

MA Theological understanding of Contemporary Society

Sociology of Religion Lectures

LECTURE 1

Churches are institutions and institutions must respond to what reaches them as predicaments, and for the Churches the main one is that very few people regard them as of sufficient interest to be bothered to attend their activities. Taken as a whole Churches have been in absolute decline since 1914, and in percentage of the rapidly rising urban population they were in decline before then. This then is all about secularisation, and secularisation as a term is very controversial, with either different meanings or no clear meaning any more.

Churches like all organisations want to survive and prosper if possible, so obviously they must develop strategies. When an institution is an ideological one, as is any Church, then organisational response to something like secularisation can involve ideological change. So here is the controversial point that theological ideas in this age have a sociological causality. Indeed, theological ideas in any age have a sociological causality. This is what sociology is all about - socially organised forms of causality. When sociologists claim this causality, it very much annoys theologians of a more conservative bent like Brian Hebblethwaite (*The Problems of Theology*, 1980, pp. 52-59). They say that this is sociological imperialism over theology. What, it is asked, of the constancies and certainties of the divine which theology is supposed to tease out? So in this introductory stage, I ought to say something about sociological method.

Sociology is inevitably a humanistic perspective. Certain analyses and insights, such as the possibilities of divine causes, simply lie outside of its field. Of course there is a potential sociological imperialism if not only forms of social and economic development throw up ways of thinking, but sociology goes on to say that, for example, theological thought is just an epiphenomenal construction. Not all Sociology does; Weber did promote the independence of ideas which then get caught up in structures. And if you did claim that every idea is subject to sociological causality, then so must be the ideas of sociology itself. This discussion is in the

sociology of knowledge, discussed by Karl Mannheim and others.

So I declare my own position. Sociology is not all explaining, but simply a set of perspectives on the study of people in society. But, theologically I am a relativist, as I think theology is speculative about belief and simply deals in a branch of culture out of which we might forge some form of life path or sense of trust as sentient beings. Robin Gill overlaps the two disciplines from a more realist perspective. My three lectures are a sociology of theology regarding the adaptations of Churches relating to themselves and any religiosity/ies of society. There are bits of structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism, and the Homeless Mind thesis (Berger, Berger, Kellner, 1974) is well detectable. Like a postmodernist I use perspectives as I go along. You may not agree.

This first lecture debates the environment which forms the predicament of change for Churches. So, pluralism and any sense of common religiosity out there features in examining the secularisation debate. After this analysis of the social construction of the Churches; environment comes, in the following two lectures, my analysis of Churches as sociological constructions. I should say that I refer mainly to Churches rather than "the Church", and I mean those umbrella bodies containing within super-orthodox beliefs right through to heterodoxy, like Anglican, Methodist, URC, and Baptist; Pentecostalism, evangelical churches, increasingly Roman Catholicism, certainly Orthodoxy, the continuing Churches, Unitarians and Quakers are specialities around the main ones.

Churches as institutions are objects of sociological causality. In Europe Churches have emerged out of a feudal society and its traditional cosmology, and were altered by reformation with the weakening of the old feudal society and development of trading and industrialisation. Churches were part of the State, and one state meant one Church and the Church provided a kind of ideological ballast and legitimacy to the State. This continued after Henry VIII who remained deeply suspicious of emerging Protestant movements. The Reformation meant competition. With the well established and exceptional case of the Jewish faith in ghettos with their special economic functions, the Reformation in Europe led to many churches but one religion. The new

Churches began to appeal to a rising but politically dispossessed class. These were the mercantilists or forerunners of the industrialists. In Britain these groups of people were growing in economic power but not political power while the state and organised religion were intertwined; the new middle class next world theology became increasingly a this world theology and agitation. You start with the Kings; Indulgences after the Civil War, the Act of Toleration and lead up to the 1832 Reform Act. Industrial and urban growth was the force which expanded non-conformity because their class was excluded from the establishment. Old dissent grew out of the mercantilists and with Methodism were boosted by industrial interests. These new Churches assisted in the regimentation of a clockwork, mechanical, industrial life, in an attempt to overcome the felt chaos of the city. The history I know best involves merchants in Hull becoming trustees and pew renters in English Presbyterianism. The Bowlalley Lane English Presbyterian and later Unitarian Church became a hive of middle class agitation to Parliament for reform. The Unitarian movement as whole was made and developed by industrialists and infused appropriate liberal ideology - Ricardo, Locke, Bentham and Mill. Later it became civic in outlook, and posh, rubbing shoulders with Anglicanism from whence it came, but this time at the liberal end.

