

Chapter 11

Christian Response to Social Evils



History testifies great men and social reformers and great men fighting against the structures of repressions which caused people to suffer. There were situations which led people to sin and suffer. Those great men relentlessly fought against the rotten and evil structure prevalent in the society. They tried to uphold dignity and freedom of individuals. Their dedicated service helped to prevent much of the malpractices.

Moses was one of the prominent figures who brought back Israelites from the bondage of Pharaoh. He was an effective instrument in the hands of the Lord to save the people of God from the oppressors.

Like Moses, it is the duty of every Christian to fight against prejudices, exploitation and other evils and set the people free from the clutches of social evil and sins. The goodness and quality of individuals reflect the quality and goodness of the society. In the same way, evil deeds of individuals badly affect the society. So it is important to be well aware of the consequences of the social evils and their negative impact on individuals. The social teachings of the personal sins and social evils will guide us to know more about adverse and destructive influences and irreparable damage they inflict on the individuals and the society alike.

Social Evils

Any evil, such as over-indulgence, that affects society adversely in general is termed as social evil. A social evil is an action that if and when is allowed to run its course, results in the destruction or diminution of a society. It is normally the falling apart of moral values in the society. It is conceived from the sin of many and continues to exist influencing many to fall into sin. It is also called structural sin. Social evils are organized social structures that tempt one to injustice, exploitation, and lead him to indulge in illegal activities. Individuals may not be fully aware of its consequences but they become active agents and collaborators. Caste system was prevalent in our country. Under this evil of structural system, justice was denied to people, especially to so

called low castes. The social evils become powerful when and where moral values were ignored. It is our duty and responsibility to challenge these social systems. Our silence and indifference will only encourage to sustain them.

Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical letter, "On the Social Concerns of the Church" (1988), *sollicitudo rei socialis*, warns: "Sin originates in the human hearts; it tends to rotten the social systems, in the course of time badly affecting the entire social life itself. It also paves way to other related evils, negatively affecting behavior of individuals, their decisions and actions. Social systems should stand for the progress and welfare of human beings. Personal sins should not be allowed to come to play to destroy the well established social set up. But our society today is infested with the negative and harmful behavior and actions of individuals.

Caste system, dowry etc. are examples of the same social evils. Instances are many where the individuals respond to such evil systems. Knowingly or unknowingly they try to sustain these sins. These evils are serious sins which are sustained for the advantage of a minority of greedy people but it causes great sufferings and hardships for many. Such kinds of evil systems must be stopped for ever. A general understanding of evil systems existing in our society will be helpful to create awareness among the people. So it is imperative to learn on these social evils, so that individuals may respond, react and come forward to control and stop such evil systems and their compelling influences on individuals.

1. Injustice

It is the denial of what is due to each person. Injustice is an act against the love of God and love towards one's neighbour. Man's selfishness is the main reason of injustice. When selfishness is promoted out of proportion, others' needs and rights are ignored and violated. Wherever the human rights are denied, justice is denied. It is equal to the promotion of injustice. When justice is denied and injustice is promoted a situation arises where the rich becomes richer and the poor the poorer. As a result, suffering flourish in the society. The fast spreading injustice is largely seen due to the absence of responsible and worthy individuals holding public offices who must be persons of integrity and character. Corruption and nepotism are seen as flourishing as offshoots of injustice. It is the duty of every responsible person to raise his voice against such malpractices.

2. Violence

Violence has always been a part of the human condition. Of all the species in the nature, man alone can cold – bloodedly plan for violence. From the club of the cave man to the bomb of Hiroshima runs the same trail of blood. Diversification and spread of violence can be noted in the contemporary world. Violence after violence takes place in different parts of the world, in the name of religion caste or political reasons. In our country hartals, strike works, lockouts etc. usually turn out to be serious scenes of violence, resulting in the loss of lives and property. Lives and property of ordinary citizens are lost in violence, in the name of terrorism, politics, caste, under criminal and illegal activities. Terrorism is a phenomenon that recommends violence as a vehicle to achieve political or social goals. Violence in any form is an abortive attempt at destroying the

existing social fabric of unity. Every individual should rise up to oppose tendencies encouraging hatred and violence. Violence cannot be accepted as politically justified or morally legitimate. Violence begets violence only.

3. Discrimination

It is a partisan spirit practiced in the name of religion, race, sex, colour, wealth and political reasons. In any case, pre-possessed or biased attitude is a social evil prevalent in the world. Very often under such partisan mentality, people are denied their rights and those who reach in some alien countries, seeking job and higher studies are also become easy victims due to this evil of discrimination. The evil of untouchability still exists in certain areas of our country. Misunderstanding, ignorance and pre-possessed attitude towards other human beings, of their cultural differences, in food habits, clothing, talents, contributions etc. are the main reasons of discrimination. We should learn to develop respect and appreciation and celebrate differences of the rich cultures of other people and nations.

