

Upper Class Thinking

Class Definitions

One does not classify a person, family, or society as upper, lower, or middle class using monetary standards; i.e., bank account balance, salary level, property owned, etc. Class distinctions are ultimately differentiated by a mind set; a way of thinking. Upper class people are mentally able to provide for a distant future in terms of themselves and their culture. Through discipline and hard work, they have developed the capability: (1) to think about the present in terms of the future and (2) to discipline themselves to sacrifice present needs and wants for the sake of future goals and plans. Middle class people limit their vision of the future to very personal factors, like a comfortable home, new car, care-free retirement, etc. Lower class people do not plan for the future - they have no future orientation. They are like the weather vane; they are driven by the winds of circumstance. Things (good and bad) happen to them; they do not make good things happen by careful planning and foresight.

These definitions reflect a universal maxim: You cannot classify a person or a society on the basis of outward appearance of affluence. A person with a lot of money may put on the appearance of being upper class, but he may be lower class in his thinking. In time, his affluence will evaporate (apply the same logic to society). And, the person with little money may be upper class in his thinking. In time, he will become financially affluent.

All three classes can encounter poverty. For upper and middle class, poverty comes as a result of external circumstances (death, illness, layoff, natural disaster, etc.). These people, because of their internal self-discipline, can rebound from such losses. For the lower class, poverty is caused by inward attitudes reflected by a ramshackle or debasing lifestyle.

Ideas have consequences

How does this class “way of thinking” bear fruit in life? In economics, upper class people are production oriented; they know how to consistently generate wealth. They know the importance of production and the law of supply and demand. Lower class people are consumption oriented; they dissipate whatever wealth comes their way. In agriculture, the difference between lower and upper class is that the former mines the soil and the latter develops it. In education, the lower class demand rights and privileges while the upper class cherish and develop habits of hard work (a.k.a. study - the ability to learn new ideas and skills on your own), thriftiness, and responsibility. They know the long term rewards generated by responsible and trustworthy behavior. Lower class politicians seek to “please the crowd.” True political leaders look beyond the banter of special interest groups and seek what is best for the nation, long-term. In religion, the lower class seek quick fixes for their problems and needs by searching for the warm, fuzzy feelings or a church that makes them “feel good” or “accepts them.” The upper class seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness by learning their faith and acting on it.

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A lower class society wants immediate gratification - its motto is to do whatever “turns you on.” It is entertainment and self-oriented. It is always seeking new ways to “get something for nothing” (this is why, in a lower class society, gambling flourishes - the gambling conglomerate prospers by preying on the lower class “get rich quick” mentality). Because of this, a lower class society guarantees continual unhappiness and frustration when its wants are not fulfilled (no one can have whatever he wants when he wants it with consistency). When conflicts come, and they most assuredly will, those of the lower class mindset will seek ways of escape. They will turn to some type of experience that gives them release from the pressures of the moment: alcohol, drugs, aberrant sexual behavior, mindless amusement (amuse means “no think”), divorce, suicide, or criminal activity. A permissive, lower class society lacks the capacity to meet and constructively overcome problems. As a person searches for new ways in which to gratify himself, he only intensifies his frustration level because, in his search for personal pleasure, he decreases his ability to overcome any type of constraint or trouble. Today people increasingly “fall apart” under less and less tension and trouble. It has been said that only two things are certain in life: death and taxes. May I add a third - problems. Those who run out on problems have abandoned life. As the Christian scholar Rousas J. Rushdoony has said, “To ask for a trouble-free, unfrustrated life is to finally ask for death, and, before death, a lower class, slave status.”¹

In contrast, those of the upper class mindset know how to discipline their appetites and wants. They know how to overcome obstacles and frustrations. They know the value of patience and hard work. An upper class society does not just happen. It is the product of many years (even generations) where individual members of that society learn to joyfully submit themselves to law and discipline. It is these habit patterns developed over time that produce a future oriented, upper-class society. An upper-class mindset will look beyond the short-term benefits and analyze the long-term ramifications of any proposed program or action. An upper class person faces life realistically; he knows that there will be frustrations to overcome and problems to embrace and solve. He knows that this will require hard work, both in thought and in deed. He also knows this is the way of life and true joy. He knows that happiness is fleeting and transient. It is a fluctuating emotion that comes with pleasant happenings and goes with unpleasant happenings. Joy is a deep, constant, and inner sense of accomplishment that comes from the knowledge that you have done your duty and done it well.