If we consider the Anglican Church as the Church of the state with privileges, and essentially rural in its parish and priestly structure, then non-conformity was the Church without privileges for the middle class. At no point in history has the working class ever been churched. It was reluctant when rural, and got away with it in the anonymity of the town and city. The working class had different kinds of organisations related to work and its own definitions of leisure. Churches formed outreaches into the working class which largely failed. Groups like the Salvation Army who took on the popular music of the time - brass bands - and populist militarism by the wearing uniforms, only produced a tiny working class subculture rather than their conversion. Churches were associated with class. Even the most liberal and sympathetic of Church people like some Unitarians were regarded with deep suspicion by labour leaders. Groups like the Labour Churches and even Secularist bodies stayed tiny because they were middle class like forms of association. The only successful point of contact with the working class was with rites of passage and the Sunday School movement, a convenient way for parents

with large families to get the children out of the house and enjoy sex on a Sunday morning. In addition the philanthropy of churches provided cheap or free education, welfare and leisure to the families of workers.

Decline of churches followed the removal of the reasons for middle class involvement and philanthropy, the change in leisure activity and the growth of the welfare state, and the shrinkage of churches to the core activity of worshipping. American experience has been more friendly to churchgoing because they started as part and parcel of the American ideology of civil and religious liberty, were ground into the toughness of the frontier expansion, and there was never a class based state church from which a middle class dissented or a working class rejected. All American Churches are denominations for a market society which socialises through associations.

At the core of a social and economic understanding of churches as institutions is the Church, denomination and sect continuum. This was developed by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch and added to most significantly by H. Richard Niebuhr, the brother of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The original discussion of Church and sect does contain a confusion about what is a Church. It can be thought of as traditionalist, authoritarian and at one with a traditional society on a sort of mediaeval cosmological model because it is largely undifferentiated with the State. Troeltsch suggests that the Church no longer exists. Quite, but in modern times we think of the Church as broad, communal in outlook, and trying to stretch out its boundaries to cover all people as members but without the teeth and assumed hegemony of the traditionalist society Church. Troeltsch introduced Mysticism to be a new post reformation liberal Church, except it does not all embrace. Mysticism has effectively been dropped, wrongly in my view, even if the name is awkward.

The denomination part introduced by Niebuhr emphasises the economic dynamic of the continuum. In other words, we do not just have a list of ideal types but a theory of social change. The dispossessed start with a tough sectarian theology promising other worldly salvation and economic discipline. As the members build up their capital, the other worldly interest becomes

this worldly. The sect thus becomes a denomination. The Wesleyan Methodists ended up as a socially conservative denomination with a breadth of theology close to any Church. The English Presbyterians started off as far more orthodox than the Church of England and they ended up as Unitarians! Of course today religious ideas have become unhooked from socio-economic and civic dynamics. For example, the defence of religion in schools has become a Conservative imposed battleline that headteachers cannot maintain. Instead we have moved from the one religion many churches situation to many faiths, many branches and mass ignorance, when Churches in fact only relate to their small worshipping groups who pay the piper, try to call the tune (depending on authority in the institution) and try to keep the show on the road.

As a social and economic dynamic, a civic force and indeed theologically, the Church-denomination-sect continuum has run out of time. The Church of England, a Church, has within it: believers who are as sectarian as any actual attender of a sect, people of middling positions and those who are now extremely broad, and denominations have all three too. And yet they are as cut off as sects, because of the very cutting off of religion from the socio-economic and civic fabric. And indeed so far I have been speaking of an historical Homeless Mind thesis of institutional pluralism leading to secularisation: a cause and effect where the Churches themselves have undermined their own social rootedness. And so to secularisation in depth.

Secularisation is not simply about the minority status of Churches but about the change in the basic assumptions of the meanings of life. People don't actually analyse but they live the thinking - it is like a Darwinian selection of thinking that fits the institutions and culture of living. If the social order and ideology was once a reflection of the heavenly order it is now a reflection of the technological order, or our thinking follows on from the way of doing things and getting results. However, it is when you discover that there still is quite a bit of religion of sorts around that all the complications begin.

There are two main views of secularisation. The first is Weberian, which is a linear march towards rationality, and it fits his view of social authority too running from charismatic to traditional and then bureaucratic. A cool decline to religionlessness is expected, and is not that

far removed from secularism. At best it involves the thorough privatisation of religion and residue sects, so that there is no civic, economic or societal impact. Religious knowledge moves outside plausibility structures in explaining anything other than private superstition.

The second view is Durkheimian in background, in that the secular and the sacred fuse together. In this approach we still see religious values, but the religion is infused into a whole set of civic and societal binding values.

