Models for Ministry in a Secular Age

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Presentation #1: A Proposed Lutheran Model (My Own) Arising from the Lutheran Confessional Tradition

Introductory Reflections: Systematic theology probes for the "sufficient grounds" supporting any doctrine. The sufficient grounds of the confessional doctrine about the church. Article 7 & 8 of the Augsburg Confession say: Church is people who have been on the receiving end of gospel proclamation and sacramental action. That is what makes anybody "the church."

I. The two-storey model of reality implicit in the general discussion of secularization as a historical process, and of the current age as being secular. The realm of the transcendent, super-nature, the world above appears to be squeezed smaller and smaller by the rising competency of the lower storey, the immanent natural this-worldly realm where man lives and works.

II. Some responses to this (Peter Berger, Langdon Gilkey) have sought to demonstrate that there are still many evidences of the transcendent breaking through in the daily lived experience of secular man.

III. The Biblical root which the Reformation tapped. The two-storey picture does not fit to serve as model for most of what the scriptures predicate to God. God is creator, yet his realm of operation is not above creation, but in, with, and under it.

IV. Luther's explication of this in the Heidelberg Theses of 1518. *Theologia gloriae* slips back into the two-storey view for talking about God and thereby by-passes most (if not all) of what the Bible says with its God-talk. God, as a theologian of glory encounters him, is finally the hidden god who judges and condemns.

What Luther calls *theologia crucis* locates God's work not transcendent to our world, but immanent to it. By focusing that work of God here "down on the ground," the issue is changed from what it is in theology of glory. No longer does one ask for evidence of God coming down from the upper storey, but one asks "How is God acting upon us in the immanent world?" This refocuses the "God-talk" on the issue of the contradictory actions of God's condemning and restoring sinners (law/gospel). Is God for us or against us? The Gospel is the evidence of God-for-us, evidence that was so immanent that it (He) walked on our ground, died our kind of death, appeared to people like us as resurrected Lord.

V. This perspective then suggests that the problem for secular man is still the credibility of that immanent gospel. In ministering this gospel to our age the church will have to expose the clay-feet of the false gods which secular man trusts (even while he denies the existence of any transcendent "gods"), help him see first the grubby data of God's being against him in the normal shape of his daily life (exposing where God-with-his-law-as- hidden-God is tracking man down), and then portraying the work of Christ as God's immanent action to "trump" these particular law-encounters with His particular gospel. The

church’s witness is not focused on God’s existence but on His Gospel.

The man who does not trust the Gospel, has not yet been removed from the deadly relationship with God called wrath, law, sin, and death in New Testament language. Only faith in Christ does this, makes man a new creature. There are no New Testament theological grounds for saying; If any man looks like the new creation (however I define that), I can conclude that he is “in Christ” (even if he says I know not the man). The Pauline affirmation is cardinal: If any man is in Christ, then he is a member of the new creation. Church’s ministry is to make this new creation happen via the only ways that the church’s Lord authorized, viz., *Kerygma* and sacraments.

Presentation #2: The Model Suggested by Harvey Cox’s Secular City

I. What does the Secular Age Really look like? Religious institutions lose their social impact. Parallels the social evolution from tribe, to town, to technopolis. Bible itself is the source of secularization (not secularism, which is a surrogate faith) by taking the divinity component out of nature, politics, and values. Creation account of scriptures disenchants nature; exodus desacralizes politics} Sinai deconsecrates values.

II. What is the church? Church a responding community, a people whose task it is to discern the action of God in the world and to join in His work. The Kingdom of God is happening—at least since Easter—in many places in the world. That is the action of God which the churchly community is empowered to discern, and called to join in.

III. What Gets Done in the Church's Ministry? Church participates in God's actions in the world, via?., the liberation of man to freedom and responsibility. It does this via the following four functions; A) kerygmatic function (broadcasting that God has come into the world and has seized power, i.e., the kingdom of God); B) diakonic function (Healing the urban fractures); C) koinoniac function (Making visible the city of man, i.e.. the creative free fellowship of love and forgiveness); D) cultural exorcist function (breaking the strangle-hold that the modern secular demons inflict on secular man).

IV. What is the Christological quotient for church and ministry in this model? The role which Jesus plays in this model is that he is the representative, the embodiment, and the central sign of the kingdom. Just how Jesus empowers the church for ministry is not clarified. The predominant image is that he is model, fore-runner, calling the churchly community to imitate him. "He is always ahead of the church, beckoning it to get up to date."

