemic started has accelerated digitalization and enabled people to communicate and enhance their social services, which allowed the sustenance of the global economy during the lockdown period. Cities have been in the front line of digital acceleration compared to rural settlements. In Dallas, technology has been fundamental in the economic response after the setbacks of the pandemic; protection of the people and social action to support the less privileged in the community, and the shift to remote working.

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208 Goedhart, N. S., Broerse, J. E., Kattouw, R., & Dedding, C. (2019). 'Just having a computer doesn't make sense': The digital divide from the perspective of mothers with a low socio-economic position. *New media & society*, 21(11-12), 2347-2365.

209 Heponiemi, T., Jormanainen, V., Leemann, L., Manderbacka, K., Aalto, A. M., & Hyppönen, H. (2020). Digital divide in perceived benefits of online health care and social welfare services: National cross-sectional survey study. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 22(7), e17616.

210 Tudor, S. L. (2020). E-inclusion versus digital divide—a challenge for Romanian educational system within the context of CORONAVIRUS pandemic growth. *Educația Plus*, 26(1), 374-381.

The prevention of physical interaction has been the main talk for most people in the country. Dallas has not been left behind in these with the municipal services being done on digital platforms. This has worked well for the majority of people. Still, it has exposed the vulnerabilities of society when it comes to the digital divide between the people with access to the internet and those who do not have access to the internet.<sup>211</sup> The effects of the digital divide have been made clear during the pandemic. Most people have no access to the internet during the period when the whole world was shifting its attention to the digital economy and integration. The digital divide limits most people's rights and freedom, such as the freedom to work, the right to learn, and the right to equal opportunities.

In recent years, digital rights, which concern the privacy of data and transparency and technological accountability issues, have been the subject of the global discussion. These discussions yielded to the introduction of the general data protection regulation of 2016. The pandemic has offered us an opportunity to rectify the situation and make the world a better place for both those with low income and those with high income.<sup>212</sup> The global representation of material digitalization and its social impact has never been mainly presented. We remain in the dark on the extent of inequity available in the world. The pandemic offers an opportunity to correct this and discuss the social change in the digital age. It is important to note that digital transition cannot be achieved if only a few members of society can access the internet while the rest cannot access the internet.

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211 Esteban-Navarro, M. Á., García-Madurga, M. Á., Morte-Nadal, T., & Nogales-Bocio, A. I. (2020, December). The Rural Digital Divide in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic—Recommendations from a Scoping Review. In *Informatics* (Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 54). Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

212 Pandey, N., & Pal, A. (2020). Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice. *International Journal of Information Management*, 55, 102171.

## **Empathy and Hospitality in Fighting Social Injustices and the Digital Divide**

Empathy and stewardship of funds are Christian tenets important in fighting social injustice, therefore, closing the digital divide. Empathy denotes the ability of understanding and sharing the feelings of another. The Bible provides us examples of both empathy and hospitality. Arguably the most famous parable, the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-27) instructs us to care for our neighbors with empathy to fight inequity.<sup>213</sup> Djupe et al. (2018) suggest that in applying good deeds to your neighbors and maintaining a good relationship with Him, the Good Samaritan is an example of transformation and faithfulness to God.<sup>214</sup> Although this parable exemplifies the core of Christian faith, that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, many Christians fail to take the next step, which is to “go and do likewise.” Beyond relating to the suffering of another, God instructs us to help them. Not only should we love our neighbors, but we should also be hospitable to them. Due to the simplicity of the parable Christians often fail to implement hospitality. When Jesus instructs us to do likewise, it is to show acts of benevolence to the most disadvantaged in society.<sup>215</sup>

The disadvantaged and suffering people in society have, for long, posed a theological problem – why does God allow such misery? God is always compatible with the Word but our experiences and emotions can confuse us. Our experience can only be viewed from a limited and depressing human perspective. Therefore, we cannot trust experiences as much as emotions.

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213 Bergman, Roger C. *Catholic social learning: Educating the faith that does justice*. Fordham Univ Press, 2011.

214 Djupe, Paul A., and Christopher P. Gilbert. "Politics and church: byproduct or central mission?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2018): 45-62.

215 Dunning, John H., ed. *Making globalization good: The moral challenges of global capitalism*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Feelings are unreasonable and should not be trusted to make decisions. The only truly consistent and reliable way comes from God and His Word. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest who took part in founding the liberation theology, stresses God's will to free people from dehumanizing mindsets, situations, and activities. Faithful believers are urged to follow God's will to liberate all humans from their cruel actions, sin, and evil social systems. Gutierrez points out that the liberation call is an invite to a sanctity seeking the proper connection with God by associating with the sidelined, poor, and helpless persons. The embodiment of Christ alters the link between humankind and God, making freedom a call to transformation and faithfulness to Christ – who is viewed as the neighbor and lives in the less fortunate among us.<sup>216</sup>

According to Gutierrez, “the theology of the neighbor” is demonstrated by the Samaritan. Gutierrez's most recent works further develop this thought, suggesting that the Samaritan's actions are an example of special treatment for the poor and afflicted.<sup>217</sup> According to Gutierrez, when the Samaritan leaves the road to Jericho to enter the valley and care for the robbery victim, he depicts how one can wear another's shoe. The Samaritan comes to understand that society deems as unimportant or unworthy, and shares in their pain.<sup>218</sup> This view emphasizes the solidness of human bonds and the need for justice to treat the poorest in society preferentially, but this does not mean acting out of pity. Instead, Gutierrez emphasizes the importance of parity

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216 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, and Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller. *On the side of the poor: The theology of liberation*. Orbis Books, 2015.

217 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, and Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller. *On the side of the poor: The theology of liberation*. Orbis Books, 2015.

218 Dunning, John H., ed. *Making globalization good: The moral challenges of global capitalism*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

and empathy and argues that the act of entering the valley implies identification with the needy and amongst the needy.<sup>219</sup>

Spohn poses an intense challenge for Christian leaders and those under their leadership.<sup>220</sup> This work aims to address that challenge. In so doing, this project argues for a “theology of neighbors” inspired and focused on the core parts of the Good Samaritan passage. It aims to point out how values of unity and special treatment for the unfortunate may be practiced in line with the parable.

Three other acumens shape and direct the whole idea of this project. The first follows William Spohn’s notion that the words “Go and do likewise,” don’t mean “Go and do precisely the same as the Samaritan” or “Go and do whatsoever you feel like.”<sup>221</sup> “Doing likewise” leans on analog thoughts that devotedly and artistically recognize what is necessary in following the example of the Good Samaritan in one’s cultural setting. In this case, the logic of the Samaritan’s deeds focuses on his kindheartedness, a kind of compassion that Spohn stated is the core of a Christian vision.

The second influence comes from the work of theologian Maureen O’Connell, who applies the compassion demonstrated in the Good Samaritan parable to the current state of deep-seated social disparity, extreme anguish, and the other harmful implications of globalization.<sup>222</sup>

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219 Azubuike, Obiageri Bridget, Oyindamola Adegboye, and Habeeb Quadri. "Who gets to learn in a pandemic? Exploring the digital divide in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria." *International Journal of Educational Research Open* (2020): 100022.

220 Spohn, William C. "Spirituality and ethics: Exploring the connections." *Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (1997): 109-123.

221 Spohn, William C. *What are they saying about Scripture and ethics?* Paulist Press, 1995. 12-17

222 O'Connell, Maureen H. *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*. Orbis Books, 2015.



O'Connell explicitly advocates for radical compassion, which begins by sharing in the agony of the oppressed and then encourages Christians to scrutinize their complicit participation in the societal systems and practices that cause the misery or misfortune of others.

Lastly, the work of Roger Bergman's work serves as inspiration.<sup>223</sup> He focuses on how these principles of empathy, hospitality, and love can be scholastically employed.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, the suggested "theology of neighbor" should comprise an essential education on the formation of neighbors through practicing the values of cohesion and preferential treatment for the underprivileged.<sup>225</sup> As much as these themes are universally applicable to Christ's disciples' lives, this dissertation concentrates predominantly on religious teaching in battling social injustices. This project also shares Dr. Martin L. King's belief that "Go and do likewise" is more than mere charity; the followers of Jesus should endeavor to modify the "road to Jericho" and change the severe circumstances to bring justice.

Prior to further considering the teachings of Luke 10:25-37, it is crucial to reassess the meaning of "neighbor" in a universe dominated by globalization, the "cushioned self," and rapidly growing technology. The term "neighbor" originally referred to a person who lived nearby, and Christians were mainly concerned with belonging to a particular group and the support that belonging to such groups merited. The Commandment to love one's neighbor was a directive to respect shared affections and privileges among mutual relations. Christian teachings and the healing ministry of Jesus stretched out the spheres of respect, social unity, and right-

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223 Rule, Peter N. "The pedagogy of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan: A diacognitive analysis." *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 1-8.