Steve Bruce and Bryan Wilson support the linear view, and Robert Bellah and David Martin support the civic diffusionist view. Indeed David Martin doubts secularisation altogether. Theologians latched on to this debate, especially in the 1960's when the linear view was more dominant but where distinctions were made between secularism on the one hand and Bonhoeffer's view of Religionless Christianity or Barth's distant God which offered theological secularisation. Sociologists do not worry about such sleights of hand.

Some sociologists like Richard K. Fenn have tried to combine both views. He sees a rise in generalized beliefs and values to create consensus, happening at the same time as a separation of distinctly religious bodies from the rest of society with their deviant beliefs. While religion fuses into society in a most general way, the dedicated become more differentiated.

Larry Shiner also stresses complexity. First of all he asks when was the former religious age? Perhaps secularisation is in the religious tradition itself if it desacralizes the world where the Christian view of God becoming man encourages a this worldly secularisation in itself. Larry Shiner has no overall view and concludes that secularisation as a term has been over used.

The whole notion of secularisation is promoted by the decline of outwardly measurable religious commitment. But it is more marked in Europe than America, and then we might think of the Far East where secular societies at one level are producing a current boom in success-promoting Protestant religious activity along with the rest of their emergence into modernity.

But when you look at Europe you see beliefs hanging on, dispersing and transforming. So is secularisation a particular institutional problem of the loss of church functions plus the First World War and the Holocaust, which is a European problem in particular?

Jeffrey Cox says that the shrinkage in all denominations from 1905 and 1910 misled academics.

Many people would have believed that Christianity was irrelevant even if the churches had been thriving; many Americans, especially intellectuals, are astonished to discover the facts about the pervasiveness of the churches and the Christian faith in America. But in England it was the actual collapse of the churches which allowed the complete triumph of the argument that religion is something which belongs to another age. (Cox, J., 1982, p. 276).

He is against the air of inevitability associated with ' secularisation;

I am not disputing the fact that our view of the world, our cosmology, has been transformed by scientific advances since the Reformation, a fact which poses new and unique problems for Christian thinkers. Nor am I asserting the advent of heavy industry, the polarization of society along class lines, the growth of cities, and geographical and social mobility do not, other things being equal, cause new problems for the churches which can, and often do, contribute to a decline of religious practice.

What I object to is the air of inevitability which results from wrapping up all of these changes into a package called the :process of secularisation; and using that package as an explanation of social change in the modern world. (Cox, J., 1982, p. 226).

I draw your attention to a religious belief survey in Hull in which I was involved, in Longhill Estate, a 1950' s low rise working class council estate of about 5000 people, where the Anglican church was well sited and all others are peripheral or off the estate. Read Peter Forster' s Contemporary Mainstream Religion for the details. People still identified with the Church of

England say for the purposes of attending hospital, but the big change is that it has become deviant to send children to Sunday School. It was once deviant not to attend. There is certainly a liberalising of and decline in belief and practice, but still an attachment to the headlines of Christian belief.

The great majority of the young do not pray unlike a majority of their elders who do. Yet, amazingly, using the Longhill figures, two fifths of younger people regard Jesus as the only son of God, with only one fifth making him a good man and one eighth a leader like those of other faiths. The older groups overwhelmingly gave such a balance to orthodoxy too. Approaching half gave the Bible a large including fundamentalist level of inspiration, being true for a third of young people. Only one tenth of everyone and under a quarter of younger people think Christianity is unimportant, although it is most important concerning schools and discipline. So Christianity is linked with children and discipline even now. But the Church itself as a place to go is kept beyond arm' s length - for everyone!

There is a complex argument here that I think goes like this. People who attend churches are not necessarily any more orthodox. In fact the late Michael Dalling' s work in the same book is one of many that shows a lack of orthodoxy in the churches - only some 60% of attenders say they believe in God, well less than the population as a whole. But then they are in touch with the official doctrines in which so many then do not believe. For those outside the decline in the Sunday School and church rituals contact means a decline in the common memory of Christian beliefs and an evacuation of meaning to its headlines. This leaves is a vague attachment to a perceived National Church with its belief labels and a cultural religion, occasionally called on for rites of passage. At the same time the religion of Luck and superstition also continues, giving a fragmented, illogical, hope for better things, a modern (even postmodern) and unorganised Christian paganism.

The headlines of Christian belief remain strongest for the older population who had Sunday School contact. It is naive to think that younger people who did not will become closer to orthodoxy as they get older. We can call this secularisation but another term suggested is

Implicit Religion.

