

Christian Callings: Care & Redemption of Creation

Colleagues,

Here follows the text of a presentation I made this morning (March 11) to the Lutheran Professional Church Workers Conference of St. Louis. Not everyone of the 30-plus people attending was pleased. So proceed with a grain of salt.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Christian Calling: “The Care and Redemption of all that you [God] have made”

1. Near the end of Luther’s life (1543) someone asked him: “What Bible text was the trip wire to move you to become the Reformer that you are?” Here’s what he said:

“For a long time, as I was teaching the Bible at the seminary, I knew I had discovered something important, but I was never clear about just what it was. Then one day I was reading Romans 1:17 again: “Righteous people will live by faith.” [It can also be translated: “People who are righteous by faith will live” i.e., not die as sinners.”] That text helped me, for in the verse just before it were these words: “The Gospel is God’s own righteousness. It is revealed through faith.” So I connected the two: God’s own righteousness [= the righteousness in God himself] and righteous people who have faith. When I made that connection, I saw what the Gospel was. The Gospel is the story of God’s own

righteousness. And what is that? Answer: The righteousness of God is God working to make us righteous. He makes us righteous when he leads us to put our faith in Christ."Before that discovery I had never noticed any difference between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of the gospel. I always thought that Moses (the law) and Christ (the gospel) were basically the same thing. The only difference, I thought, was that Moses was farther back in history—and not God's full revelation, while Christ was closer to us in time—and God's 100% revelation. But I always thought that God's word from both of them was the same.

"But when I made this discovery that the righteousness of the law is one thing, and the righteousness of the gospel is something else, that was my breakthrough. [German: Da riss ich herdurch.]"

2. Luther's discovery of these 2 righteousnesses—call it "discovery of the Gospel"—opened his eyes to such two-ness of God's activity thorough the Bible and thus in our world. He eventually called it God's left-hand work and God's right-hand work. God's right-hand work always centers in Christ; the center for God's left-hand work is God's law.
3. With this "Aha!" ML eventually detected a whole raft of two-nesses about God in the Bible: God's 2-covenants, 2-creations, 2-grammars, 2-messages, even 2-wills. This "Aha! About The Two's" became the Lutheran hermeneutic. See Melancthon's Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Art.IV. In the opening paragraphs he gives a concise statement of "how we read the Bible and why we do it that way."
4. All human beings are called to be God's "deacons,

ministers " [=workers, agents, field representatives] in God's left-hand ministry to the world. Christians have a second assignment in addition: to be deacons, ministers, ad-ministrators, of God's "new" covenant-operation in the world [2. Cor. 3:4-6].

5. The second offertory prayer in the LUTHERAN BOOK OF WORSHIP is very Lutheran in this regard: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the CARE and REDEMPTION of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."
6. Care and Redemption are not synonyms. They are the two different tasks that God carries out in the world. The caring work God assigns to all humankind. The redeeming work is an additional assignment to Christians—and only to Christians. Why? Answer: If redemption hasn't happened to you, you won't even know what it is. So how can you be an agent for it happening to anybody else? If you don't know how to ride a bicycle, can you teach someone else?
7. By caring for the now fallen world, God keeps it from blowing completely apart. All people everywhere are called to this task of care and preservation, to be agents for the Creator's Critical Support Structures [C2S2]. Older Lutheran lingo called them the "orders of creation." Even then a better rendering of Luther's German would have been the "Creator's Ordainings." The label "C2S2" signals the import of each of the 4 terms. First "C": They are the CREATOR'S handiwork. Second "C": They are CRITICAL; we get evaluated in these contexts. First "S": They SUPPORT us and all the endangered creation. Second "S": They are STRUCTURES, patterned networks that hold people and things together. It is people everywhere, not just Christ-

connected ones, throughout the world who carry out this ministry, who do execute justice, love, nurture so that the life of our world is preserved, so that fairness and equity happen in human interaction.

