

BOOK REVIEW: "SOCIAL ANALYSIS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"

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URBAN THEOLOGY – UR510 – NA/NOS – PROF. JOSE CARLOS MONTES

Completed By: Denese Joyner

Demonstrating a great desire and fulfilling a gaping need in our society, Maria Cimperman, provides a spiritually sound, practical, and communal guide for the universal, Catholic church to relevantly impact their respective communities and cultures. The Pastoral Spiral is presented throughout Maria Cimperman's book, "Social Analysis for the 21st Century", as a cyclical, four part process, toward ecclesial application. The four steps of the Pastoral Spiral: Experience, Social Analysis, Faith Reflection, and Action, can be applied on micro and macro societal levels. It is as broad or narrow in scope as needed to instill holistic reforms within a church, a community, a state, or even a nation. The effectiveness of this reading not only lies in its technique, but in its effort to promote the universality of faith in impacting all aspects of society; political, economic, sociological, environmental, cultural, and religious.

As Christians we innately have a deep and abiding hope that the world and various life challenges can improve. Cimperman explores the deep hope possessed by the Christian faith as a tension between the reign of God being here and not yet here, simultaneously. Biblical accounts are replete with examples of prophets and the Son of God, Jesus, proclaiming the reign of God among present-day humanity. In Jesus' teaching the people how to pray, He states in Matthew 6:10 NET, "may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". The clarion call of the Gospel message is for all Christians to respond to the needs of society, thereby manifesting the earthly reign of God on the earth. This incarnate representation of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through Christians expects to institute life and subsequent societal transformation. The lived reality of modern urban dwellers continue to face the despair and depravity of evil throughout society. The universal, Catholic, church has an opportunity to respond to both the

hope of transformation that lies within its members and the curative measures of societal transformation for the greater good. Cimperman provides the tools necessary to seize such opportunities.

Cimperman highlights historic incidences of the church implementing transformational action within a society. Drawing from Jesus' earthly experience, "the Gospels remind us that while the people at first welcomed this news, then came some doubts and challenges, even as Jesus was preaching, teaching and healing." (Cimperman, 15) The setting of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of Heaven in villages, and towns, allowed for its diverse inhabitants to hear and respond to its holistic message of life transformation both for the present and the future. In essence, life does not have to be filled with suffering, pain, heartache, and the disillusionments of evil as its guidepost. Cimperman points to recent history and the transformational impact the institution of the Catholic Church, under the leadership of its Pope, has made toward relief to the poor, environmental changes, family and community wellness, and a plethora of issues facing modern societies. "The Catholic social tradition calls us to make the reign of God present in all areas of the world, transforming oppressive or limiting systems into systems marked by justice and peace." (Cimperman, 43) Both the mission of God, as proclaimed by Christ Jesus, and the historical Catholic Church tradition, make an imperative for all Christians to utilize their gifts within faith tradition to bring forth societal healing and transformation. The absence of such action by the church, exacerbates the evil already present in our communities, cities, and world at large.

The need for social transformation is married to the proclamation of the Gospel. The good news is not only the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, but the hope and solutions His life and Spirit bring to a society. The agents used to

promote His Gospel, are those dwelling within the land, or purposefully living where God has sovereignly placed them to dwell. The transformation of lives by the Gospel is both internal and external. "There is no way to change a system if the persons involved are not also transformed. So it is important to state clearly that the pastoral spiral offers both tools for change and invites the transformation of each person involved." (Cimperman, 11) In Mark 6, Jesus fed thousands with limited resources. He not only solved a problem of hunger for individual lives but demonstrated the power of God to holistically meet the needs of many despite the limited resources at hand. Moreover, Jesus' work to feed thousands was done by His power, but carried out by His disciples. Jesus was not alone in doing His work. He empowered His disciples to do as He did. The Pastoral Spiral provides a sense of empowerment by inviting a team, a community of advocates, under God's leadership through a particular authority, and bound by the same experiences. Since the commonality shared by its participants, provokes urgency, social analysis of any issue affecting a community has the hope of being sufficiently addressed.

Members within a community must unite and take action if the problems facing society have any hope of being solved. Maria Cimperman has not only answered the call for action, but has developed a proven strategy to ensure success. This strategy can be implemented both locally and globally, lovingly and compassionately, inviting people to a relationship with Christ and to experience shalom in relationship with each other. It is not only dutiful for urbanites to analyze their experiences and the factors that shape them, but to engage in a time of faith reflection before seeking to act. Emphasis is placed on the application of the scriptures, faith traditions, and God's mission of wholeness and healing in a society in the 3rd phase of the Pastoral Spiral. This is so the action taken is Spirit

led, and filled with the power needed to make sustainable changes against the systems of oppression and injustice in society. Consider the theological reflections taken by abolitionists amidst chattel slavery. It required extreme courage, insight, flexibility, and leadership to realize change to a three hundred year old institution. It was the faith of leadership after experience and analysis of the effects of slavery that gave way to the actions taken by the various abolition movements around the world. Reformation of any kind is preceded by faith. God's mighty hand in direction and power has proven victorious, despite the challenges encountered along the way. "Social Analysis for the 21st Century" has provided the theological foundation necessary to become God's agent of healing in our communities via the Pastoral Spiral. One does not have to be a Pastor to engage the Pastoral Spiral. However, it is clear that any significant impact or transformation of any kind in a community, requires the practical steps of social analysis coupled with faith reflection. Cimperman has equipped all amidst the uneasiness of an unjust society, with the leadership tools to change it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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