

Evangelicals and the Social Gospel

Is North America experiencing a revival? George Gallup reports a "groundswell interest in religion," cutting across age, income and denominational groups. This report is based on an eighteen month study, including a survey taken in April, 1977. *Time magazine* had a feature article "Back to that Old Time Religion. Gaudy and vital, U.S. Evangelicalism is booming." (Dec. 26, 1977) Donald Tinder wrote in *Christianity Today*: "Why the Evangelical Resurgence?" You even have A born Again club in Miami, Florida.

Clippings and newspaper articles sent to us report the ever growing popularity of evangelical programs on TV. The 700 Club, a program produced and hosted by Pat Robertson of the Virginia based Christian Broadcasting Network, is seen daily by millions. It is also broadcast in the Philippines. The 100 Huntly Street program started just before we left Canada. It is broadcast live over Global-TV every morning in the Toronto area. Viewers who "experience the warmth of God's love" or feel the need for spiritual, emotional or physical healing are encouraged by Rev. David Mainse, the program's host, to phone in for prayer requests or counseling.

Many evangelical agencies are expanding while mainline Protestant denominations are cutting their foreign missionary programs. In 1977, 2,200 college students sent cards to Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, pledging their lives to overseas work. In the Philippines, the evangelical mission forces are expanding as a result of this growing mission interest and fervor.

What impact is this new evangelical awakening making? On one hand, I am glad to see this renewed interest in evangelicalism. On the other hand, I have my questions. The evangelical TV programs seem to be watched mainly by fellow-evangelicals. And aren't many of the programs short on doctrinal content but long on experience? Hasn't TV become a substitute for communication between people? Through TV many have lack of contact with real people. The result can be utter loneliness. Through TV the Western world has lost something very precious. The Philippines may be a developing country, but we can learn from the Filipinos the highly developed art of interpersonal relationships.

What are the new converts taught? Are they passively accepting the evils of the outside world? Very few evangelicals in the Philippines are involved in the social aspect of the gospel. The emphasis is usually on personal salvation alone. Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners of Washington, D.C.*, a radical evangelical magazine, says, "The Evangelical movement is presented in terms of what Jesus can do for me. It calls many to believe in Jesus and few to obedience." Should Christians only dwell on the privileges of their salvation? Shouldn't they be aware that the only certainty of those privileges is the evidence of a life committed without reserve to obedient living? Isn't it true that when the grace of God reaches to sinners, the purpose of God's saving work is to make them like Jesus Christ?

Doesn't the Heidelberg Catechism, in line with Scripture, teach a full orb'd Christianity - sin, salvation, service? Doesn't the God of the whole Bible demand our total commitment to Himself, to His revealed will for our lives, to personal and social ethics?

Here in fertile, Negros Island, which is known as the "sugar bowl" of the Philippines, the poverty is harsh. Few protect the interests of the poor, whereas the rich have well organized and powerful organizations. The well manicured teenage daughters of the rich spend more on one society evening in the city than a poor teenage girl can earn in a whole year at the hacienda.

Medicines are always much more expensive for the poor because the poor have to buy them in small quantities. A serious illness of one member of the family can cripple them all financially for life. A hospital can refuse treatment if bills are not paid on time. One worker said: "We are squeezed dry like laundry." The inequalities of life are enormous; the gulf between the haves and the have nots too wide and deep to ignore.

I pray that evangelicals will start to realize more and more the social implications of the gospel. Thank God for personal salvation, peace of heart, knowing that your sins are washed away through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. But our whole life must stand under the power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ whose salvation is radical and total. Changed hearts ought to lead to changed minds and lives turned about and reformed.

Johan D. Tangelder
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