224 Bergman, Roger C. *Catholic social learning: Educating the faith that does justice*. Fordham Univ Press, 2011.

225 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, Caridad Inda, John Eagleson, and Caridad Inda. *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

relationship. As such, Jesus urges us to expand our social groups inclusively without boundaries.<sup>226</sup> Today, this has become more complicated as the world population is over seven billion and is composed of a multifaceted web of inter-reliant political, cultural, and economic systems referred to as “globalization.”

But digital inclusivity has the power to facilitate seeing every human as one’s neighbor. Specifically, the globalized networks formed through ICT tend to diminish the significance of territoriality; nowadays, being “near” someone despite a tremendous geographical distance has been made easier. The integrating function of the digital world, particularly the use of social media to ensure reforms, and accountability, yields a varied impact at local, county, national, and global stages. On one hand, some forces homogenize to bond people and nations uniquely; on the other, the resulting pressures can also differentiate and build friction among people. Considering the compression of space and time through these exchange processes, globalization redefines the meaning of place. The complexity of globalization poses a substantial level of insecurity and volatility, particularly in competition between global and local aspects.<sup>227</sup> For example, the amalgamation of power into multinationals, international trade agreements, and other financial institutions has disempowered and marginalized an uncountable number of local cooperatives, families, and persons.

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226 Spohn, William C. "Spirituality and ethics: Exploring the connections." *Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (1997): 109-123.

227 Duplaga, Mariusz. "Digital divide among people with disabilities: Analysis of data from a nationwide study for determinants of Internet use and activities performed online." *PloS one* 12, no. 6 (2017): e0179825.

The nature of this shift creates room for insensitivity to human misery and environmental dilapidation, which can be termed a “globalization of insensitivity.”<sup>228</sup> The thought of complicity within economic, political, and social structures can overwhelm people. This can create moral paralysis and emotional apathy in the face of rising fortune for a select few and dizzying rates of scarcity among those in unindustrialized countries. In Western countries, paralysis results in “social imaginaries” which favor opportune social detachment. The desire for safety, autonomy, and order paradoxically leads to fear, dissatisfaction, and estrangement, as people disengage from the feeling of belonging, responsibility, and purpose emanating from embedment in broader contexts and communities. George et al. explains this detachment as an occurrence of the “cushioned self” that raises the capability to exit social obligations and the equivalent responsibilities and susceptibilities of a healthy sociality.<sup>229</sup>

This lenient and vague ethnic anthropology is more challenging when bearing in mind that familiarities of disempowerment, misery, and inequality seem to grow in severity. A few years back, the U.S. Census Bureau published statistics that showed the peak levels of poverty ever experienced in the USA since 1965. With over 143 million American citizens living below the national poverty line, the number of those in need is swiftly moving towards a ratio of one in

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228 Esteban-Navarro, Miguel-Ángel, Miguel-Ángel García-Madurga, Tamara Morte-Nadal, and Antonia-Isabel Nogales-Bocio. "The Rural Digital Divide in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Europe—Recommendations from a Scoping Review." In *Informatics*, vol. 7, no. 4, p. 54. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2020.

229 George, G., Lakhani, K. R., & Puranam, P. (2020). What has changed? The impact of Covid pandemic on the technology and innovation management research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8), 1754-1758.

every two citizens.<sup>230</sup> Renowned sociologists caution that the rising income disparity and a dwindling middle-class have begun producing a two-tiered society that will be dangerous to the economy. Those with means are slowly moving away from the poorer neighbors and converging in areas of affluent like-minded people. This results in the geographical segregation of the country in social, economic, and political realms.

Theological thinkers globally have been vocal in influencing Christians to fight for change within the structures of the “civilization of wealth” that profits the few and simultaneously neglects the basic needs of all people.<sup>231</sup> The Catholic Church condemns the practices and structures of economic activities which expose the lives of our brothers and sisters to impoverished conditions – as though they are less worthy.<sup>232</sup> Recently, Pope Francis supported this opinion in his disapproval of the “cult of money” greediness popularized and the “culture of disposal” which views human beings as simple consumer goods. Such systems result in an invisible virtual tyranny that singlehandedly and irremediably enforces its laws that seek gains before human development.<sup>233</sup>

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230 Heponiemi, Tarja, Vesa Jormanainen, Lars Leemann, Kristiina Manderbacka, Anna-Mari Aalto, and Hannele Hyppönen. "Digital divide in perceived benefits of online health care and social welfare services: National cross-sectional survey study." *Journal of medical Internet research* 22, no. 7 (2020): e17616

231 Heidegger, Martin. “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 165-182.

232 Hampton, Keith. “Neighborhoods in the Network Society: The e-Neighbors Study” *Information, Communication & Society* 10:5 (October 2007), 714-748.

233 Held, David and Anthony McGrew (eds.) *Governing Globalization: Power, Authority, and Global Governance*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

During the prevalence of these “signs of the end-times,” Christians are sensitized to adopt another type of globalization – one that supports unity. However, the tyranny of forbearance and pervasive domestication of Christianity that adulterates the standards of discipleship forms a substantial hurdle to nurturing solidarity. Domesticated Christianity, like the “cheap grace” condemned by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is the life-long enemy of the church and dodges the “cost” of discipleship.<sup>234</sup> In the United States, Christian domestication is ignorant of the base of the status quo, banal, privatized, and aids the creation of self-exonerating lies about one’s responsibility for the suffering of others.<sup>235</sup> As a country that boasts the most powerful and prosperous economy globally, a large number of Christians in America should counter the existing critiques.<sup>236</sup> Disciples ought to resist all kinds of self-referential piousness that dodge duty to our neighbors, particularly those who endure the most suffering from unjust practices and policies required to maintain the status quo. It is imperative for Christians to understand that over-relying on incidences of charity at a distance, i.e., donating to religious establishments and other nonprofits that serve the poor directly instead of involving themselves, are less helpful in ameliorating the current situation. Furthermore, in doing so Christians fail in their responsibility of love and justice. It is, therefore, the duty of all Christians to use empathy and hospitality to fight the existent social injustices. Only when this kind of love is put across to the world can it be

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234 Heuertz, Christopher L. and Christine D. Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. 29-34

235 Hicks, Douglas A. and Mark Valeri (eds.) *Global Neighbors: Christian Faith and Moral Obligation in Today’s Economy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

236 Junco, Reynol. “Too Much Face and Not Enough Books: The Relationship Between Multiple Indices of Facebook Use and Academic Performance” *Computers in Human Behavior* 28:1 (January 2012), 187-198.

said that “Go and do likewise” is fulfilled. This will also fulfill the will of God, which is alleviating all humankind from their suffering.<sup>237</sup>

### **Empathy and Hospitality as an Expression of Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care is the active relationship of a pastor (religious leader) has in helping others heal their *wounds* while managing one’s *wounds*. Pastors and other religious leaders represent God here on earth by continuing His will for humanity and doing as He would have done in every situation. For this reason, pastoral care is an essential part of ministry. We see the importance God places on observation as the father who loves and cares for His children. God observes every creation He makes to affirm its perfection according to His vision (Genesis 1:31). He watches His creation and channels his emotions (love and anger) appropriately. In expressing love for His creation, God offers His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ) as a sacrifice to die for the atonement of the sins of humanity (John 3:16). Christians can see his anger in the example of Moses, who God forces to die before reaching the Promised Land because of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 4:21).

Pastoral care is heavily reliant on empathy and hospitality for it is through these aspects that one can share in the wounds of others as they fix one’s own. Thus, all of the above attributes – observation, love, and *anger* – are vital in shaping religious leaders. In society, several people experience several afflictions. As a religious leader, one should feel this pain as expressed in others and help them to heal by creating a conducive environment for the healing process. Pastoral care requires observation of the prevalent situation in society, the expression of *anger* towards unjust practices in society, and the expression of love through sharing in the afflictions

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237 Kistemaker, Simon J. *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002.

of others and accommodating the underprivileged. It is through this understanding that empathy and hospitality can be applied in pastoral care.

### **Open Discussion and Building Relationships**

What is the role of the church in enabling open discussions and building relationships as a means to fight for social injustice and the digital divide? Close attention must first be paid to the distinction essential to understanding the reasons for church involvement in social problems: the church as an *organism* and as an *institution*. The difference can be explained in two ways of conceptualizing or imagining the church, thus, two separate forms of talking about it. None of these ways is wrong or right, and neither is any proper or improper—they both serve distinct purposes accordingly.