Edward Bailey and the Network for the Study of Implicit Religion claims that there is a widespread popular belief connected with Christianity.

...this [cultural ' Christianity'] is one kind of Christianity; as village Hinduism is one kind of Hinduism; and as ecclesiastical Christianity, and philosophical Hinduism, are other kinds. (Bailey, in Moss, 1986, p. 187)

According to him, people do not primarily believe in God, Jesus or the Church but in :Christianity;, being a popularised version of the apostolic faith. This national cultural religion has a theology of its own, based around the self and more like that of Hinduism where Christ is the cultural figure similar to Krishna. I think this is too optimistic. Hinduism pure and popular is far more integrated and socially spread whereas official Christianity is not some healthy functioning central tradition of which the populace has a variant in constant dialogue. I am suggesting that there is a memory loss displaced only by the media, its headlines and its mischief making. Indeed, a dominant intellectual trend of thought is pluralistic and humanistic, and against this background the popular situation is a kind of dispersed superstition and Luck using Christian and other labels, some science, some humanism, and a good dollop of nationalism all being absorbed into an increasingly fast sex and image based culture.

This is the sociological causality to which churches have to respond to and adapt themselves.

SEMINAR 1

Sociology versus theology. Is theology about divine knowledge -revelation - and thus determines and shapes sociology or is sociology a humaniser and relativiser of theology?

Is the Church a defunct concept outside of a traditional society? Are all activists sectarians, even liberals, due to the marginalisation of church activity?

Is Durkheim or Weber and their descendents right, or is it a mix, or a hopeless analytical case?

If there is secularisation, when was the golden age of religious involvement. Where was Church power located which has now gone?

Is implicit religion too rosy a view?

Lecture 2

Implicit religion can include anything from a crude and distant memory of media informed Christianity to belief in astrology and alternative medicine. What are the Churches; own institutional responses to people keeping churches at beyond arms length, with or without any hostility? So when looking at churches, our concern is primarily about adaptation of Church authority and belief to a changing culture.

There has been some work relating culture to religious authority in a primary theological rather than sociological analysis, especially by H. R. Niebuhr, Minear, Harrison (on American Baptists) and Rudge, who links theology and management theory.

Niebuhr relates Christ and culture. :Christ against culture; includes the promotion of a charismatic religious sub-culture converting the people from this world of sin, although today charismatic churches use the modern culture in their liturgies to get their converts. :Christ above culture; is when a supernatural culture becomes joined in tandem with a traditional Church. And if a Church cannot defend and keep the traditional culture, as it cannot, then it retreats to only within the Church walls, and then is Christ in defence of the rump;. For Rudge, Christ and culture in paradox; implies the authority of the law of Christ over all, meaning the classical or bureaucratic power of the Church and domination, although in fact Niebuhr only suggests that the dualism of this position is a superiority of Christ from the wider culture left as unimportant, so nothing needs to be done about culture, and therefore the Church ends up being conservative about culture as it is. Niebuhr' s Christ the transformer of culture; is about relating to culture but

to change it, affirming culture but then altering it as in a theology of incarnation. The Christ of culture; gets equated with liberal democratic western institutions, involving a shift in theology to keep the same sociological sympathy between Church and modern culture that there was between a traditional Church in a traditional culture.

Rudge starts with Weberian theory, adds in two more types and uses these to comment on to Niebuhr' s typologies. Rudge considers charismatic authority, people who command by personality. We might think of Jesus, Buddha, Lenin. Charisma gets routinised via early followers like disciples or Bolsheviks and then that becomes a tradition like the Church (or Communist Party!). So an initial stance of looking forward becomes focussed on the past. In the modern period rationality as a way of organising social institutions replaces tradition based on the supernatural. So you get classical bureaucracy. But Burns and Stalker saw Weber' s bureaucracy as mechanistic and suggested an organismic or systemic model, where specialists on the ground become joint decision makers. And then there is a horizontal, almost voluntaristic, human relations authority, working by agreement not hierarchy, as outlined by Elton Mayo.

Rudge like Niebuhr essentially asks what is the correct authority model for the whole Church. Rudge says Charismatic authority has plenty of basis in the New Testament but should be balanced by the historical emphasis found in traditional authority. Harrison calls traditionalism mimetic-traditional authority meaning a continued use of historic liturgical symbols which no longer keep their original meaning, used in order to prevent modern anomie and alienation. It is like saying that worship must be archaic to work its magic. When it comes to bureaucratic authority or organisation on rational-pragmatic grounds Rudge says it has no place in the New Testament but shows that large areas of the Church are separate from God.

