

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 20 and POWER POINT 20:

1. Prayer brings faith into the vocation. The dependence realized in prayer is an example of faith. Without faith, vocations are mere employments, mere things to do, empty of God & empty of meaning, faith sees them as masks of God. W/o faith, suffering is empty and meaningless of life. With faith, suffering in vocation becomes a cross, comprehended in the saving cross of Christ. WIngren concludes; (See previous page)

LIVING IN TWO KINGDOMS: The Sacred and the Secular:

2. The doctrine of vocation gives spiritual significance to every day ordinary life. It sanctifies the secular realm of life in the world. Family, work and government and other activities in life emerge as the action of God in love and service. The doctrine of justification is otherworldly. It delivers sinful human beings snared in sin for eternal life for heaven. LS affirms both truths. As with other paradoxes-sin and grace, L and G, Christ, true man and true God, the Lord's Supper being body and blood and bread and wine, thus L insist that a Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms at once.
3. The notion that God can serve in both the spiritual and earthly rule even though differently and related ways frees Christians to be engaged in the secular realm, w/o being swept away by 'secularism.' The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, TK gives a blue print for Christian activism, while safeguarding against the illusions of political or theological utopianism. It transfigures the Christian's life in the world, while safeguarding against worldliness. At the same time, the Christian lives in the world through vocation and lives in heaven through faith.

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE:

4. How to live a spiritual life in the midst of an unspiritual world is one of the most vexing dilemmas of the Christian life. Should Christians go to the movies, watch TV, and indulge in worldly pleasures? How different should a Christian be from everyone else? Should Christians withdraw from society or try to reform it? In theology, issues about the proper relationship between faith and culture are dividing churches and confusing members. Should the church be involved in politics? Do Christians have the right to impose Biblical morality on non-Christians? Should the church change its beliefs and practices to accommodate cultural change? There are different ways to approach the perennial conflict between the church/state, the sacred/secular.
5. One way to solve that problem is to make religion and culture identical. Most of the world's religions are cultural. Their spiritual beliefs sanction social practices. In tribal religions, social customs are tied to their gods and explained and justified by mythological tales. In pagan faiths, the ruler is god or a descendent of god, and a seamless web is woven to unite nature and culture into a single whole. Hinduism with its caste and rituals is synonymous with their culture. To embrace Islam is to embrace a culture with dress, diet, law and the Arabic language. It is possible in Judaism to be an atheist & a Jew, for some their religion is part of their culture.

6. The sociological function of religion so powerful that Christianity can be reduced to a cultural religion. Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats may think religion is so important that they would kill for it, but EV was told very few go to church. Northern Ireland harbors atheist Protestants and atheist Catholics, some bent on blowing each other up. In less ways some versions of Christianity can be tied to ethnic identity. This is evident especially in America, where churches were founded by immigrants. We have Polish and Irish Catholics and German and Scandinavian Lutherans, all holding ethnic festivals in their church parking lots.
7. Be certain that Christianity can support and influence a particular culture and be part of God's earthly culture and the realm of vocation. Strictly speaking Christianity is supposed to be 'universal.' Jesus charged Christians "To make disciples of All Nations," Matthew 28:19. The redeemed of heaven include members "of every tribe and tongue and people and nation," Rev. 5:9-that is of every culture.
8. So if Christianity is not to be 'coterminous' of every culture, what is the relationship ought to be? In the classic book, "Christ and Culture," H. Richard Niebuhr shows that there are a limited number of possibilities, each has been adopted by Christian theologies. When someone sees a conflict between Christianity and culture their impulse is to change Christianity. For them, culture should rule the church. In a scientific age, the church needs to tone down its supernatural teaching. In the Romantic age, the church is to become emotional and subjective. If the dominant culture becomes tolerant of sexual immorality, so must the church. This is the response of "Liberal Theology," (LT) It has taken different forms dependent upon that particular time. The assumption is that the church needs to change to be culturally relevant.
9. In 'LT,' the secular swallows the sacred. Christianity is reduced to another cultural religion, and a rather poor and pointless one. (Example; The United Way). This brand of LT follows the secularist trendsetters. Ironically, though such a view drastically downgrades the supernatural status of the church, such views are the refuge of many pastors and clergy, who worry that their institution will lose members unless they "stay up to date." Laypeople tend to recognize that if the culture is supreme & the church is the same they might as well sleep in on Sunday.
10. Others act heroically, when faced with this conflict. They try to change the world. They plunge into social activism for social reform. Through legislation, political power and social engineering they believe that society can be reorganized to follow God's law. Such activism has a long and often distinguished history and has been practiced by partisans of both left and right wing political activism. When churches turn into political action committees, however the danger is that they lose their supernatural focus concentrating instead on earthly programs and becoming just another worldly institution.
11. If they are successful in making a perfect society, what would they have? Another divinized culture. Heaven built by human hands is not the same as eternal life, again, Christianity always has to be more than a cultural religion. Other Christians respond to faith and their culture by withdrawing from the sinful world. They separate themselves from secular amusements and institutions. Some take the ascetic route, they deny themselves the pleasure, social involvements and entertainment options enjoyed by their more secular members. Others allow entertainment as long as books, films and videos have explicit Christian doctrine. Those who separate themselves from the culture often attempt to set up their own communities along Christian principles. The classic example is the Amish, who go so far as to reject modern technology to keep their community pure. This can also be seen in Christian communes.