One can view the church as an institution – what Berkhof refers to as *mater fidelium*.<sup>238</sup> This view considers the church a united organization. On the other hand, one can consider the church an organism (what Berkhof calls *mater coetus*). Unlike the church as an institution, the organism church is a collection of individual followers i.e., the communion of devotees.<sup>239</sup> In this communion, each individual has his/her call and purpose according to the plan of God. Each also has a talent or gift, be it being a politician, a doctor, or a teacher. With these differences in mind, it follows that there is also a difference in their work: *kingdom work* and *church work*. Kingdom work is work a Christian does to serve the Lord – not in the capacity of an agent. On the other

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238 Lamb, Matthew L. “Solidarity” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1994), 908-912.

239 Levitt, Peggy. *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*. New York: The New Press, 2007.

hand, church work is a Christian's work – done in the capacity of an agent of the church institution.<sup>240</sup>

### **The Christian's Involvement in Society**

The concern of this dissertation is not whether a Christian or a Christians groups need to tackle social matters –we should. Each Christian must carry his/her values and beliefs into the public domain and direct them towards countering current significant social problems. This action constitutes an essential part of kingdom work.<sup>241</sup> Christians are obligated to practice love and empathy to others in tangible ways. Christians should be feeding the starving, comforting the mournful, and visiting the sick. Kingdom service requires that Christian plumbers keep plumbing to ensure there is no leakage in the kingdom. For the Christian truckers, they are obligated to keep trucking to distribute the goodness in the kingdom of God all over to the world.<sup>242</sup> Christian teachers should teach the message of a surety that though we may be in the darkness, a day is coming when we will see Jesus face-to-face, and darkness will be a thing of the past, for there will be no ignorance.

Either as individuals or in groups, Christians should address the problems the less fortunate face and facilitate solutions to their suffering. The simplest and the first step Christians can take to do so is voting in leaders whom they deem capable of effectively tackling the issues

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240 Martínez Alemán, Ana M. and Katherine Lynk Wartman, *Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding What Matters in Student Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

241 “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (October 2012), [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious\\_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf).

242 Peppard, Christiana. “Fresh Water and Catholic Social Teaching: A Vital Nexus” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 9:2 (Summer 2012), 325-352.



at hand. Christians should also work within Christian organizations in influencing government policies for good. Examples of such organizations include the Center for Public Justice and Bread for the World. To be effective in society, Christians should be empathetic, responsible, and law-abiding citizens.<sup>243</sup> All of these responsibilities apply to Christians as individuals and groups for the glory of the Kingdom of God. As Christians go about our day-to-day activities, we must avoid confusing whatever we say and do with the church work. This is because of the reasons that I will mention below to clear the air.

### **The Church's Involvement in Society**

This paper tackles and focuses upon the subject of social justice. Primarily, the institutional church serves to educate people on the existence of divine justice. It is also not focused on reminding people to stay righteous but rather to inform them of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ.<sup>244</sup> The institutional church does not instruct people on the candidate to vote for to take public office because the German churches, by and large, did not speak out against Hitler but the Confessing Church did, and members were punished. Instead, it spreads news across the globe about the man who chose many for eternity and gave His life for it. It is, therefore, not advocating for social justice in society; the institutional church primarily opens and closes God's kingdom and cultivates the Christian faith. To achieve this, the institutional church preaches (gospel), and administers sacraments while exercising church discipline.<sup>245</sup>

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243 Rainie, Lee, Joanna Brenner, and Kristen Purcell, "Photos and Videos as Social Currency Online" Pew Internet & American Life Project (13 September 2012), <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Online-Pictures.aspx>.

244 Perlow, Leslie A. *Sleeping with Your Smartphone*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012.

245 Sniegocki, John. "Neoliberal Globalization: Critiques and Alternatives" *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 321-339.

It should be understood that this does not mean that the institutional church should distance itself from advocating for social justice, neither should it avoid speaking for victims of injustice. There are circumstances where the institutional church should stand firm and speak against the prevailing social issues.<sup>246</sup> In this case, the institutional church must be lucid in stating out some of the appropriate goals that social policy should promote. For instance, it is in the best position for the church to work for a society where all the citizens are protected from acts of violence by speaking for their best interests. On ordinary occasions, the church should never assume the goal of entertaining political questions of how particular societies should be set to achieve the ultimate goal of social justice. Generally, this means that the institutional church must always avoid taking part in the formulation of policy statements.<sup>247</sup> Some questions about social violence, e.g., is it a good idea to impose gun control, or does this solely arm the lawbreakers? Is it necessary to add more police officers, expand jail sizes, set compulsory jail terms, or blend all these? Frankly, answers to these questions are beyond the abilities of the institutional church and should, therefore, distance itself from such.

In my opinion, institutional churches ought to speak against avoidable poverty. The institutional church can take part in outlining the broad perspectives of social policies but should never recommend particular policy suggestions. It must not precisely endorse the best social guidelines to reduce poverty as politics is not the institution's area of expertise. For instance, the church should not take part in any recommendation regarding the best form of private welfare or public support. This is because the institutional church cannot come up with the best proposal in

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246 Rosen, Ellen Israel. *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

247 Outka, Gene. *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

those lines.<sup>248</sup> Every single Christian has his/her own opinion regarding this. For the institutional church to take part in such decisions, it would be taking the name of the Lord in vain and claiming a godly standing for political decision – which should never be the case.<sup>249</sup> If a congregant protests the current welfare rules and drafts a letter to their congressman stating the reasons for the opposition, that is their decision and is answerable before God. However, when a pastor preaches a sermon expressing the church’s opposition to the welfare rules, this could strip the congregants of the freedom to have their own opinion on political matters.

Similarly, when an individual decides to vote a particular way, that is their personal decision and is answerable before God. However, when a particular committee of a congregation instructs their members to vote for a specific candidate – claiming that it is the Christian choice to vote for the candidate, this becomes a different case.<sup>250</sup> It is, therefore, unwise for the church to take part in political matters. But in some instances, the institutional church should speak responsibly against particular policies affecting the justice system – whenever the policies in question are undoubtedly dissolute. At times policies can be decadent, probably because their aims are evil, e.g., regarding ethnic cleansing, or because those policies are dissolute from the onset - even though the aim may be ethically necessary. For instance, legalizing abortion could be a well-intentioned approach to reducing poverty. However, it is against the church’s moral and scriptural considerations, and therefore, the church should firmly oppose abortion. Presently,

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248 Myers, Jack. *Hooked Up: A New Generation’s Surprising Take on Sex, Politics, and Saving the World*. New York: York House Press, 2012.

249 Neyrey, Jerome H. and Eric C. Stewart (eds.) *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018.

250 O’Brien, David J. and Thomas A. Shannon (eds.) *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, [1992] 2005.

the church has stood against abortion in many instances. For example, Christian Reformed Church has, on many occasions, officially opposed legalized abortion through its ecclesiastic council.<sup>251</sup>

I believe that when a council as big as a synod stands in opposition against a specific policy or social injustice, it speaks volumes that the particular policy is undoubtedly dissolute. This is not mean that the decision of moral truth is made based on the majority vote. This is not, in any way, an ontological claim. Instead, it is purely an epistemological claim: A notable dissimilarity of views among the Reformed Christians on the policy concern is an indication that the morals of the problem are unclear.

### **Two Dangers**

There are two dangers the church should avoid when it considers social policies. The first is a failure to recognize undeniably dissolute policies and be quiet when it ought to bravely speak against the specific practice. The apartheid policies in South Africa can be viewed as a reference point; some churches failed to oppose such undeniably immoral practices.<sup>252</sup> The second danger – a worse one – is that the church might speak out in defense of an unethical policy. If this occurs, the church associates itself with injustice. This was the case in many American churches which opposed the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>253</sup> The church is privileged to bear the written word of God, and therefore be in a position to clearly understand morality and distinguish what is not ethically acceptable. Because of this, it must use its power to speak against apparent moral

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251 Norris, Pippa. *Digital Divide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

252 O'Connell, Maureen H. *Compassion: Loving Our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019.

253 Neyrey, Jerome H. and Eric C. Stewart (eds.) *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018.

injustices. Political arguments in the Western world, however, are usually between several morally acceptable policy choices. In these cases, selecting one among such choices is not the church's expertise nor responsibility.

