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Presentation:

A THEOLOGY OF EQUALITY

BY

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It is clear, even to the most casual observer, that the God we meet skipping across the pages of the Old Testament is a God who is opposed to injustice and inequality. One does not get very far in the reading of the First Testament without coming to the realization that this God takes political, social and economic injustice and inequality very seriously. This is a commonly accepted fact by many contemporary Western theologians, such as James H. Cone, Cain Hope Felder, Jurgen Moltmann and the late Keller Miller Smith, Sr.

To be sure, there are many references in the Old Testament to inequality as a social phenomenon. No other ancient literature contains such detailed descriptions, or is so considered to be a judgment. Injustice and inequality were obviously things that shocked thoughtful Israelites and the Old Testament is basically about the movement and activity of God in the lives of the Jewish people.

A careful examination of the Old Testament will reveal that the Jewish community considered poverty, injustice and inequality as scandalous conditions that never should have happened, either *to* or *in* Israel. The Exodus experience, which in the mind of the Jewish community is the absolute most celebrated of all of God's mighty acts and the bedrock foundation of Old Testament faith, was a deliberate act of God designed to prove God's personal interest, involvement and active participation in the eradication of political, social and economic injustice and inequality. Therefore, they made the Exodus experience central in their creeds and confessions of faith.

When Moses established the people in the deserts of Sinai and Kadesh, he gave them a common soul and a kind of collectivist sensibility that was facilitated by the semi-nomadic structure of their life. As a result of this quasi-organic solidarity, individuals lived and acted as a function of the whole; the individual was to the group what the member was to the living body.

Hopes, trials, possessions- everything was shared. The blessings foreseen and promised by Yahweh were to be enjoyed by every person in the community.

By the time we get to the early reign of David, we begin to see serious signs of social dislocation in various forms. Shortly thereafter, the prophets rose up as the conscience of the nation and they worked diligently to preserve the Mosaic heritage. We often refer to them as revolutionaries because of their verbal attacks on the established order in regards to the political, social and economic injustice and inequality evident in the community. The great prophets boldly championed the cause of the weak, under-privileged, disadvantaged, disenfranchised and those who lived in marginality of whatever kind.

Heir of the prophets and sages of the First Testament, Jesus never contradicted what Israel's spiritual guides (i.e. the prophets) had taught about poverty and the social, political and economic injustice and inequality that comes with it. Far from breaking with the tradition, Jesus gave new dimensions to their teachings when he so boldly exclaimed, "Do not think that I have come to abolish (destroy) the Law or the prophets; I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill (complete)."

If it is true that the Christian Church is a living extension of Jesus Christ in human society, then it must stand to reason that whatever Jesus perceived was his unique mission in society is precisely the mission of the contemporary church. Jesus very carefully stated his personal understanding of his life work and mission in Luke 4:18, when he stood in the synagogue and very publicly declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." This was his way of saying, "I have come to

address the political, social and economic disparities and inequalities that cause some to live longer and healthier, while others die younger and earlier. I have come to attack those political, social and economic structures that leave some with plenty and others with nothing. I have come to be the voice of the voiceless and to act on behalf of the powerless.”

To me, this is the faith and religion of the One who declares, “I have come that you may have life, and that more abundantly.” For me, this constitutes a valid reason for the church’s active involvement and participation in social issues that address disparities and inequalities of every nature. Failure to do so may, indeed, raise serious questions as to the church’s authenticity and its identification with Christ. That which is essential to the Redeemer must always be essential to the Redeemed!

This challenges the Church of Christ to reclaim its unique place as the contemporary “prophet” of God, or the 21st century mouth-piece of God, through which God boldly addresses and confronts contemporary injustices and inequities of all kinds. To rephrase the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Inequality anywhere is a threat to equality everywhere!

I Remain,
In His Service,
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