

Symposium on Mission and Social Action

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The Role of Social Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

UNEDITED TRANSCRIPT

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Plenary Session 6

Models of Responses to Social Needs

(Unidentified speaker)

[Tape starting]..... Yes, mission in anthropology and each of these he pointed out are the NK is really a kind of cultural schizophrenia, the Mennonite Brethren is a kind of a theological schizophrenia and the missionary in anthropology is a sort of a professional schizophrenia, so I want you to give him your undivided attention.

Paul G. Hiebert (Professor of Missions, Anthropology and South Asian Studies and Associate Dean of Academic Doctorates, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

If I speak out of two sides of my mouth you understand what the problem is. Let me say what a privilege it is to join with you in these sessions as an observer, a colleague, a friend and above all I want to express my deep appreciation for the Christian fellowship and love that you have shown as I have gathered. I have sensed that I am in the body of Christ and have worshipped this morning. Thank you. That was great. I also have a special word of appreciation, we were on our way to India as missionaries then our daughter, who as 18 months old got vacullary and ameba at the same time on first stomach on a little freight ship that was poking its way from Cairo to Pakistan, so for 3 days I sort of force fed here with saline and waters and so on to try to keep her alive. We got her to the hospital in Karachi and your Adventist hospital there pulled her out. So we give thanks for her. Also, my daughter is a graduate of Loma Linda and has been out as a missionary in El Salvador and continues to give tremendous response to what she has received there.

I have been asked to address the question, how as Mennonites have we struggled with this issue of doing whole ministry. I would like to address that and speak partly as a Mennonite, as an Anthropologist and as a missionary. I would love to speak to it a little bit more as an active practitioner. My heart is still field missions. I would have been a field missionary all my life. The Lord turned us around and we were 2 weeks from leaving back for another long term, in those days you went for 7 years nonstop and we were headed back and the Lord turned us around with health problems. My wife had, had stomach surgery in India and then had hemorrhaged seriously with some experimental and Mayo said you need to stay. So, my heart is still a practitioner but I've been thrown in the area of sort of outside rooter, cheerleader and reflector. So, that is my role today.

The comments I will make have 2 privileges. One, Ralph said I can say anything I want because I can leave and he will have to pick up the pieces. The second is the disclaimer that the Indian politician has in the Bombay Times some years ago, Lutchman's political cartoon and the politician is addressing a very big crowd and he says the subject on which I am about to address you is so controversial that I shall deny at the outset every remark I am about to make. So the question I am going to raise is how have we responded to the question of whole ministry? I need to go back behind that because there is a prior question. Why is this a problem with us at all?

If we look at Christ and Jonathan showed us yesterday there is no question that there is a holism there that does not seem to be natural to us. If we look at the middle ages the church, the monastery, the church was the center not only for worship but for agricultural development, seed development for hospitals and schools. It is only after about the 12th, 13th, 14th century that this has become a problem in the church. So I am going to try to ask why this arose as another problem and I want to use another word. Caleb used the word memes that comes out of psychology and helps us understand I think somewhat the same thing I am going to use with a more simple word, world view.

From our understanding of human society we see each other, we behave, this is on the surface obvious. We also begin to talk about the belief systems, the deep belief systems. Our theologies our sciences, Larry Laughton the philosopher of science talks about these as our research traditions and these are what we think about. But below those we are becoming increasingly aware there is another level and that is what we think with. It is the categories we use, the metaphors we take, the logic we use and there are many logics - modern algorithmic logic is one of only several logics, and it is the assumptions that we make. The best metaphor I can think of is that our world views are like are glasses, they totally shape what we see but we don't see them. Those of you who have glasses try to see the glass. You can't. You see with your glasses. It is not what you think about, it is what you think with. The other thing about world views is they are things that others often see better than we. So when you go to another culture you see it and they see ours. It is very hard for us to see our own.

I would like to argue that part of our problem is not a Biblical problem. It is a Western, modern world view problem and that this has been a problem we are going to struggle with because we live in a society with a modern world view and we have to in some sense challenge it. I am going to say that the solution is another Biblical world. It is theology but it is even deeper. It is at the very fundamental categories.

I would like to raise three areas that have shaped our world view in the last 5 or 6 centuries which I think give rise to the problem and then try to see how as Mennonites we have tried to respond to these 3. There are many others, but let me start first of all. The first is the split between supernatural and natural. This is a Greek division that was brought back to the universities in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries and if you start with this, and Thomas Aquiness was struggling with this, you have already a split between mind and body. You have split between spirit and matter. You have a split between religion and science. You have a split between faith and fact. Religion is faith and science is fact. Our young people are asked to choose which is it? Fact or faith and that is a false dichotomy.