As such, the institutional church should never get involved in the specific political and social policies of the day unless a glaring moral issue is present and clearly defined. Otherwise, involvement compromises the principal work of the church – spreading the gospel of God by reaching out to the many in love and empathy. Linking Christ's work with particular social policies that are not ethically binding extremely encumbers the principal work of the church.

This is done in two ways: sapping the resources and energy from its principal and creating an association between the church and defined political ideologies. Personally, there are churches I cannot consider regularly attending, not because of having a mistaken theology, but because I associate them churches with certain political ideologies I do not subscribe to as an individual.<sup>254</sup> Considering the above reasons, people must resist the enticement of using the institutional church as an agent for passing their political opinions.<sup>255</sup>

### **The Melville Family Foundation**

Poverty exists globally, and there is a need for communities and individuals to work empathetically to lift those in need out of their suffering. As part of fulfilling the work of God, acts of compassion should always be the ultimate goal of all humans and especially Christians.

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254 Iivari, Netta, Sumita Sharma, and Leena Ventä-Olkkonen. "Digital transformation of everyday life—How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care?." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102183.

255 Heponiemi, Tarja, Vesa Jormanainen, Lars Leemann, Kristiina Manderbacka, Anna-Mari Aalto, and Hannele Hyppönen. "Digital divide in perceived benefits of online health care and social welfare services: National cross-sectional survey study." *Journal of medical Internet research* 22, no. 7 (2020): e17616.

Across the world, several nonprofit organizations exist to uplift people from impoverished situations. These organizations are typically funded by individuals and other organizations to sustain their humanitarian missions. In Dallas alone, citizens have formed several organizations of this nature with the sole mission of helping the underserved. The engagement in such work speaks volumes on their intention to see all people living happily. When God placed humans here on Earth, His will was for all humankind to prosper in the Glory of His name. Most of the suffering experienced in the world is a result of humans' doing, and it is only in the best interest of God's work to help lift the hell.<sup>256</sup> Because of this, Christians and the church should make it their mission to diminish injustices, such as economic and educational disparity, and the experience of human suffering through acts of compassion.

One Dallas organization that addresses these disparities is the Melville Family Foundation. Rev. Dr. Lael Melville and her husband Randolph (Randy) Melville formed the organization in 2018. The reason for founding the Melville Family Foundation is to improve the lives of brown and black children residing in the southern region of Dallas through food security, economic stability, and academic excellence. In addressing food security issues, the Melville Family Foundation has partnered with other foundations such as the North Texas Food Bank and The Mint. Through this partnership, it was possible to provide food to over 2000 families and give out meal kits above 2250 for children since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic alone.<sup>257</sup>

These numbers show the effectiveness of the organization in ending the disparities seen in the Dallas community. To help the community move towards economic stability, the Melville

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256 Kapetaniou, Chrystalla. "Learning in a pandemic: closing the digital skills gap during COVID-19." (2020)

257 Lai, John, and Nicole O. Widmar. "Revisiting the Digital Divide in the COVID-19 Era." *Applied economic perspectives and policy* 43, no. 1 (2021): 458-464.

Family Foundation concentrates on bridging the gap between the corporations around North Texas and the needy families and children.<sup>258</sup> Through this objective, the organization aims to give scholarships to deserving students and alleviate their poverty-stricken families. It also works to provide internship opportunities to those who excel in their fields.<sup>259</sup> To address education disparity, the organization has partnered with UpLift School System and taken five schools under its wings.<sup>260</sup> This program aims to provide virtual mentorship services to empower the kids and encourage them to do better in their chosen areas of study.

Through the incredible work of the Melville Family Foundation, it is evident that Christians, especially leaders, can use their influence in continuing God's work of compassion and love to the whole world. The kind of economic disparity experienced is one of the issues that can be addressed through compassion by lifting the underserved. It is, therefore, only fitting that all Christians around the world should use their abilities and capabilities to help the poor and oppressed by showing love and compassion to them.<sup>261</sup> In so doing, they will be fulfilling the instructions of Jesus – "Go and do likewise."

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258 Pandey, Neena, and Abhipsa Pal. "Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice." *International Journal of Information Management* 55 (2020): 102171.

259 Ibid.

260 Reisdorf, Bianca, and Colin Rhinesmith. "Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion." *Social Inclusion* 8, no. 2 (2020): 132-137.

261 Pun, Raymond. "Understanding the Roles of Public Libraries and Digital Exclusion Through Critical Race Theory: An Exploratory Study of People of Color in California Affected by the Digital Divide and the Pandemic." *Urban Library Journal* 26, no. 2 (2021): 1.

## Digital Inclusion in a Multi-Level Context

Organizations like the Melville Family Foundation are essential to the issue of the digital divide due to the pressures and constraints of local and federal governments. Cities cannot currently overcome digital inequalities independently, especially when faced with a dip in budgets and revenues caused by the pandemic. Thus, efforts to end the digital divide must be a multi-level approach so that implemented action and policy addresses the entire community.<sup>262</sup> If digital inclusion is to occur on an international and national level, then political conversations must highlight it. Conversations on digital inclusion are rightfully beginning to arise in the agendas of political spheres. In June 2020, for example, the UN secretary-general Antonio-Guterres presented a roadmap on digital cooperation with goals and strategies to ensure that the universal aim is achieved.

Furthermore, the analysis of the digital divide should be considered in the context of social justice to pressure political and public figures into implementing policies to address it.<sup>263</sup> The introduction of social justice to the digital divide conversation, especially after the pandemic, would be the best time to rectify the inequalities that have been deeply rooted so long in our society. Promoting digital inclusion means providing residents with the internet and developing policies that would ensure internet access to the micro-level. The local governments have a huge role in playing, especially in identifying the vulnerabilities and needs of its people.

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262 Lai, J., & Widmar, N. O. (2020). Revisiting the Digital Divide in the COVID-19 Era. *Applied economic perspectives and policy*.

263 Reisdorf, B., & Rhinesmith, C. (2020). Digital Inclusion as a Core Component of Social Inclusion. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2), 132-137.



They have the capacity with the government's help to build an ecosystem of inclusion in terms of digital accessibility.<sup>264</sup>

### **Technological Humanism and a People-centered Digital City**

Within the last five years, the Dallas City Council has moved to create a city model where the rights and freedoms of individuals are respected. The previous municipality (2015-2019), worked towards a digital-oriented environment and created policies to advance the city's technological sovereignty. The vision of the municipal government is to ensure that the city will be built on a digital city that enhances the rights and freedoms of the citizens allowing them to have equality in terms of issues such as privacy, accessibility, participation, and expression. In 2018, the city installed a network of 15000 urban sensors to track data on mobility, waste management, air quality, and energy consumption by the residents.<sup>265</sup> The municipal government has incorporated digital technologies such as Artificial intelligence and 5G into government projects concerning education, social care, and accessibility.

### **Post-COVID Action Plan for Fighting Social Injustices and the Digital Divide**

The increased necessity of the digital world paired with the possibility of another crisis similar to the pandemic requires people to heavily rely upon digital platforms in their day-to-day activities. At the same time, there is a need for Christians to embrace inclusivity and work to

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264 Drane, C., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2020). The impact of 'learning at home' on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Literature Review Prepared by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education*. Curtin University, Australia.

265 Azubuike, O. B., Adegboye, O., & Quadri, H. (2020). Who gets to learn in a pandemic? Exploring the digital divide in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 100022.

close the divide. If nothing is done to address this issue, the result will be further inequality of people and regions in participating in the pool of knowledge and information in society. Scholars suggest that digital disparity research should draw attention to the prevalence of the issue itself and that the chief purpose of studies should be to suggest possible solutions to the problem.<sup>266</sup>

As the need for broadband in low-income communities increases significantly, studies on the geographical magnitude of this divide and targeted solutions are necessary.<sup>267</sup> Lindsay and Marias correctly point out that the digital divide has become a worldwide research topic centered on policymakers' interest in bridging the digital gap.<sup>268</sup> Determining the best approaches and workable policies, especially concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, has become a significant problem. This pandemic has led to a surge in literature revolving around the available resources to steer growth economically and socially without disrupting environmental conservation or the link between the pandemic and food security. Several other studies focus on the digital disparity in rural areas while aiming to empower people in ending this.<sup>269</sup> This section aims to suggest measures to ensure that solutions to social injustices and technological disparity in Dallas will be in place after the pandemic.

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266 Dmitry, Epstein, Erik C. Nisbet, and Tarleton Gillespie, "Who's responsible for the digital divide? Public perceptions and policy implications." *The Information Society* 27, no. 2 (2011): 92-104.

