

Greetings church,

We're on chapter 4, "Institutional Obligations; or, What Is Owed".

In this chapter Rabbi Ruttenberg critiques what has traditionally been in the United States institutions playbooks as far as responding to criticism. She quotes another woman who says "institutions often prefer proactive measures focused on moving forward . . . over the earlier stages of Maimonides' repentance work - public acknowledgment of harm and making apologies and amends . . ." ¹ There's a lot to examine in just these few words. The desperate push to only ever move forward is testimony to the capitalistic enterprise and the United State's worship of it. You cannot make more money if you're not constantly moving forward. In direct connection with this mindset and mentality is what has become the reality of the capitalistic enterprise; financial results are all that matter, regardless of the human cost. As a nation we have compromised our moral values in favor of monetary value. The call then would be to re-invert the paradigm and turn it back right-side up. We can demand of our leaders and institutions "that actually owning the harm caused can go a long, long way toward not only healing and repair, but also toward institutional responsibility and moral leadership" ² Our worship of the false god of mammon has deeply skewed our understanding of what makes right and therefore, how to make things right. "Making things better isn't (just) about financial compensation. It must be a holistic effort." ³ Dismantling the complex web of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and enduring racial tensions is NOT going to be done solely through reparations; throwing money at the problem and hoping it goes away. The harm is far more complex and nuanced and as such, so the repair must be complex and nuanced as well.

Ruttenberg also points out that we cannot solely focus on the harm of the institution but we must be about the individual obligations of those making the choices within the institution. That is to say that there is something to be said for a call to "institutional courage". One loud voice need not speak for the entire institution. There are many more voices within any given institution than just one. These other voices would then be called to practice institutional courage to tamp down the one voice, or small group of voices, that is doing the harm. Institutional courage is "an institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost. It is a pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution. It is a compass oriented to the common good of individuals, institutions, and the world. It is a force that transforms institutions into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone" ⁴ This is a radical idea! We're so used to seeing harm and damage caused down-played that we've lost sight of the selfishness of such behavior as it has become more and more normalized. The Bible calls for the good of *all* of God's good creation in an equitable manner, not just those parts of God's good creation that we most identify with. *This* was the moral compass, at one point, though the country's, and by extension all of its institutions, true north now points towards selfishness at the expense of others.

¹ Ruttenberg, Danya. On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World. Beacon Press, Boston, MA; 2022. p.101.

² Ibid, p. 101.

³ Ibid, p. 102.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 107-108.

That being said, Rabbi Ruttenberg concludes this chapter by pointing out the reality that the American Church, as an institution, must lead the way in owning the damage and harm that it has done so that we might be at the vanguard of repairing centuries of harm done. By not properly excising the more damaging components of false narratives and heretical doctrine in the interest of free speech, the American Church is complicit in the centuries of damage done to people of color and minorities in this nation. By refusing to walk the fine line of saying we're not infringing on your right to say what you want to say, we're saying that what you're saying is not Christian, the Church has tacitly endorsed racism, segregation, and a myriad of other societal ills. Reparation, restoration, starting with confession and repentance as an institution, is the actual and true way forward.

In Christ's Service,
Pastor Eddie