V. Some prospects for LC-MS parish life if structured according to Cox's model. Social ministry at all levels. Missionaries to segments of society to find out what God is doing there, so that the Church could join in that work. Congregations planted where the *kerygmatic, diakonic, koinoniac* and exorcist function need to be done. No concern for statistics. Ministry focused on the four functions rather than on the traditional means of grace.

Presentation #3: The Model suggested by Edward Schillebeeckx

Introduction: The centrality of the ancient formula *Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit* in the Christian secularity of Roman theology following Vatican II.

I. The shape of the Current Age. The ecclesial tendency in mankind. The natural thrust toward unity and community as vocation and destiny of the human race. The renewed consciousness of this in the current age. Because creation was "in view of Christ," since creation all mankind carries within itself and anonymously this orientation toward Christ, an early rough-draft of the church that is to come.

II. What is the church? Church is that conscious community of people among whom the "nature" specified in the previous paragraph is perfected. Grace perfects the nature of man toward redemptive and supportive community. In his dying and "going away" Jesus creates church, a special ecclesiastico-social structure that does not coincide with the social structure of secular society. Yet the boundaries between church as such and mankind as a whole are fluid.

III. Church's ministry to the world. It dialogues with the world of mankind not contradictorily, but complimentarily. The world's God-related life remains anonymous and implicit until the church's dialogue with the world makes it "named" and explicit. The sacraments and worship of the church aim at this one goal. In this sense one can say: outside of the church there is no salvation.

IV. The Christological Quotient of the Model. Seen in the notion of Sacrament that is central to Schillebeeckx's theology. Jesus is the primordial sacrament. Sacrament is "Every supernatural saving reality which presents itself in our lives historically." Encountering Jesus is "sacramental encounter with God," "the encounter of man with the invisible God through the medium of the visible embodiment of the love of that same God in a man." The church could not be church (itself a sacrament) except for this primordial sacrament. Thus "the sacramental church is the earthly, visible instrument of salvation employed by the living,

[but now] invisible *kyrios*."

V. Pastoral Ministry and Pariah Life when Structured on this Model. Use of Sunday worship to outfit worshippers for ordinary everyday callings, especially the calling to be on the lookout for the anonymous and implicit church in the secular world. Parish program designed for establishing contact with this anonymous church, i.e., people and movements working along the lines of the parable of Mt. 25. Expectations of "grace" (even where the means of grace are not present) everywhere in the world. Optimistic view of the world to which the sacramental church is sent.

Presentation #4: The Model Suggested by Carl Braaten in his book The Future of God

Introduction: Braaten's point of departure in the Theology of hope, theology of futurity developed by Moltmann and Pannenberg

I. The shape of the current Age. Braaten critical of the secular theologians who say that secular man has no feel for religion. If the term religion specifies what a man hopes in (as Luther said a man's God was what he "hung his heart on"), then the secular age is full of religion. Men are full of hopes for the future, even though much of their hope(s) may rest on shallow foundations.

II. What is the church? The church is the prolepsis of the new world God has in score for the whole creation. The eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God, central to the message and ministry of Jesus is what is already concretized in the church, although it constitutes the future God has for the whole human race. The church's sacraments, preaching, prayer and

worship must center on this eschatological future which is already present or else the church itself is not participating in the Kingdom of God which came into the present in Christ. This makes the church's structures relative and puts a particular universal and social stamp on the church's mission.

III. What ministry does church render to the World? The church promotes a radical "social" ministry since the kingdom of God is God's future for the whole world, the world as it exists right now. Nevertheless, even in a society that reaches the highest social and political expectations, the church has the indispensible task of witnessing to the ultimate goal and meaning of life, thus bestowing on individuals a sense of personal worth that can never be exhausted by the individual's social. economic, or political functions. Braaten calls for a theology of revolution, the politics of eschatological hope in society. Here the function of the church is to release into the political realm new impulses which might raise the level of expectations, to inject hope into society, giving birth to vision and courage to transform existing institutions.

IV. The Christological quotient in This Model. God himself is the "power of the future." In Jesus we have "The presence of the future" in our present world. Jesus is both God' representative and ours. As the former he represents the depths of God's love to us in that the crucified Jesus is the presence of the future of God under the conditions of alienated existence. As the latter he is our representative because in his resurrection God accredited him as the One who has what we lack, and who lacks what we have. The Jesus of the synoptic gospels and the Jesus of Paul's theology are unified under the theological terms "kingdom of God and his righteousness." In all of this the resurrection of Jesus is the touchstone. If life does not conquer death, then there is no hope for man as he moves toward God and God's future.