267 Epstein, 92-104.

268 Beverly, Lindsay and Maria T. Poindexter, "The Internet: Creating equity through continuous education or perpetuating a digital divide?," *Comparative Education Review* 47, no. 1 (2003): 112-122.

269 James, Prieger E., "The broadband digital divide and the economic benefits of mobile broadband for rural areas," *Telecommunications Policy* 37, no. 6-7 (2013): 483-502.

## **Recommendations Related to Access and Connectivity**

There is a plethora of literature on the digital divide in Europe. The majority of these studies analyze the dimensions of the digital disparity, in terms of either particular social or technological aspects. Generally, the research regarding social aspects of the digital divide attempts to dissect internet exploitation methods in promoting personal or regional growth. Broadly, the studies cover general environmental aspects of the digital disparity in various communities. The available literature scope is centered on explaining the situations in rural Europe and suggests possible intervention actions. Although most of the studies were conducted without factoring in COVID-19, the suggested courses of action can still be implemented without the need for structural adjustments.

Several neighborhoods inhabited by the poor in Dallas lack adequate connectivity. Because connectivity is a vital part of elevating poverty and ensuring employability, this sad truth requires immediate attention. Internet connectivity is essential to the development of innovation and general growth aspects of companies; broadband and internet connectivity are directly related to economic disparities that exist in disadvantaged areas. But researchers such as Duvivier understands that the widespread deployment of high-speed internet and fiber is not, in itself, sufficient enough to stir economic development and improvement in the lives of those living in impoverished areas.<sup>270</sup> However such deployment can be a catalyst for the development of particular conditions in the context of regional economics.<sup>271</sup> Wilson and Hopkins insist that the goal of these actions is not simply connectivity, but the spillover results include shielding the

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270 Chloé, Duvivier, Stéphanie Truchet, Nicolas Mauhé, and Marouene Mbarek, "The rollout of high-speed broadband and company creations in rural areas: An evaluation of the Auvergne High-speed Broadband Program," *Economie prevision 2* (2018): 97-139.

271 Duvivier, 97-139.

areas from several injustices. As a result, solutions should concentrate on the most disadvantaged areas to narrow the possibility of further disparity in those regions.<sup>272</sup>

Government has a crucial role to play in reducing the digital divide. Politically led measures on connectivity have thrived in European cities such as Barcelona. However, there is scarcity in the facts of the effectiveness and efficiency of these measures. The broadband disparity in the less industrialized areas has not been eradicated.<sup>273</sup> Matteucci indicates the balance between the merits and demerits of government intervention; therefore, the benefits are not as pronounced.<sup>274</sup> It is also important to note that the rapid progression of technology needs a speedier deployment mechanism across all the regions.<sup>275</sup> When procuring the equipment, more attention was directed towards the overall efficiency rather than the technical quality, thus, compromising the final quality. Salemink et al. point out that technological development policies have been underpriced because of their broad nature and the inability to predict future technological advancements; they were already obsolete during the time of launching. There is a rift in the connection between territorial administrations and the initiatives of citizens in this area.<sup>276</sup> Salemink and Strijker claim that even if the government implements supportive policies to aid citizens' ideas, the citizens could still view them as limiting factors. Therefore, there is a

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272 Ruth, Wilson and Jonathan Hopkins, "The Changing Shape of Scotland's Digital Divide," *European Countryside* 11, no. 4 (2019): 563-583.

273 Duvivier, 97-139

274 Nicola, Matteucci, "The EU State aid policy for broadband: An evaluation of the Italian experience with first generation networks," *Telecommunications Policy* 43, no. 9 (2019): 101830.

275 Matteucci, 101830.

276 Salemink, 360-371.

need to clear any form of misinterpretation by clearly explaining the details whenever a government calls for participation.<sup>277</sup>

Public intervention plays a crucial role in ensuring the continued existence of local communities, especially when the focus is on a core development factor-like technology. The rollout of the technology needs to be quick to avoid the risk of running outdated and losing its viability to the target groups in the rural areas.<sup>278</sup> Areas that are least attractive to the newest technologies, such as 5G, should be backed by the government to receive such connectivity. It is suggested that population density criteria should be used to identify remote areas that require the deployment of superfast internet connectivity. This method would provide information on the impact of poverty and the scarceness of the population. It is the most scarcely populated area that bears the most economic and logistic problems when dealing with technology. It is, therefore, of importance to put more concentration on the most underprivileged areas.<sup>279</sup>

Governments have failed to implement broadband fully and lack proper customer support and risk factor consideration to face potential hurdles.<sup>280</sup> However, it is the role of Christians of good will at all times to champion such reforms through activism just as Amos did in the Old Testament and MLK did in the fight for civil rights. Therefore, there is a need for particular policies based on the knowledge and needs of the various actors. This suggests the need for a community-based tactic that cuts across the individual and national stages as bridging the digital gap requires a multi-faceted policy approach and input from all stakeholders, not only the

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277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

279 Ibid.

280 Matteucci, 101830.

government but also social organizations, Christians of good will, and the general community.<sup>281</sup> Such measure can be replicated in Dallas if those in power act in empathy and hospitality to make change for the vulnerable in society.

### **Design and Implementation of Policies and Programs**

For there to be a rollout of broadband in unconnected areas, policymakers must consider several issues. The rollout of broadband development in these areas must determine the cost and technical resources required to achieve connectivity. Service providers have the urban and suburban areas' technology needs in check. However, there is close to no connectivity in the most underprivileged regions nor are there incentives for suppliers to provide service to these areas.<sup>282</sup> Policymakers must recognize that suppliers will take advantage of the demand for superfast broadband from these unexplored markets. Historically, suppliers have developed exceptional commercial models basing on a segmental or vital partnership approach that caters to small-scale issues when they intend to close the digital gap through public intervention.

Policymakers are becoming more aware of the importance of specialized providers in the spread of cutting-edge broadband. On the other hand, additional steps must be put into consideration to ensure the effective distribution of public resources and reduce competitive distortions in this sector. To account for the rise of new players, both regulations and public subsidies should be checked. This will almost certainly necessitate a new approach to government involvement in internet markets, which is currently a contrast between

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281 Koen, Saleminck, Dirk Strijker, and Gary Bosworth, "Rural development in the digital age: A systematic literature review on unequal ICT availability, adoption, and use in rural areas," *Journal of Rural Studies* 54 (2017): 360-371.

282 Raul, Katz L., and Taylor A. Berry, *Driving demand for broadband networks and services*, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014).

competitiveness in urban centers and market imperfections in remote regions. Government participation of the past has failed to identify and leverage possible motivations for private development in places where market failure is expected. Pilot projects should be used to test potential solutions, and these programs should be evaluated based on their feasibility, performance, and magnitude of the achievement of their goals.<sup>283</sup> Permanent supervision of digital distribution is needed for management assessment and the selection of prevention and stimulation steps. It is difficult to recognize the obstacles to positive changes in the agricultural sector of the economy without this rational approach.<sup>284</sup> Pointers such as the fraction of the population with a computer, the proportion of homes with broadband, fixed and mobile internet subscribers per 100 inhabitants, frequency per user, the volume of safe servers per million residents, and proportion of daily internet users are all important points of data when assessing the effectiveness public and private initiatives.<sup>285</sup>

### **Technological Solutions**

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells his disciples that the Good Samaritan saw the helpless man and addressed his problems. It is imperative for Christians to not only identify and critique issues in society but also provide solutions for such deficiencies. In this context, satellite connectivity is a viable tool for those living in underprivileged communities. Because the internet has become essential to everyday life, access can mitigate and increase opportunities in employment, education, political participation, healthcare, etc. Scholars have varying opinions on how widespread connectivity can best be achieved. The most cost-effective

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283 Leanne, Townsend, Arjuna Sathiaselalan, Gorry Fairhurst, and Claire Wallace, "Enhanced broadband access as a solution to the social and economic problems of the rural digital divide," *Local Economy* 28, no. 6 (2013): 580-595.

284 Townsend, 583.

285 Townsend, 587.

alternative, according to Pereira, is a combination of both cable and wireless technologies.<sup>286</sup> Further research indicates that introducing satellite or wireless connections would increase regional coverage and connection speed by extending coverage via satellite systems.<sup>287</sup> These studies emphasize the complexity of deploying xDSL (Digital Subscriber Lines) and recommend WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access), BFWA (Broadband Fixed Wireless Access), and DVB-S (Digital Video Broadcasting via Satellite) as substitutes.<sup>288</sup> They also advocate for reshaping the models of partnership between telecommunication providers and the general public. Other researchers suggest combining satellite downlink connectivity with 4G bandwidth networks.<sup>289</sup> They also demonstrate that storing the most shared data to minimize data transferred via the satellite connection resulted in a substantial reduction in operational costs (more than 60 percent), implying a substantial reduction in estimated cost per user.<sup>290</sup>

Ensuring connectivity reaches all the corners of Dallas is only the first step. The conventional digital divide concerning connectivity is being replaced by the disparity in use. This newer disparity distinguishes users who solely use the network to search for knowledge and

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286 Samuel, Pereira C., Alexandre S. Caporali, and Ivan RS Casella, "Power line communication technology in industrial networks." In *2015 IEEE International Symposium on Power Line Communications and Its Applications (ISPLC)*, pp. 216-221. IEEE, 2015.