8. Caring for creation, as good and necessary as it is, does not yet redeem creation. The word "redemption" comes from the language of ownership. Remember the warning "caveat emptor?" Emptor is the buyer, the owner. "Re-d-emption" is the action that brings something back from alien ownership, back into its original & rightful ownership. Christ's work of redemption brings sinners back under God's ownership and management, specifically God's "mercy-management," which the Gospels call "the Kingdom of God." Perhaps the most vivid episodes in these Gospels are Jesus' exorcisms, wherein he breaks people loose from "demonic possession" and transfers them into the Kingdom of God, God's mercy-ownership taking place in Jesus.
9. For Christians their dedication to the task of "...redemption of all that you have made" comes on assignment, a second assignment after the "care" assignment. This one comes directly from Jesus: "As the Father sent me [on this redemption assignment] so send I you."
10. Thus the location of all Christians' 2-fold ministry is primarily in the world, not in the church. For it is the world that constantly needs God's caring, the C2S2 work. It is also that not-yet-redeemed world that needs the redeeming. Christ-connected people, a.k.a. church, are that segment of the "old" creation now made "new," already enjoying God's re-ownership, God's mercy-management.
11. In today's parlance the term "laity" designates Christians whose calling from God leads them explicitly into "world-work" and not into "church-work." Thus the ministry of the laity in the world is not first of all a ministry of

proclamation or of public leadership within the church. Such "world-work," however, is not at all un-godly. On the contrary, it is godly work when it carries out God's own "care and redemption of all that you, God, have made."

12. Christians out in the world are themselves "already-redeemed creation." Yet at first they look hardly any different from anybody else. Their way of living ("care-giving") is where their "difference" most regularly surfaces—if and when it does surface. E.g., the freedom that accompaniaies their care-giving may be one such element. In the way they do their care-giving they can signal who their Lord is, a Lord (=owner) committed "not to be served, but to serve and give his life to ransom many."
13. The secular world, at its best, operates on God's law for caring (equity, fairness, care for others), not at all on God's Gospel of redemption. Seldom, of course, is the secular world ever "at its best" so that God's ministry of "care" goes very smoothly. But non-Christians can and do do it, even though they may not do it well & not all the time. You don't have to know Christ to be a care-taker, a care-giver.
14. But not all Christians do this well or all the time either. Yet they acknowledge that this is their first godly assignment. And on Sundays when the second offertory prayer is used, they publicly dedicate themselves to it. The "Good News" they speak in, with, and under their care-giving is linked to their second "dedication," the ministry of redemption.
15. Laity are sent as God's exiles "full-time" into that Old Age, God's creation still longing for total care and finally for real redemption. They are the shock-troops, the guerillas on the front line, of the Old Creation, and also of the New Creation.

16. They need a talent not so much for preaching as for how to listen to and hear preaching, and then to re-WORD it for themselves.
17. They have to brave the loneliness of the weekday dispersion into a world that is ominous. They face their own kind of temptations. Here are some:
 - a. Faith seems "impractical" out there.
 - b. The Sunday church seems "unreal," even irrelevant to that world.
 - c. The secular sector seems not at all to be "the Lord's," even for God's care-giving.
 - d. The world "out there" cannot be "crossed" with the Word of God.
 - e. If Christianity is to be relevant to that world it must be legalistic, moralistic.
 - f. Sunday Christianity, in order to be a relief from that world, must therefore be "soft" on God's Law.
 - g. Lay people are most Christian when they are amateur preachers, when they try to do out in the world what the pastor does in church.
18. In the gathered church, they not only need theological help in "crossing" their secular worlds with the Word of God, but they need that help from one another, as an explicitly mutual theological community.
19. The arena of their theological calling is not the church as such, but the Kingdom (God's Mercy-Management Takeover in Christ), to which the church itself, of course, is in service.
20. This "left-hand / right-hand" picture of God's two-fold work in this one world is what Lutheran theology proposes when we "dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you, God, have made."