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OCCC ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL -21 APR 1991

TOPIC SEVEN: WHY SOCIAL CONCERN?

I) INTRODUCTION

1) What is social concern? Basically it is a kind of mentality & awareness: one that senses that no individual can be or should be isolated from the community & society. Hence one is sensitive to what is happening around him & he tries to understand more about the society. He also reacts according to the needs he perceives & the things he values.

For a Christian the typical actions can be:

- a) prophetic voice: criticisms & oppositions to immoralities & injustice.
- b) counterculture: attempts to spread the Christian values to the wider public, e.g. magazines, media, education, services
- c) charity: caring for & relieving the needs of the poor, the oppressed, the underprivileged, the old, etc.
- d) social action: attempts to influence the policies of the government from within (political groups or individual Christian politicians) or from without (pressure bodies).
- e) civil disobedience or revolution.

2) Why the Chinese churches are afraid of social concern?

- a) Chinese culture: political apathy; fear of change- acceptance of status quo unless really unbearable; inadequate development of social morality.
- b) Theological heritage: the controversy between the fundamentalists & the liberals; fear of the "social gospel"; => overreaction.

3) The problems:

- a) Dichotomy between the spiritual & the secular, the personal & the social => falling short of the full gospel => distorted Christian life
- b) The churches become dominated by the culture of the middle class. Gospel becomes unintelligible to the masses.

II) RECOVERING THE FULL GOSPEL FROM THE BIBLE

1) Doctrine of God:

- a) God is the God of nature as well as of religion. The dichotomy between the 'sacred' & the 'secular' is only reflecting a narrow understanding of God. The creation is good rather than inherently bad. Hence faith in God should affect every aspect of our life, personal or social. (Gen 1.31; 1 Tim 4.4)
- b) God is the God of history & all nations. His concern is not only confined to Israel. (Amos 9.7; Dan 4.32)
- c) God is the God of justice. He hates injustice & oppression everywhere. (Ps 146.7-9; Amos 1,2)

2) Doctrine of Man:

- a) Every human being, by virtue of the image of God, regardless of his faith, is worthy of respect & is God's object of concern. (Gen 9.6; Jam 3.9)
- b) Man is a unity of "body-soul-in-community": the parts are distinguishable but inseparable. Salvation is for the whole man as should be our concern. A pure salvation for the "soul" alone is not taught in the Bible.

3) Doctrine of Christ:

- a) Threefold ministry of Christ: preaching, teaching, healing. (Mt 4.23, 9.35; Lk 4.18-9)
- b) Universal lordship of Christ (Col 1.16-8)
- c) Christ's identification with the suffering people (Mt 25.40)
- d) Christ as Messiah (Is 9.2-7; Mt 12.18-20) *Lk 4:18-19; Mt 11:1-6*
Lord's Spirit upon me... Ans. to John the Baptist

4) Doctrine of Sin/ Salvation:

- a) Sin is more than the sum total of personal sins, & that the fall has distorted the whole structure of human society. Just consider the institutions of slavery, apartheid, etc.
- b) The OT law is more than private morality. (Lev 19.9-15)
- c) Hence salvation is nothing less than a "new world order". (Is 65.17-25)

5) Doctrine of Church:

- a) Church is not the Kingdom of God but she should be a community to manifest the Kingdom.
- b) Salt of the earth & light of the world!

6) True Spirituality:

- a) True knowledge of God is inseparable from social concern. (Jer 22.16; Is 58.3-9; Mic 6.8)
- b) Religious ceremonies divorced from social concern are condemned by God! (Amos 5.22-4; Is 1.12-17)

III) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EVANGELISM & SOCIAL CONCERN

- 1) Social concern as means, manifestation, or partner of evangelism?
- 2) Do we have one mission or two? The integral relationship between proclamation & social concern; a holistic gospel & a holistic mission. Radical discipleship.