Let me suggest that this split has taken over and has led us to a number of consequences which we see very widespread. First of all, the triumph of science as the dominate public domain of information. Science is public information. All of our schools teach science, no question. Religion is personal opinion. It can be taught in a Christian school but cannot be taught in secular schools. Do you see what I am saying? Science has become the dominate paradigm of knowledge that controls all of the United States and all of us in the West. We have no question we learn that. We add on religion and it has become secondary.

Second, this metaphor has led us to give priority to material needs and defining what are the worlds problems. If we hit it with Maslow you start with material and eventually hit the spiritual. I have a real problem with that because it really says your biggest problem is staying alive and then incidentally if you want you can become spiritual. I say that is upside down. So, we need to define or redefine what are the real needs we are trying to solve.

Third, it has led to a search for solutions in science and technology. Now I am not underestimating that, my background is physics and I love the hard sciences. But, I think if we look for solutions in science and technology we have gone down it the wrong end. In the church it has led us to the division between evangelism and social concern. This is material and body and that split is natural, supernatural. It has led to the privatization of our Christian faith and God becomes sort of private and marginal.

Now the second shift, and I will try to see how we look at these different ones, is traced by Peter Berger, Dichsterhaus in Holland, Maskel and if you like Jacques , moves the technological society. The shift from a world that was seen in terms of the organic root metaphor. The world is alive, everything is alive. Middle Ages life in interacting being was the basic metaphor. We have moved

together. The word miracle is again a hivoth of supernaturalism and it sort of says we only see God in that. No. We return to seek God at all levels. It brings evangelism and social concern together.

How does that play itself out? First I think we have to begin to work and we are struggling with how to minister to whole ministries. To body, to soul and to community at once. An example of this would be a couple of years ago some Doctors went out to East Africa on their own as a short-term ministry and the church organized their patients and they were able to see 400 patients within a very short time. They were so excited about it. The local church in East Africa did an assessment and they said, but we simply healed the bodies we didn't deal with the person or the whole. So, this last year the church decided, we will choose 200 patients and we will give you much more time so that each Doctor can spend as much time as possible to deal with physical, spiritual and all. The second thing is they broke their patients down into bodies of 20. Ten groups of 20 and they brought patients into the one Doctor and nurses and everybody in a camp and so there was an hour and a half that they all spent in a community dynamic. It took our American Doctors mind shifts to think that you do more for 200 than 400, but the feedback from the churches has been outstanding. People were ministered to not just healed. How do you bring this whole ministry back together?

A second element. I think that we are struggling with trying to see how the church and here I think we are following after the Adventists a lot, see the church not just as a worshipping community but as a healing community. Where can the church can be not only a place we gather to worship but also to care and heal in the whole sense. Hear one another's burdens, care for one another and the church should become that kind, not a club, not a crowd, not a corporation.

A third way that we have been trying to fill that out is to get back to a sensitivity that God is part of everyday life. He is right here with us now and that awareness of God in everything. We can integrate all the sciences, but if we leave God out we have simply failed. So bringing God back not in the miracle but in the sense of guidance and gifts and hear and now and prayer is more than just a perfunctory beginning. I heard through the theology here tremendous encouragement to hear you doing your theological reflections and I took a lot of notes on those, but also that needs to see the demonic in everyday life. We are dealing not only with God and the Holy Spirit, but we are dealing with the forces of evil and they are just as much a part. It is just not poverty there are other areas at work here.

Finally, in coming more of the social science approach we are increasing getting into what we call a systems of systems approach. A systems approach is to say no linear, this causes this and this causes that and so. It is to say there are many parts, things can start anywhere and ramify out so you don't always have linearity. Secondly, it is to say our human knowledge is limited. The body, the human is infinitely complex and we can't understand it. Our problem is not a problem of whole person. We are whole persons. Our problem is the way we look at people, our knowledge limits. God gave me a six kilobyte mind and we live in a 60 megabyte world. I am trying to see how to get it. So what we have it complimentary. We look at a person this way, we look at them this way and we look at them that way. So I can look at you as a biological creature and the documents of humans that bear all of these systems going on. A psychologist comes and says you are a psychological person and he can do a nice psychological work up. A sociologist comes and she say well you are a social being, look at that. I will look at you and say you are a cultural being bound in the West. The theologian will come say you are a spiritual person. The way to integrate these is either reductionism. We finally say everything is there but they all reduce to medicine. Take another drug and you will feel spiritually good. That is reductionism. Clifford Geards talks about the stratographic approach. We rank them all up like we do at the University, which is a multi-university, physicists do their thing, sociologists do their thing, and the two never meet. They are like stratas in rocks. A systems approach says these are our perceptions and they are all intertwined in a system made up of larger systems. In other words psychological problems carry

spiritual consequences and physical consequences. The symptoms may be here, the causes may be elsewhere, so it becomes integrated. You have to start thinking in that way.