287 Lorna, Philip, Caitlin Cottrill, John Farrington, Fiona Williams, and Fiona Ashmore. "The digital divide: Patterns, policy and scenarios for connecting the 'final few' in rural communities across Great Britain." *Journal of Rural Studies* 54 (2017): 386-398.

288 Philip, 391.

289 Asma, Chiha, Marlies Van der Wee, Didier Colle, and Sofie Verbrugge, "Techno-economic viability of integrating satellite communication in 4G networks to bridge the broadband digital divide," *Telecommunications Policy* 44, no. 3 (2020): 101874.

290 Ibid.



interact with others from those users using it more widely through sophisticated network facilities. For example, data from Richmond et al. noted a transition to this form of inequality between cities and suburbs. The gap in high-speed connectivity has been reduced, but it has been supplemented by a significant gap in the use of digital business tactics. Determining whether this lag is due to a lack of capital, difference in expertise, increased competition, etc. is critical for implementing tactics that assist smaller companies. Smaller companies not able to embrace new-age business models will struggle to target modern consumers and therefore risk their success.<sup>291</sup>

Guaranteeing proper and effective use of digital resources is extremely important, and is not limited to businesses but rather is especially relevant to individuals. Widespread connectivity will be useless if the individuals and organizations it is meant to serve do not have the knowledge to properly use it. Simple development of fresh digital technology is insufficient; knowledge, literacy, and instruction on functionality and potential benefits are needed.<sup>292</sup> With this in mind, political and community initiatives should prioritize proper use of emerging technology in underserved regions rather than solely accessibility. There are several appropriate ways in which physical connectivity, as well as connectivity skills, can be used to improve the lives of the population as a whole. Fluency in fundamental digital skills required for e-administration, online learning, e-commerce, banking, and working virtually can significantly affect, particularly in the suburbs, by reducing or reversing their backward trends, alleviating poverty, growing businesses and job opportunities. If the following recommendations are

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291 William, Richmond, Scott Rader, and Clinton Lanier, "The "digital divide" for rural small businesses," *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship* (2017).

292 Lisha, Ye, and Huiqin Yang, "From digital divide to social inclusion: a tale of mobile platform empowerment in rural areas," *Sustainability* 12, no. 6 (2020): 2424.

considered and put in action, the ultimate goal of bridging the technological gap between the rich and the poor will be achieved.

Similar to physical access, researchers have suggested multiple solutions for creating equality in digital use. Community resilience research indicates that socioeconomic, cultural, and structural obstacles affect digitalization and persist after the digital connectivity gap has been bridged. To encourage underserved communities to embrace emerging technology, digital guidelines that foster communal pliability has been proposed.<sup>293</sup>

Gonzalez and Morales propose a cross-generational approach that includes generation assistance in the elderly education process.<sup>294</sup> This approach seeks to motivate users of all age groups to improve their digital skills to better communicate with loved ones. We can see how this motivation is effective in reaching across generations on social media platforms. Social media use has been shown to encourage social participation in low-income regions, particularly among older adult women without a college education.<sup>295</sup> While the motivation social media creates for older generations is important to recognize, other researchers argue that so long as educational gaps exist, closing the digital divide will be challenging.<sup>296</sup> Evidence suggests that education's position as a driving force behind the digital gap has weakened; nevertheless, to garner technological growth, there is a need to concentrate on teaching specific ICT skills to reduce ambiguity and foster their acceptance.

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293 Ye, 2424.

294 José Antonio Canchola, González, and Leonardo David Glasserman Morales, "Digital adult literacy in virtual learning environments: The case of xMOOCs in energy sustainability." In *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Technological Ecosystems for Enhancing Multiculturality*, pp. 987-992. 2019.

295 González et al., 990.

296 Cruz-Jesus, 79.

Creating policies that promote higher education and discourage school dropouts helps to close the digital gap. Teachers play a critical role in students' digital literacy through encouragement and the demonstration of digital skills. As such, it is proposed that schools implement training programs for these practitioners that educate them on innovation and incorporate such innovation into school curricula.<sup>297</sup> Another researcher, Van Deursen, proposes a blended schooling system in which families and educators actively participate and technology as a protagonist.<sup>298</sup> However this proposed method is limited in that it expects families and instructors to have previous electronic-skill training in compliance with comprehensive-time-planning and the development of a set of metrics to rate the sufficiency of the standards.

According to Cruz-Jesus et al., income gaps continue to be the most significant precursor of technological asymmetries in all nations.<sup>299</sup> But the work to establish growth tools and policies must consider more than just demographics, taking into account the uniqueness of the underserved community and proposing policies that foster intelligent, viable, and shared prosperity.<sup>300</sup> In other words, to bridge the current digital divide, actions to promote the use of innovative services are needed.<sup>301</sup> Meijere and Tambovceva assert that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are valuable and practical tools for enabling the growth of

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297 Cruz-Jesus, 81.

298 Alexander, Van Deursen, JAM, and Jan AGM Van Dijk. "The digital divide shifts to differences in usage." *New media & society* 16, no. 3 (2014): 507-526.

299 Cruz-Jesus, Analysis for the EU-28, 82

300 Van Deursen, 520.

301 Frederico, Cruz-Jesus, María Rosalía Vicente, Fernando Bacao, and Tiago Oliveira, "The education-related digital divide: An analysis for the EU-28," *Computers in Human Behavior* 56 (2016): 72-82.

underserved areas, particularly in the health, management, and e-commerce sectors.<sup>302</sup> As such, significant resources should be dedicated to raising knowledge of IT solutions and facilities among the underprivileged, with an emphasis on encouraging SMEs in underserved regions to use such facilities and solutions. Despite the technology costs, their research suggests that nations with varying economic output levels would also have varying digital growth levels. Therefore, development strategies should insist on funding, subsidizing the procurement of gear, or enabling community access to the internet, e.g., through internet booths and public hubs.

Staging archives in underserved communities could play a vital role in providing internet via public equipment and facilities designed for the physically challenged, teaching fundamental digital knowledge to the operators, impacting security facets, secrecy, and creating pools based on their users' requirements. Such actions must be highly adaptable to respond effectually and efficiently to the various circumstances that may arise: A too homogeneous diffusion of information can result in some blocking phenomena as a result of extreme conceptual proximity.<sup>303</sup> Thus, coaching and civic information campaigns should accompany innovative progress, particularly as related to ICTS and designed for disadvantaged groups. Gonzales and Morales further recommend increasing public spending and resource optimization in underprivileged areas, such as using computers in schools after school time.<sup>304</sup> Implementing

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302 Sanita, Mejjere and Tatjana Tambovceva. "INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AS ENABLER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT." In *Economic Science for Rural Development Conference Proceedings*, no. 44. 2017.

303 Cruz-Jesus, 76.

304 Gonzales, 980.

living labs focused on the public invention can have a significant effect in underserved regions, enhancing development strategies, innovation, as well as individual and welfare.<sup>305</sup>

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305 Gonzales, 975.

## **Chapter Six: Outcome**

### **Understanding the Relationship Between Empathy, Hospitality, and Justice**

The Rabbinic and Biblical visions of suffering and its alleviation, if not abolition, arise from Israel's fundamental narratives. The vocation and remembrance of Israel, as well as the sacred choice and historic destiny of Israel, compel them to reach inward to express cohesion as well as outward to the margins of social influence – the widow, orphan, and outsider – in order to include them all in the close sanctum of brotherly love.

However, incorporating the central message into laws and welfare institutions, character building, the motives of those who give, and society's religious belief systems are remarkably varied in the Rabbinic, Biblical, and Christian practices. Israel's identity narratives are numerous, and when they diverge, they motivate various ideologies, processes, and interests in societal justice policies. Because the Bible made its responsibilities to the underprivileged fundamental to its existence, we can gain knowledge through studying these different tactics.

