

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 11 and POWER POINT 11:

THE SACRAMENTS: HOLY COMMUNION:

1. Christ is really present. Many people go searching, hoping to find and meet Jesus, but there He is in His body and blood. Some say they could believe if Jesus would only appear to them. And here He is! Christ is present at the altar, and He gives Himself to us! As we eat His bread, we receive in a personal way His body offered on the cross. We sip the wine and we receive His blood sealing the forgiveness of sins. In these are literally UNITED to Christ. The gap between us, Golgotha and eternity are bridged!
2. It has been said this unity with Christ is more intimate than what the very disciples had enjoyed face to face with Jesus. Christ comes to us, it's not what we do, but something Christ does, we only receive. HC is nothing more than G! The most significant words in HC are as Luther points out, "Given for you!" The one who receives the bread and wine, hears that Christ body and blood are offered, "FOR YOU!"
3. There is nothing vague here. We don't have to worry about our 'decision' for Jesus or if we have been elected or sinful or saved. In HC, Christ gives Himself to me! All of His promises are now tangible. In the HC, we touch the Risen Christ like His disciples. As God's Word rings in my ears, it tells me that His body and blood are for me! I'm forgiven assured of God's forgiveness.
4. When EV first went to a L Church, he was mesmerized by what the Pastor was saying to those at the Communion rail. We couldn't go until we have been thoroughly instructed. We needed to become an actual member of this community that is so intimate that fellowship is established by eating and drinking. So EV watched, he heard the word for the teenager, the mother of the baby and the lady in the wheel chair, "Given for you," and over and over again, "Given for you!"
5. It seems the shuffling of those attending communion go up and back from the rail may have been a routine. Other times EV saw the seraphic expression on their faces. God routinely feeds His people with Himself and it is His action even with our blindness and/or our dull insensibility does not take anything away from His gift.
6. At times EV takes the HC for granted, there are other times that he is overwhelmed by Christ's real presence. EV said his first communion was like his B. The wafer was light, but needed chewed, "This is the true body of the Lord," said the Pastor. The wine surprised him by its sharpness, the sour and sweet taste according to the words I was hearing, "This is the true blood of our Lord and Savior," was tangible.
7. Without food we starve, we must fuel our physical life, otherwise we go weak and fade away. The food for our body comes from the death of living things. Whether we fuel ourselves with a steak or ripped plants in a veggie casserole, the can be no physical life w/o the death of other life. What is true for the physical is true for the spiritual, we can only live if there is sacrifice, we can only live with nourishment.
8. The G converts us and nourishes us, we need to receive Christ over and over again. In LS, HC is a means of grace. They are tangible, material means used by God to convey the G, that converts, feeds us and is actually present in the Church!

The Theology of the Cross: THE HIDDENNESS OF GOD:

1. God speaking to us through a literal book of ink, paper and binding, and a Styrofoam like wafer of bread and a small sip of wine, or the pastor's sermon can create faith are strange. These are spectacular claims in an ordinary worship service, with weakly sung hymns, babies crying in the background and people fidgeting in their pews. It's hard to think a mundane and frequently dull setting could be the scene of high and holy spiritual presence.
2. Some can say the same about the central event in Christianity. God came from heaven to live as a Jewish carpenter and winds up being executed by torture. We would think as God to come as King, accepting the veneration of His people and conquering His enemies. That Christ would come in weakness, rejection, suffering and humiliation to say the least is unexpected.
3. Spiritual people today confess that Christ is far away. The ordinariness of life, the burdens we live through, the practical routines/preoccupations of daily life smother any sense of transcendence, then the fact of actual suffering. When we face failure, disease, loss of loved one, the lingering prospect of our own death, we raise the agonizing question, "Where is God?"
4. Isaiah, the prophet in the midst of national turmoil and political collapse with impending divine judgment says, "*Truly you are a God who hides Himself,*" (Is. 45:15). To say God is hidden doesn't mean absence. Hidden means present, but not seen. The hiding child in the room is there. God conceals Himself in places we don't expect; a crucified criminal, a book, water, bread and wine, a gouty pastor, trials and suffering and people raising families.
5. The hiddenness of God is one of the most profound themes in LS. It is termed 'the theology of the cross' (TOC) or 'the spirituality of the cross,' (SOC). It has to do with Christ's work, His presence and how we get close to Him. The theology of the C (TOC) deals with difficulties and hardships we live through in a realistic and honest way.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS (TOC) VS. THE THEOLOGY OF GLORY (TOG)

6. In the spirituality section of the book store will come shelves and shelves of books that offer an array of teachings and techniques that will bring us to the pinnacle of success. Meditation, Yoga, pop psychology, positive thinking promise empowerment. They will bring personal peace and happiness and can even improve one's health, from losing weight to beating cancer. Spiritual disciplines can bring career advancement from the point that business books seem indistinguishable from spiritual books. (Positive thinking mantras and fire walking imaging techniques help one score big!) Some can actualize themselves to even be called "God."
7. The self, you make your own reality can become God and you are the new Law Maker, you do what's right for you! Hence there is no need for a Redeemer. New Age affirms that each person is 'God' and we need to realize that we share the same divinity. In today's religiosity, spirituality is a means to an end to enhance and improve the self for power pleasure and self-deification.
8. New Age rack material can be found in Christian books stores. Their shelves are filled with WAYS to one's own health, happiness and prosperity. Christian diet books can be the "Management Techniques of Jesus," and analyze Christ as the master salesman, teacher and instructor. Other books carry more serious concerns about raising children and improving society. Their covers make vast and exciting claims, and if one follows their steps family problems will go away, our bodies will do what we want and our financial woe will evaporate and we will solve our nation's problems, grow the church and live happily ever after.

9. The Bible has much to say on how to live that can give wisdom, influence our family and culture in profound ways. EV's next chapter, "Vocation," will show that faith has wisdom for the secular work of managers, salesmen and even parents. The problem is that these books fail to do what they claim, the best Christian families have issues, problems and failures. The most devout Christian may go bankrupt or have a nervous breakdown or contract a disease w/o hope.
10. These books don't help, but accentuate our sense of failure. Even if their step by step principals are valid, our inability is to keep God's law perfectly and consistently. The ideal of "Victorious Christian life is impossible. We suppress our failures and in dishonesty present a phony front.
11. Luther called this kind of self-aggrandizing, success oriented, power spirituality the THEOLOGY OF GLORY, (TOG). Its attraction is understandable. We want success, victories and happiness, we are attracted to religions that promise that. We want complete and understandable answers. We want evidences of spiritual powers conveyed by impressive well run institutions, instead God gives us the Cross or the THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS, TOG.
12. EV had heard missionaries have a hard time explaining Jesus to Tribal faiths as "our God is a great warrior." Sometimes, they respond, "He would not allow himself to be killed like your Jesus." The TOG cuts against the grain of natural religion, and all of what we expect and want in a spiritual system. God manifests Himself not in abstract principals, but came down from heaven, not as sheer energy, but as a baby. He came in a scandalous way, of a poor virgin, not in a palace, but in a stable. The angels announced his birth, not to royalty, but to shepherds. Throughout His life the Son of God emptied Himself of Glory (Philippians 2:6-8).