Second, how do we deal with the growing mechanistic world view? I think there are small steps that we can get back to say, fundamental reality in scripture is beings not particles. The search for the smallest particles is what we call foundationalism. I was talking to my son who is in science and I used to think atoms were the smallest and then we had protons and neutrons and now it was quarks and he says now we have found smaller than quarks and Schilling says we have no reason to believe there is a smallest particle. That shakes a lot of us up because you think if you know the bottom you can build up. The Bible starts with beings not building up. It starts with God and then if we start with an organic world view then we have to keep priority in all of our ministries by focusing on people rather than tasks.

People are what we are about, not programs. Not x number of patients, not x number fed. We are dealing with the whole person and that must be seen. Theologically I think in part we were looking at foundations and one of the places I would root that for myself, is in the create commandment. Christ summarizes it, you are to love God and your neighbor. We can all understand God in Christ. Who is our neighbor has been our human dilemma. Generally we see our neighbor as our kind of people. Same class, same ethnicity. It is us and them. Now in the Good Samaritan Christ challenges that by saying that is not the other, your Samaritan is you. He is your neighbor, he is part of the neighborhood. So he breaks down that whole line of us and them. It is not us and them there is just us. Racially differences, class differences, we are us. Not us and them. But, what about the enemy and then Christ say, you love your enemy. With that in one sweep he reduces everybody to us. Do you understand what I mean? When we look at anybody it is not us and them. We are human. We are God's people. If we start with us and them we will never get us together except in casual integration. If we start with a common humanity then we can get together at that fallen level as God's people we get together as one body. So I have come to the conclusion theologically in Christ there is no other. There is only us. It is hard to learn to see that when you look at others. The otherness signs out so easily.

The second consequence of working toward organic is to focus on relationships and sending out our workers we usually do not give them assignment for a year or two. Our argument is build relationships, be there, find out what God is doing and see how you fit in to that task. It is not from day one you report this and this. Building in time, allowing relationships as a valid part of this whole matter of mission. Do we allow our workers enough time? Along side that is the incarnational approach. Living as closely to the people as we can with simple lifestyle. Now on short-term we can do this. Our short-term workers like our daughter, for four years they were getting room and board at the level of where the people were in El Salvador plus \$50 a month. That's all you get. Now you will never get retirement and get rich at that rate but that is not our point here. So there is a point for saying as much as is possible living a simple lifestyle.

The third consequence of focusing on organic is to work in partnership with the church. The church is us and we need to therefore decentralize and empower the different branches of the church. This leads us away from bureaucracy which is a model of organization based on mechanistic style of organization to organic ones. Where flexibility and decentralization and empowering are words that we would use regularly.

A final consequences of moving toward this kind of model of organic, is what increasingly has been known in development circles as participatory learning and action. You join with the non-Christian community to carry out all five major functions of any program. The first one is to define the problem together. Secondly, decide together what is the solution. Third, together provide all the resources. Fourth, do it together. And the hardest one, for we found in our areas is the last, to evaluate it together. We still want to keep the powerless and yeses failure or not. All

five steps, participatory from defining the need, deciding a solution, gathering the resources, do the job, and finally, evaluating the outcome.

My time is about up. Let me give out the third one. How can we return to a group oriented approach? Where it is team and group, rather than lone individuals in a bureaucratic ministry program. How can the church be the church in ministry to the world, not only in worship? Here I would say again we can not just take individuals and put them together and somehow bureaucratically organize them into a group. Groupness is organic. It is relational. It takes place. You cannot program it. Let me say theologically I think you are already far along on this and from my understanding of it, you stress the theology of the kingdom of God. If we start with the local Christian and build churches and then get to the kingdom it does not work. If we start with the kingdom, the King and the kingdom. I had written an article on the kingdom and then read Steven Neal's article which was a great critique. He said we tried that, start with the kingdom, but he says if you start with the kingdom you make it Marxist or capitalist or whatever you want. You have got to start with the King. You start with Christ as King and that kind of kingdom.