4. Violence against Women

Violence against women is on the rise. Human trafficking, crime or assault against women is getting more attention of the media. Violence against women is the reflection of cultural deterioration of the society. Now a day, women are not safe at work places, offices, public places, at travels and even at homes. Very often they are abused, both physically and mentally and they are ill-treated by the in-laws and even their own relatives. Women are assaulted at home for more dowries. They are being exhibited as commodity for sale, especially in films, advertisement industry etc. This has become a reason for further violence and advancement towards the women folk.

Usually violence against women may not be reported and it may not appear in the media. There are many cases of insulting and negligence from the part of spouse.

These social evil practices can be prevented only by mutual acceptance and respect for each one's integrity, individuality and uniqueness. More and more awareness and motivational classes on moral values will be helpful to prevent the evil of violence against women.

5. Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a great disaster weakening the very fabric of the society. It is one of the major killer agents, posing health problems, next to the deadly cancer. Alcoholism has created serious social and psychological problem besides being the cause of liver cirrhosis, sickness related to stomach and reach intestine (Colitis) and others. Family is greatly affected and the peaceful atmosphere of the family is lost due to alcoholism. The habit of drinking leads to serious problems of poverty in the families. The habit of heavy drinking affects the character and behavior of children whose parent is a drunkard. Their sense of dignity and future is also greatly affected. Normal social and dignified lives of the alcoholics are also lost.

It is not the taste of liquor that makes it popular but because it affects the user's mood. Intellectual functions of the brain are suppressed under the influence of alcohol. The dictates of conscience no longer controls the alcoholic.

Advertising has a great influence on alcoholism. Very often people are led astray by the hollow promises under such advertisements. They do not present a disheveled fellow leaning against a lamppost. Ignorance is another cause for alcoholism. Wrong information received from companions is taken to be the truth and by the time the victim realizes his mistake, he will already be in the clutches of the habit.

Alcoholism impairs the nervous system and causes slow responses, poor vision, blurred speech and loss of judgment. It causes abnormal behaviour such as crying, aggression, rowdiness and giggling. Alcoholism breeds crying. More than 50% of the murders are committed under the influence of alcohol.

One who drinks intoxicating things loses his control and soon becomes physically dependent on alcohol. Drunkenness also leads to fights and indecent behaviour, affecting his social life. It disrupts the lives of members of his family and has grave social consequences.

Alcoholism is both disease and a personality disorder. It is a complex illness involving physical, emotional, and spiritual factors.

Any habit can be broken if the required determination is present. Reliance upon divine providence through prayer has proved to be the most effective method of weaning alcoholics away from the habit. Personal attention and an element of friendship offered by understanding and caring individuals will also help in this case.

6. Use of Drugs

The increased use of drugs is a very grave social evil, badly affecting the younger generation. The drug peddlers are active near educational institutions to attract the youngsters. Once addicted to drugs, it is not easy to get rid of the same. Panmasala, tobacco etc. come under the label of drugs. Young men who are supposed to be the bread earner and saviour of the family become destroyers of the family if once gets addicted. Drug addiction is a social evil. It is taken for granted that a drug abuser becomes mentally sick and frustrated. It affects brain-cells leading to other diseases and loss of health, resulting in untimely death. Take care, lest any one would become easy victim to this social and dangerous evil.

Drugs are substances which by their chemical nature influence the functions and structure of living tissues. They are powerful agents and they have the potential of changing the body's functions. If they are used unguarded, they may cripple, kill or produce more debilitating physical and psychological dependence on the drugs. In fact, at no other time drugs have been such a great danger to physical and psychological health as in our times. Several people especially the young, coming to grips with this and unable to cope up to the social realities turn to more and more use of drugs to reduce tension, pain and to increase the joys of living.

Drugs should never be seen as a short-cut for any problems. The addiction becomes a debilitating habit at a time when more important developmental experiences are required in those young people who are under drug influence. It can become very non-productive, detractive and costly in terms of an individual's chances of becoming a fully participating adult.

7. Consumerism

This is a dangerous trend that is fixing its hold on human minds. It picks up its pace when people fail to distinguish the difference between wants and needs, luxuries and wasteful demands. Advertisements play a great role in this regard. Attractive and negative impact of advertisements has affected the choice of the customers. The customers are inclined to purchase unnecessary, attractive but wasteful things under the magic spell of offers attracted by advertisements. Under a strong feeling and a thirst for public show many customers have been active in purchasing with bank loans interest rates or from money lenders. This attitude of lavishly spending must be controlled by the practice of financial discipline. One must take care not to fall as an easy victim to the craze of consumerism by practicing prudence and frugality. Media plays a powerful role in shaping life-style and attitude of individuals and communities.

The main aims of the media are the following: communication of ideas, exchange of information and knowledge, entertaining the people etc. Basic means of communication are Newspapers, Magazines, Films, TV, Video- tape, Periodicals, Radio, Television, Mobile phones, Computer are the major agents of communication. Media are effective means for the cultural progress and collecting responses of a public on social problems. But at the same time these communicating systems are being misused for partisan interests. Many people have expressed deep concern about blatant misuse of print and electronics media.

