

Uprising Notes from 6/30/02

Jim responded to three questions raised at the 6/21/02 session.

The Jubilee Platform

Today we can assume that the Christendom, which existed from 325 CE to 1914 CE, is dead. The ecclesiastical world has erased the historical Jesus from the modern church and from the minds of the people. This disappearance of the historical Jesus was accomplished through the church by: 1. ignoring the historical Jesus, 2. shifting attention to the Trinity, and 3. focusing on religious piety, e.g. liturgy, religious education, etc.

This process allowed the church to develop a religious orthodoxy that later could be used to ferret out and determine who was a heretic. This orthodoxy became approved and supported by the state first under Constantine.

During this period the following three traits of the left wing religious tradition were lost within Christendom. These included: 1. the gospel is social through and through, not religious, 2. denial of allegiance to all authorities secular or religious, and 3. scripture not as the divine word of god, but as a source of information about Jesus Christ which helped followers to understand the true person of Jesus, his social action, and the means to a life and death allegiance to his movement.

Resurrection

Before the crucifixion the Jubilee Platform grew in popularity and support without the doctrine of the resurrection. Jesus called the Disciples to preach the “Good News” – the Jubilee Platform. Followers of Jesus held a vision of a nonviolent sacred presence in their midst. The “Satan” of which Jesus spoke was the Roman Empire and he could foresee its collapse. The movement was held together by the charismatic leadership of Jesus and his followers anticipated some dramatic event. Surprising his followers, this event turned out to be the confrontation at the Temple and the consequent execution of Jesus, resulting in death and terror in his followers. Eventually the various “healing cells” pulled themselves together. They came to believe that Jesus was alive and well in their midst, but they just could not see him. The narrative for this understanding is described in the four gospels, circa 30-40 CE. The “Risen Lord of Jesus of Nazareth” is pre-Pauline.

The idea or concept of resurrection was not new during this time period. In 300 – 200 BC Jewish thought on resurrection was influenced by the Persians, as recorded in Macachees (180 BC) and Daniel (167 BC). Two sects of Jews existed during Jesus’s time, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the need for a resurrection, one only had to keep the law to achieve immortality. The Pharisees, on the other hand, did believe in the need for a resurrection because things were just so bad and evil there was no other way for humans to achieve immortality. As a result the resurrection and the apocalypse became linked in Jewish life in the first century. The world was so evil it could not be redeemed, God would destroy it and make a new creation – I Cor. Chapter 15. These two points of view were frequently debated and discussed.

The first generation of Jesus followers translated the Greek word “avaotuois” to mean upstanding, uprising, insurrection, and revolution. Today Christians have interpreted it to mean “resurrection”. Interesting to note that Mark only talks about an empty tomb, not a resurrection in his gospel.

Liberal theology involves two acts. The first is “engagement” where the experience or revelation occurs. The second is “figuring it out/defining the experience”.

Place of Women in the Early Church

The Jesus Movement (20-36 CE) was involved in a social struggle of Jewish people against the economic and political forces of the Roman Empire. A break in the patriarchal society occurred with the Jesus Movement. Several reasons account for this happening. One was that first century Roman law and order gave women the right to inherit the property of their husbands. During this time it was common for fathers to arrange the marriage of their teenage daughters to men who were much older. As a result husbands frequently died before their wives thus leaving them their inheritance hence independence and financial stability.

Women, however, were marginalized in society and the church. The Jews sought to maintain their authority, identity, and customs while under various foreign powers through the “Purity vs Pollution” practices and beliefs. Within this context, things that were polluted were sinful and needed cleansing. Women by nature were considered unclean. Others considered unclean included the sick, poor, lame, tax collectors, and Gentiles, and thus they all were socially alienated. Women were placed on the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder. The Jesus Movement was very attractive to these groups.

The Jesus Movement response to this situation was quite different. Jesus talked about “male and female becoming one” and “the first will be last and the last will be first”. As result these disenfranchised groups had nothing to loose by joining the Jesus Movement and many of them did. At this time the Movement did not require repentance of sins as defined by Jewish tradition, Luke 4 V 18 & 19. Many women were therefore active in the evangelical aspect of the Jesus Movement in the first century. Many of them even became martyrs, a consequence of being in Act I – engagement. Through baptism they publicly proclaimed to be ready for the struggle and to be willing to die for it.

By the second century the male had regained much of his original patriarchal influence in society and the church. The active role of women in the church diminished significantly.