Empathy towards the poor can be classified based on hierarchical delivery structures or religious keynotes. To meet human needs, biblical law employs a multi-faceted approach. Take, for instance, the monarch. Royalty can create judiciary bodies and enact legislation to protect the vulnerable and protect them from others who are powerful. However, if the bodies are corrupt, the ruler can directly intervene in the system and save the oppressed by overruling decisions, cancelling debts, and liberating slaves. If an external danger threatens the entire society (invasion, oppressive homage, or oppression by a hostile kingdom) the king must save the poor – his entire country – in battle. This is also a question of fairness, particularly economic impartiality. For example, David freed Israelites from Philistine tyrants who burdened Israel, but he also oppressed his people. As a result, Prophet Nathan had to directly petition David to repent

and cleanse his sins. He used the parable of a stolen sheep to signify Bathsheba, whom the king had taken from Uriah. The prophet appears to David as the pinnacle of justice, the supreme appellate court (II Sam. 12). However, the king was ironically the criminal. Thus, the Prophet Nathan and David analogy forms a concerted framework for all Christians to advocated for the marginalized and abused.

The first monotheistic motif necessary for comprehending one's responsibilities to the needy is **God as king and judge**. The term “judge” can refer to both the court and political functions, as in the Book of Judges. According to the biblical rationale, the earthly king, ordained by God, and the justice, judging on the law of God, both served as God's representation on Earth. As such, they were responsible for promoting universal justice as well as socio-economic and political order. The Sacred position of that leader is stated explicitly in the imperial Psalm 72:1-2: “God grant your judgments (mishpat) to the king and give your justice (tzedakah) to the king’s son. Judge your people in justice and your poor with judgment.”

This passage explicitly engages in the ancient Jewish custom that recognizes implementing fairness is the king’s responsibility. Every judiciary or public order has its disaffection to the deprived; therefore, the ruler – whether Spiritual or human – should ensure that the system of justice encompasses outsiders and the needy that have no other supporters to plead their case. Protecting the oppressed from injustice is the secret to a king's glory:

All the kings will worship him; all the nations will serve him because he has rescued the destitute from the hand of the powerful and the poor who had no helper. (Psalm 72:12)

The advice given to rulers in Proverbs is:

Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all unfortunate.

Speak up, judge righteously, defend the cause of the poor and the needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Aside from the ruler, the Bible lists three other symbolic representations of God the king on earth: the people, the prophet, and the priest. The priest (referred to as “a *priest-Levi*” in Deuteronomy) staffs the judiciary (Deut. 17:18; Deut. 34:10). The prophet reminds the monarch, the justices, and the Israelites to carry out this principle of fairness, commonly known as *tzedakah mishaps*. The prophet also works as an intercessor between God and man. As a prophet of God, one ought to speak out for the impoverished. Thus, in the Bathsheba case, the prophet Nathan cries out to the king (II Samuel: 12); Elijah condemns Ahab's vineyard theft and assassination of Naboth, as well as Jezebel's court manipulation (I Kings: 21). As a prophet, Abraham prays to God to cure King Abimelech (Gen. 20:7), and Moses also prays to God in the desert to pardon the sins of Israel (Exodus 32 and Numbers 13).

The narrative of Abraham interceding for Sodom before God, whom he invites to stay true to the promise of being “judge of the whole earth,” is the first presentation in the Bible of the prevalent symbol of the Spiritual and, by extension, the Earthly king as obligated to pursue justice. According to God's internal monologue in this story, Abraham is selected to found a people whose ultimate purpose is a lifestyle based on *tzedakah mishpat*, which helps all humanity. *Tzedakah* benefits not only the disadvantaged but all who are subjected to injustice. Within this theme, poverty should be interpreted in political and legal contexts. The calling of Abraham and the divinatory condemnation to Israel's oppressive upper class are related to the royal order, Spiritual and mortal, to serve justice - *tzedakah mishpat* - to the entire community,



particularly to the vulnerable. While this narrative is extended to the needy as they are often abused, it is concerned chiefly with offering legal remedies rather than material support.

In the prophetic view of poverty, affluent and political authorities are criticized as exploiters of the needy and vulnerable. Whether those in need are indentured servants, laborers, orphans, widows, or legal residents who lack relatives to fight for their cause, it is God's ultimate obligation to provide equality and ensure their welfare. Genesis 18 states that this was initially the purpose of God's whole people, Abraham's learners, and his offspring. The responsibility, however, falls to the monarch, who the prophet summons to do his duties. Nonetheless, every Jew should seek justice and be compassionate.

### **Abraham's Calling**

I have singled him out [chosen him to found a people] so that he may instruct his children and his household [or posterity] after him to keep the way of Adonai, doing what is just (tzedakah) and right (mishpat) so that God may bring about for Abraham what was promised him. (Genesis 18: 18-19)

“Consider a 'Good guy,' who lives in liberty among the countries and works for his ideal. Each son of Israel serves as a model priest, pursuing justice and love in a dignified manner. He communicates not 'Israelness' – which is prohibited – but instead genuine humanity! What a booster this power might be for humanity's education and growth.”<sup>306</sup> “The basic strategy of Judaism for achieving *Tikkun Olam* [“world repair”] is to form an experimental group - the Israelites - that seeks to provide for its own. This will illustrate, a human example, of how to

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306 Samson, Hirsch, Raphael, and Joseph Elias, *The nineteen letters*, (Feldheim Publishers, 1995).

progress toward the ultimate goal bit by bit without compromising what is already successful.”<sup>307</sup>

Abraham's commendable action is concentrated on hospitality to the needy. He begs God to save his orphaned nephew, Lot, and extends kindness to the poor and weary, who are later identified as angels. Abraham also sets out to subdue four cruel kings and liberate their slaves, including Lot. For Christians and all people, this parable teaches us to always fight for justice for the vulnerable with empathy and kindness.

### **Advocacy and Exploitation of the Weak and Poor Strangers**

In the Bible, the term “strangers” is proverbially used about the needy and poverty-stricken. Abraham and his nephew Lot demonstrate hospitality to the strangers and secure their protection. Oppositely, the Sodomites exploit and sexually violate the strangers, denying them justice. God being the supreme judge, brings justice to these strangers when he wipes out the Sodomites (wicked rulers who oppress the poor) through fire. The purpose of Abraham's teaching was not to use the judiciary to benefit the poor, but rather to neutralize their presence in courts so that each could be treated fairly. This fair treatment applies even if a person is "bad" in religious or moral practices. For example, when Abraham conquered the four kings and rescued their slaves, he could have taken them as his slaves, but he chose not to. He even refused to be compensated for the military expenditure he incurred in fighting the kings. This teaches us to show empathy to the helpless without expecting anything in return, for it is our obligation as humans.

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307 Greenberg, Irving, *The Jewish Way: Living the holidays*, (Jason Aronson, Incorporated, 1998): 124.

## Engaging and Applying Various Sources

The digital divide is a chasm that divides people, cultures, and communities into two groups: “individuals and groups who have access to technology and those who do not.”<sup>308</sup> Though primarily a social problem, the ramifications of the digital disparity are extensive and severe. The Digital Divide, according to Van Dijk, is caused by three major factors:

- Lack of information on how to utilize the technology
- Lack of access because of the associated price.
- Lack of information on the advantages of the technology

The poor make up the majority of the population on this side of the disparity, with a small proportion disabled to the extent of being incapable of using these resources at all.

Approximately 69.7 percent of the world's 8 billion people lack access to the internet; this is referred to as the “Digital Abyss.”<sup>309</sup> According to Zickuhr and Smith, nearly half of the adults who do not use the internet claim the primary reason is that they do not consider it essential to them.<sup>310</sup> Most of these individuals have not used the internet before and have no family members that do. One in every five people believes they know enough about computing to use the internet on their own. As a result, this 69.7 percent of the world’s population will be less digitally educated, motivated, and accountable. These individuals are digitally sidelined; They will be excluded from the accelerating up the economic ladder and taking part in the continuing technological revolution.

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308 Van Dijk, Jan AGM. "The evolution of the digital divide the digital divide turns to inequality of skills and usage." In *Digital enlightenment yearbook 2012*, pp. 57-75. IOS Press, 2012.