So I liked what I heard when I heard you talking about the kingdom. It challenges our individualism and it restores a sense that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. It is not the sum of individuals. God is at work and there is a much bigger history here of which we are a part. It helps me to think of that. It is interesting that when Christ came, he came to challenge the powers, the Herods that were there. He was put on the cross which was the kind of execution reserved for treasonous people. It was not for thieves and others, that was the form of treason. So it was a challenge. He preached the kingdom 102 times. His works were signs of the kingdom. Where ever He did a work it was not so much that He healed them. It was a sign this is the way the kingdom of God is like. These were signs pointing beyond themselves. I see God working in and outside of the church beyond us. When we come there He is already there. So working with a theology of kingdom, working within the kingdom of the theology of the church as the outpost of the kingdom of God. This is where God's kingdom already manifest. Not in full, the already not yet. The church is to be the sign of that kingdom so we are to be the communities of shalom. The communities of caring and healing for one another's activities.

Then of course we work with the believers. Now if the church is a counter cultural believer, and this may challenge some of you to think a little bit, but how do we relate to the structures of the world and the answer we have taken is we will come in. The church does not belong to America. It does not belong to India. It is not tied to any of these. We will go to an area if we can be at both sides of the conflict. When the bi-African war was there one side wanted us and we would say we will not come in unless both sides allow us in. So we were on both. We were on both sides of Vietnam during the whole Vietnam war we had half of our people in the North and half in the South. When the US was evacuated our missionaries could stay because they were known by the North and they stayed there for another 3 or 4 years. Very quietly, trying to not be identified with the political system but a counter cultural community. How do you do that with our strong emphasis on peace and pacifism? To say that we need to be a sign in the midst of conflict and resolution.

With that I would add very quickly here, that we started with relief with the MCC as a relief agency. We have moved gradually to the development stage where it grew from the individual towards meeting community needs. We are now at the third stage of transformation. We see all three as important. Relief, development and transformation. Transformation for me is conversion. The conversion of the individual is transformativ. The transformativeness of the church. It is not just a modified club. It is a new kind of being. I have a think fixation against clubs here it sounds like doesn't it.

Finally in conclusion, I think we all have to work within our bureaucracy towards a more organic style relationships. Modern management theory is moving away from bureaucracy and towards

flexible organization and a number. There are some good works out on this. In rather tongue and cheek I said we are not a bureaucracy, we are not an ad hococracy, we are to be a quoinoncracy. Whatever that is. A community that works as a body and not as a bureaucracy.

Now, what are my commendations out of this and anything I would say to you about what I heard going on here first. Let me say, celebrate. Before you look at the problems that you are facing, look at what God has already done. We have met you around the world and seen what God has already done. We sometimes get caught up with our eyes to the local and pick that big picture. God has been mightily at work in the Adventist Church and He has used them to be a great witness around the world. I would commend you on that. Never forget you have done far more than many churches who have had much more resources. I think you have done really an example in that and I commend you and I uphold you before God.

Secondly, keep your Biblical and historically foundations. I bring in social sciences but my fear is that the social sciences will become captive. That we soon will become a human engineering task. Mission is never engineering. It is God at work and you respond. I can use my anthropology but it has got to be under critique.

Third, work on examining the world view that you and I have. The modern world view that has so shaped us which we have bought into uncritically, but which is in some ways very, very harmful for the work of the kingdom of God. These were issues I tried to raise. There are others.

Fourth, evaluate your work not quantitatively but in terms of how is it as a sign of the kingdom. If it is church growth it is narrow. If it is conversions it is narrow, heal bodies. The measure we all have, are we the sign of the kingdom. We want people to come to Christ, absolutely. However, even when they don't have they seen Christ there and heard and seen the kingdom coming in. That makes it a much more holistic evaluation. You cannot have wholeness of ministry and specialized evaluations. They have got to be put together.

Fifth, move beyond relief and development to consider transformation. Because we do need to work at all levels. Relief when there is need, development when there is there, but moving on towards the transforming kingdom.

Finally, bring the church with you. I was listening this morning and it struck me again, in missions you are a two way missionary and as leaders you are a two way. You are one hand in the church and the other in the world. We call these in anthropology culture brokers. Culture brokers in a tough place. You are the money changer at the airport who takes Rupees and gives Dollars, do you know what I mean? Nobody trusts them, because you have half over here and half out there. The net result is that you are in a tough position, but bring your churches. Mission is two way. Even as your mission reaches out in concern to the poor and the needy and the lost around the world, you are also discipling and training your churches. A church without mission is soon a dead church. It is as essential to the home church to have mission as it is for the people in need. Thank you.

David Syme

Thank you Paul. I think that was a very inspiring presentation. Gerry Whitehouse is not only a personal friend but is a person who has a wide variety both of training and of experience at home and abroad. He has a passion in his life apart from his family and that will come through to you I am sure. He currently operates the Adventist Churches Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations. He is based in California and he is going to share with us some more thought provoking ideas I am sure.