V. Pastoral Ministry and Parish Life when structured according to this Model. Once more decisively active politically and socially. Alert to the surrogate religions (hopes) which secular man pursues full throttle even while denying the existence of god(s). Especially open for dialogue with neo-marxists and other humanists of hope in man's future. Conscious of the dynamic character of God's kingdom and thus of the relativity of the church's own structures and traditional ministries. Parishioners tutored to "hang loose" about church practices. Focus on the future and the **new** that may come at any moment encourages the Christians to take the Lord's admonition seriously about travelling "light, very light" for their journey into God's future within human society.

(Notes on Schillebeeckx)

Since Vatican II it has become common within RC circles to talk about Christian secularity. One Roman author (T.E. Clarke, S.J.) ventures the guess that in future years that term will be the short-hand term for Vat. II (Just as Vat. I was "papal authority"; Trent "justification", Nicaea "homooousios"). Even tho past modern-era popes were often the last hold-outs in criticizing the god-less character of modernism, pushing God out of the normal daily affairs of life in society, the ease with which Christian secularity has become "OK" is still surprising. Illustrate with Clarke's anecdote p. 7 first full paragraph).

I have a theory why it is easy for RC theology to move so fast and so painlessly to open-armed acceptance of the secular age. Although I have not yet seen anyone in or out of the Roman communion work it out this way. And that is the ancient formula in Roman theology about GRATIA NON TOLLIT NATURAM, SED PERFICIT. As we move into Schillebeeckx's thought in a minute "we will see that formula operating implicitly although he does not quote it explicitly.

The simple principle of the formula is that anything created by god is not antithetical to his grace. I£ any reality is living and acting according to its nature, it is OK insofar as it does what it is its nature to do (hence Clarke's "secular" opinion about banks). When grace enters the picture, it does not supplant the created *natura*, or transplant it to some other-worldly plateau or give it some supernatural goal. No *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*. Grace perfects nature by letting nature come all the way to the fulfillment of its own built-in goal and purpose. By itself the world, and men and their institutions in the world will not come to perfection; Grace is needed to bring it to perfection. Schillebeeckx's definition of Grace is THE ABSOLUTE AND GRATUITOUS PRESENCE OF GOD explicit there in Christ and the church's sacramental ministry. But whatever *natura* does on its own, without the additional resources of Grace, is already a move in this direction, when human nature(s) do(es) something to make human life more human apart from any connection with Christ and the means of grace, this is already God's work in *natura* pointing toward its own completion and perfection—for which the explicit Grace is eventually necessary. But the relation between nature (the secular world that lives and works without god-talk, church-connection, or Jesus-perception) and grace is that of something good, but incomplete to something good and complete, i.e., perfectly good.

Another impetus toward RC Christian secularity arises from the character of the current age. To let nature be nature, esp. human nature without external interference is part of the current Zeitgeist according to Clarke. "One of the most deeply rooted attitudes of modern man is his refusal to see his cherished human values captured or manipulated by forces and institutions he considers extraneous, whether it be by party-line communism or party-line Christianity." (7) In response to

this Clarke deciphers two movements within Roman theology of Christian secularity. On one hand there is the movement toward immanence (toward seeing the unity of nature and supernature) the immanence of the Christian in the human rather than its transcendence of the human. Seeing the "openness of nature to grace". The second movement is that which values worldly things for their own worldly goods. Both of these directions in Roman thought may be contrary to some of the medieval heritage, but they are not contradictory to the Gratia naturam formula—at least the way that formula is now understood. This leads to a no spoken to instrumentalization—using things temporal for spiritual goals; and a no to consecration of the temporal order—which you do not change into something *sacra* by the addition of grace, but which you bring to its secular (worldly—earthly and earthy) fulfillment through grace.

For this kind of Roman theology, the Incarnation of Christ is obviously central to all the lofty things which are said of the world. Because of that historical event of unifying nature and supernature, all nature is seen as already in some contact with grace, even if it has not had explicit contact with the gospel strictly speaking.. Read marked sections p. 11.

With this we have a good stepping-stone to Schillebeeckx. Edward Schillebeeckx is a Dominican, currently at the univ. of Nijmegen, Holland, the center of considerable hub-bub in the Hutch RC church. My data is drawn mainly from an article he wrote in the first C0NCILIUM volume entitled THE CHURCH AND MANKIND.

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