309 David, Bloom E. "Population 2020." *Finance & Development* 57, no. 001 (2020).

310 Kathryn, Zickuhr, and Aaron Smith. "Home broadband 2013." *Pew Research Center* (2013).

Within the next century, the world's population is expected to increase primarily in underdeveloped countries among the poor living in urban locations. This means that as the digital divide widens, its effects of segregation will become more catastrophic and affect more significant proportions of the world.<sup>311</sup>

However, there is a ray of hope at the end of the road. It is possible to bridge the divide and reduce the connectivity gap. Internet access and broadband speeds are indispensable assets. As Dickinson states, increased broadband also promotes vertical investment through: developing emerging industries (e.g., eBay), bringing existing businesses online (for instance, newspapers and e-books), enhancing an untapped technology (e.g., internet gaming), and merging current markets (e.g., smartphones combining social media, emails, information collection, and calls).<sup>312</sup> The influx of small businesses attempting to empower and encourage those on the losing side of the disparity illustrates an effective strategy. According to Dickinson, there is a pressing need to invest in technologies that can generate and distribute creative advancements throughout industries in the shortest amount of time.<sup>313</sup> Such innovations would be critical in the switch to a successfully booming economy in which growth is not related to increases in greenhouse gases.

Businesses such as Grameen Phone, as well as projects like Aleph Molinari's group computing hubs are putting phones and computers in the hands of those who cannot purchase

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311 Wolfgang, Lutz, and Samir KC. "Dimensions of global population projections: what do we know about future population trends and structures?." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 365, no. 1554 (2010): 2779-2791.

312 Dickinson, 200.

313 Janet, Dickinson, E., Julia F. Hibbert, and Viachaslau Filimonau. "Mobile technology and the tourist experience:(Dis) connection at the campsite." *Tourism management* 57 (2016): 193-201.

them for themselves. Grameen Phone demonstrates a way that private companies can cut costs and provide essential assistance to the poor that better their economic status, while simultaneously generating significantly more GNP than government support initiatives.<sup>314</sup> In fact, some Grameen Phones initiatives, such as group computing labs, have been so effective that they have increased India's gross national product by up to five percent.<sup>315</sup> Both of the previously mentioned initiatives also train individuals to use these devices to enhance their lives and their communities. Opportunities for the underprivileged to increase their digital awareness and skills encourage the development of a framework where their enterprises in society are more prosperous and efficient.

A collaboration between UC Berkeley and Aravind Eye Clinics in India is another demonstration of how creative applications of technology and technological infrastructure can assist impoverished people. New technologies have allowed the Aravind Eye Clinics to develop free Wi-Fi cellular connection and install digital cameras and teleconferencing "connection hubs," to serve thousands of the country's poorest households. These innovations have increased patient care of 1500 clients per month while providing low-cost surgical procedures (approximately \$10 USD per eye).<sup>316</sup>

Though this progress is encouraging, not every application is successful. Initiatives such as "One Laptop per Child" and financial assistance projects have been ineffective and even counter-productive. In the case of "One Laptop per Child," the program only addresses a small piece of

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314 Iqbal, Quadir, "How mobile phones can fight poverty," *TED. com*. [http://www.ted.com/talks/iqbal\\_quadir\\_says\\_mobiles\\_fight\\_poverty.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/iqbal_quadir_says_mobiles_fight_poverty.html), accessed September 18 (2005): 2013.

315 Quadir, 2013.

316 Greensfelder, L. "New wireless networking system brings eye care to thousands in India." *Retrieved February*

12 (2006): 2009.

the issue. While starting small is acceptable, the program fails because it passes on maintenance costs, fuel, and tuition to the needy who originally received the donation. Unfortunately, monetary assistance programs are largely unsuccessful because the bulk of donated funds go to people other than those intended to receive it. When examining monetary assistance programs historically, this trend is common:

Why did monetary assistance to Europe fail? Help gave authorities and oppressed people more influence - the wealthy amassed wealth for themselves. This occurs in any country where people are not motivated. People can pull themselves out of misery if they can collaborate and motivate themselves.<sup>317</sup>

To close the digital divide, we must develop new and creative responses to poverty's serious challenges. We must teach and motivate the impoverished and the needy. When we do this, our economies grow more robust, our progress accelerates, our hungry are fed, and our suffering people recover. Working together under a worldwide platform, we must address poor policy, build new favorable legislation, improve the use of existing technology, and develop new ones. Communication is essential: internet and broadband connectivity have given the world population a capability never seen before on the universe – global collaboration. Nobody knows when the following intellectual property clerk will invent a new relativity theory. Ingenuity and innovative thinking can occur anywhere, and it only makes perfect sense to enable all of humankind to realize its full potential.

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317 Quadir, 2013.

## Conclusion

The shift to the digital world presents one of the largest dilemmas the Christian community has been called to face in the recent past. The digital divide may be a new topic for Christians recognizing it now, but it has existed for a long time.<sup>318</sup> Christians, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been forced to shift into the digital space and adapt to new trends and concepts that the digital era requires. Many churches are weighing their options between hopping on the digital bandwagon or sticking with traditional methods of preaching the gospel. With the onset of the pandemic, churches were pressured to make the digital shift in order to reach their congregations.<sup>319</sup> This shift increased and revealed the digital divide that has been present and growing quietly over the last 20 years. The issue presents a new form of social inequality brought about by modern-day society's reliance on digital technology.

Christian teachings on equality are essential to outline the roles of Christians in closing the digital divide. Those with no access to technology are left behind and isolated from society.<sup>320</sup> The shift from most governments and other organizations to the digital space has also left them vulnerable in a society disconnected from essential services. Christians must speak

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318 Ellison, T. L., & Solomon, M. (2019). Counter-storytelling vs. deficit thinking around African American children and families, digital literacies, race, and the digital divide. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 53(3), 223-244.

319 Tsuria, R. (2020). Digital divide in light of religion, gender, and women's digital participation. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*.

320 Uppal, C. (2017). Digital Divide, Diasporic Identity, and a Spiritual Upgrade. *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media*, 129.

against this injustice that has divided people based upon their economic status.<sup>321</sup> The Bible describes the character of God as just and forgiving, which means that all Christians should emulate him and be just. Pursuing justice on earth is the representation of God which is our role on the earth.<sup>322</sup> The book of Genesis stresses that humankind is made in God's image and likeness, and a core principle of Christianity is that we are all equal in the eyes of God. Thus, God has set the standard for holiness and justness in the world, which we Christians must imitate in our society.

The Bible clarifies that every Christian's mandate is to champion equality and maintain justice no matter what level of society we find ourselves in. Concerning the digital divide, we should examine the issue of equality from a scriptural point of view and reevaluate the roles of the Christians in bridging the divide that inequality in our society has caused. The life of Christ is the example by which we should live in harmony with our neighbors. Christians should always seek to address the issues that affect society; the digital divide is a perfect example of issues that should be addressed in society by Christians.<sup>323</sup> Issues that deal with economic justice and equality are the things that Christians everywhere should address in society.<sup>324</sup>

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321 Hamilton, A. M. (2020). A genealogy of critical race and digital studies: Past, present, and future. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(3), 292-301.

322 Dilmaghani, M. (2018). Religiosity and the digital divide in Canada. *The Communication Review*, 21(3), 181-211.

323 Asiedu, S. T., & Boateng, R. (2019). Development of strategies and transformation paths for structured and targeted digital change: The case of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana trinity congregation. In *Digitalization Cases* (pp. 205-224). Springer, Cham.

324 Lyons, D. A. (2018). Narrowing the Digital Divide: A Better Broadband Universal Service Program. *UC Davis L. Rev.*, 52, 803.



As Christians examine the life of Jesus Christ, they are urged to take action, confront evil and care for the vulnerable in society, and make what is the wrong right. It starts with seeing Christians the way it has been described in the Bible – as equal and made in the image and likeness of God. Notable leaders such as Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. provided a roadmap for Christians when he fought for social justice, economic justice, and against systematic racism during the civil rights era. Beyond his calling as a minister, King saw to it himself to champion the rights of the weak and the minority in society.<sup>325</sup> Unequal economic opportunities, like those King fought against, remain relevant today and are a leading cause of the digital divide. In the lead-up to his poor people campaign, which advocated for equal economic rights for all Americans, King urged the minorities to get their check-in response to the ideology that hard work is rewarded with success.<sup>326</sup> The economic disparities in the United States worsened when the federal government provided land and subsidies to poor white people but ignored the black minority citizens.

Christians have a role to play in building an equal society that is not divided on the basis of socioeconomic differences. Christians are called to protect the vulnerable and restore their hope of a just and equal world. In the modern day and age, digital spaces are a large part of that world. Like the biblical examples of Jesus Christ, and modern-day examples of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, Christians should emulate their actions and stand against inequality.

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325 Dilmaghani, M. (2018). Religiosity and the digital divide in Canada. *The Communication Review*, 21(3), 181-211.

326 Wamuyu, P. K. (2017). Closing the digital divide in low-income urban communities: A domestication approach.

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