8. Misuse of Mass Media

Media has a Miraculous Power, power of God (Gandhiji). It is a powerful way of literacy and communication. Media is a form and technology used to communicate, combined with sound, pictures, videos, etc. The revolution caused in human communication largely due to the various applications of electricity has been stupendous. Today armed with the radio, television, printing and recording techniques man can preserve his knowledge, and can inform, educate, persuade and entertain an audience of millions.

Ours is an age of media revolution. We, today undoubtedly live in the 'media age', in a world greatly controlled and influenced by the mass media. But this is unfortunate that this power is greatly misused. This constitutes a gross breach of trust with the reader or viewer who expects unbiased and fair new coverage and entertainment based on human and moral values. By misusing the media, certain set of wrong ideas, thoughts, attitudes and behavior patterns can be created in the minds of the public. The misuse of media affects the society very much and in particular the children and the youngsters. They are easily led to a life of moral deterioration, drug use, erosion of moral values etc. due to the misuse of Television channels, internet, mobile phone etc. So, it is absolutely necessary for healthy media, education and selective use of the same, in order to keep oneself away from the addictive influence of media. Mass media can be seen as one of the most decisive factors shaping the society. The belief rhythm and behavior patterns of the younger generation in many societies are strongly affected by the message they receive. It can shape the ways of people think, dress, buy and related to one another. Mass communication is the means by which members of the society store their experiences and knowledge. One should strive to choose programmes, news items etc. that have educative and informative values and not

merely entertainments. One should develop a critical mind. This will help to be active, mature and discriminating viewer. One should exercise the power of choice by making a decision to watch or not when it conflicts with other important duties. The mass media function as a watchdog of freedom, rights, dignity and morality of the people. It also acts as forum to express views on various topics, relevant and useful.

9. Child-Labour

Child-Labour is a social evil existing in many countries. Children under the age of 14 years are employed or made to work hard in factories, mines, and hotels etc are prohibited. It is not considered as child labour when they work to help their parents at home. Now, Child-Labour is punishable under the law of the land. Acute poverty is the major reason of child labour. The employees are interested to employ children as they are an unorganized group and they easily obey the order of their masters. Children are made to work hard at a tender age, their natural growth of body and mind will be affected. So it is very cruel social evil to employ them to work hard. It tells upon their general health, leading child mortality and moral degradation. Therefore, children should be given opportunity to proper education, health-care, leisure time and freedom for their graceful growth.

Our Responses against Social Evils

As true Christians, it is our duty to raise voice against the existing social evils in the society. It is not very easy to eradicate these evils which are deeply rooted in the society as a kind of organized system. As a first step towards the removal of the same, an attitudinal change must be created. One must try to cultivate courage, gain strength and uphold right attitude, without comprising with these evil practices. We must be well aware of the consequences of these social evils and take appropriate measures to conscientise people as an effective step towards preventing the same.

We can't eradicate all these evil practices completely with the enactment of laws on prohibition only but, of course strong legal actions are also necessary. It can be controlled by educating the public. Self discipline will be more effective than any other external forces.

Social evils can be brought under control mainly through change of attitudes, co-ordinate training and on-going programmes. These steps will yield the desired results, no doubt.

Action plan to control social evils: There are 3 ways proposed to curtail these social evils.

1). Ideological level 2) Organizational level and 3) Cultural level.

1. Ideological Level

We can control the existing evil practices with some systematically arranged programmes such as seminars, study – classes, discussions, use of mass media, art and literature etc to enlighten the public for a change of their mentalities and creating more and more awareness on the same.

2. Organizational level

It is not easy and effective to fight against social evils individually. An organized and well coordinated way is necessary towards the total control of these social evils. People sharing same ideals can come together willingly and work towards fighting against these social systems. This kind of organized effort to hit the target will be very forceful to catch the attention of the people for the desired change of their mind set.

3. Cultural Level

Social evils take birth and thrive in the society as part of our culture. In order to prevent or prohibit these dangerous social evils, we shall create an anti – cultural mood, as a part of our propaganda. This is the creative way to oppose these elements and to influence people for a change for the better. Different religious and cultural organizations can also come together playing creative role in this regard.

With our Christian commitment, we shall strive towards the reconstruction of the society, devoid of social evils. Our primary aim is to establish a society where good-will, freedom, equality and unity may prevail with the seal of divine will.

I. Let us Discuss

1. As devoted Christians it is not enough to avoid evil but we must do everything to fight against evil tendencies.
2. What all measures could be taken to eradicate social evils from our society?

II. Let us find out the Answers

1. What do you mean by 'social evil'?
2. Alcoholism is a force that destroys the very fabric of the society: Explain?
3. Why do you say that an addict of drug use will spoil the younger generation?
4. Misuse of drugs becomes a social evil. How?
5. What are the ways to prevent social evils? Classify your ideas.

III. Activity

Prepare an Action –Plan, Proposing measures to prevent social evils.

IV. Let us Read and Reflect

Romans 13:11-14.