The roots of lower-class thinking

Relativistic humanism

Many have written about the benefits of embracing humanism and relativistic standards (in contrast to the absolutes of biblical Christianity). Because of its inherent faith commitment, humanism replaces faith in the biblical God with faith in autonomous man. The humanist lives in a world without ultimate meaning (other than what you determine to be meaningful to you), without absolute law and standards (beyond what you determine to be helpful to you and society), and without purpose and direction (beyond living what you determine to be the “good life”). To the humanist, the future offers no grand design unfolded by God. The humanist embraces relativistic ethics; i.e., every man is a “law unto

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himself.” If this be the case, then the only thing that really matters is the experience of the moment. To the humanist, existence is all that man has in a world without God. In this sphere of moral relativism, where absolute standards and law are denied, the humanist looks at the world and life with myopic vision. Relativism destroys the ability to see long-term. Why? Confident, long-term vision finds its bed rock in a belief system that relies upon absolute standards - what is true today will be true 200 years from now. Since relativism rejects absolute standards, it lays the ground work that generates a present oriented, lower-class mindset. A good example of this is the socialist economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946). He said, in response to a question about the long term effect of his inflationary monetary policies, “In the long run, we are all dead.”

Compromised Christianity

Many who embrace humanism are critical of Christianity or, as they term it, “main-line” religion. I do not fault these people for these criticisms. What has “main-line” religion offered to us, anyway? Jesus spoke of His disciples as the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” This means that disciples of Christ are to have a beneficial impact on society; they are to prevent corruption (the meaning of salt) and enlighten (give direction to) a world stumbling in the darkness. Are the Christian churches fulfilling this function? Or, are they impotent? Yes and no. Where the Christian faith is compromised, it has become powerless and irrelevant. This watered-down faith is easy pickings for a thinking humanist.

What makes a church irrelevant to society? Lower class thinking. An impotent church is a church that has become present oriented and experiential. A purely experiential faith will stress the emotional feelings of the moment and deride the important of time and history - it is not Christian faith; it is existential faith. Its answer to problems is not the application of God’s authoritative word to man and society, but instead a yearning for some new experience or “good feeling” or to “have my needs met.” It is just another form of lower class escapism.

The emphasis on experience instead of obedience to God’s objective word is antinomian (against God’s law) and anti-Christian. What people seek in experiences is their own self-fulfillment. What people seek in obedience to God’s word and personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is His kingdom and righteousness. Instead of being the guiding and future oriented leaders of society, many churches have become irrelevant. They are essentially a refuge of retreat and serve as a convenient mechanism of escape into a lower-class, present, and experience oriented ghetto.

A lower-class church can be spotted easily. It avoids hard, systematic study of Scripture and the application of this knowledge of Scripture to the problems of the times - economics, race, politics, family, welfare, education. Not study, not an understanding of the times in the light of Scripture, but an escapist, existential experience is held to be the answer.

A lower-class church may proclaim that “Jesus is the answer,” but silence reigns when it comes to answering the crucial questions of the times. It may preach a faith rapturously relevant for eternity, but irrelevant to the pressing needs of time and history. It may preach about heaven, but neglect bringing the rule of heaven to earth. It may try to clean up the fish (get people saved), but fail to clean up the fish bowl (“salt” the earth). By the way, a dirty fish bowl will eventually kill everything that is in put

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into it. It may proclaim that “Jesus is coming back soon,” but surrender this world and history to inescapable disaster rather than conquer it with the Gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, the second coming of Christ is incorrectly understood by some Christians as the ultimate “escape” from the problems of this world.

How shall we then live?

Only as future oriented men and women, who submit their entire lives to God as revealed by His authoritative word, begin each in their calling (whether it be plumber, student, teacher, housewife, CEO, entrepreneur, or pastor), to quietly rebuild all things in terms of their faith, can there be any hope of restoration or direction to our nation and history. We will never regain that direction if we wait for others to join us. We must take the lead for either we will be leaders or be led. If we decide to “go with the flow,” then we will become as the weather vane - incapable of doing anything but reacting to the winds of history. We shall be driven, instead of driving. Irrespective of our profession of faith, we will have joined the lower class. Unless we, as individuals and as a society, upgrade ourselves to upper class thinking, then God will flunk us out of history.

Endnotes:

¹Rousas J. Rusdoony, *Chalcedon Report*, No. 67, March 1, 1971. This essay is dedicated to Dr. Rushdoony, my mentor in Christian scholarship, who wrote a series of articles exploring these issues in the early 1970s. Refer also to Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1970).