He has a point. Think of proposals for saving money and reorganisation, rationalisation as a motive for ecumenism, or ordained ministry as a career.

Harrison though defines bureaucracy towards Rudge' s systemic authority. Rudge prefers this decentralised authority as it has the diversity in unity of the Christian Church (in "the vine and

the branches" image) and is a model about service to bring out the fullness of the world. It is the transformer of culture, not ignoring it or dominating it or being dominated by it. So for Rudge the systemic model is superior. The charismatic is against culture, the bureaucratic is a form of dominance, the traditional is cultural preservation and the human relations models is a denial of the doctrine of the Church as a divine society, being instead a human developed pluralist (post-industrial) form of operation.

Note how you start with theological questions of the culture and its possible need for transformation and the discussion leads to an apparently appropriate authority type to carry out a theological task.

But for a sociologist the issue is not preference for one type but causality on to the Church. We observe and analyse what has happened, not what should happen. The Church may export its elements into the culture, and such happens with civic religion. The issue here is what the culture does to the Church, and with varied views the Church responds in all ways. We see this with belief. In 1967 Peter Berger explored varieties of Christianity or the world views adapt to what he calls external secularised consciousness.

The more moderate liberal position may be characterized as a bargaining procedure with secularized consciousness: "We'll give you the Virgin Birth, but we'll keep the Resurrection"; "You can have the Jesus of history, but we'll hold on to the Christ of the apostolic faith"; and so on. The secular theology disdains such negotiation. It surrenders all. Indeed, it goes farther in the abandonment of the tradition than most people who do not identify themselves with it. (Berger, in 1979, p. 221)

Then there are those who give no concessions at all. So we need here to ask what identifiable belief types there are, so to relate them and authority types to adapting to the culture.

Robert Towler's *The Need for Certainty* makes the significant point that belief types cut across existing denominational institutions. His book categorises letters reacting to the Robinson

controversy begun in 1962, only a tiny proportion of which appeared in the book called *The Honest to God Debate* in 1963 and the letters anyway usually stated their own belief positions rather than a criticism of the book.

He came up with the categories of traditionalism, conversionism, theism, exemplarism and gnosticism. So a quick look at these then.

Traditionalism is the discipline of certainty, the style of religion revering the tradition it represents. By preserving the details it is conservationist. Traditionalism means narrow inheritances, and there can be more than one in a Church or denomination. Conversionism is a belief in Jesus which makes the believer aware of sin. An immediate conversion lifts the burden of sin, a supernatural event as there is no human route out of evil. Towler says that Theism is monotheistic, turns evil into a kind of good and is conservative. It rejects the divine Jesus and the business of saving from sin. Exemplarism is belief in the Christ as an human exemplary figure and as such God does not come into it. The supernatural is not important, and Creeds are irrelevant. Here the emphasis is on teaching and ideals, for action in life rather than the next life. Towler thinks this sort of belief happens after intellectual difficulty with orthodoxy. Finally there is gnosticism which he sees as concern with the details of spirituality and the unreal nature of evil. It is a minority faith because, he says, it lacks support in the Bible.

Except for traditionalism, I think these categories are inadequate, because they do not work at mapping all mainstream belief in a continuum, nor necessarily relate to the authority behind believing. And as with Rudge' s work, I like the categories but I want to rescue their sociology. And then I put them all together to make a map of a system of belief, authority and integrities of people responding in varied ways to culture.

Clearly, traditionalists are defensive and look to the past. The authority pattern is Christ in defence of the rump or traditionalism. They won;t convert the culture, they are retreating. We get tight, traditional, doctrinal believers, not ecumenical, reaching out to no one but themselves, and beyond the main churches they are closest to continuing Churches like the continuing Primitive

Methodists, Congregationalists outside the URC, the Traditional Church of England, the Anglican Catholic Church and so on.

Conversionism is about sin and converting, and all of it I relate to Weber' s charismatic authority. This means it relies on individual interpretations and is personality driven. The first sub-belief is fundamentalism, a hardline biblicism where individuals selectively pronounce on the biblical word of God. Such fundies are quite ecumenical with other fundies. They think the charismatic belief thing is a bit gassy and unnecessary.

Charismatic belief is biblical but heavily dependent on personal experience as guided by leading personalities. There is emphasis on glossolalia and such as the Toronto experience. They are ecumenical to their own kind too.

Evangelicalism is the most historical and moderate of the three sub-groups, associated with past figures and biblical social reformers, and personalities like say David Sheppard in Liverpool. The Bible retains a high place, as understood by a reformed Church, but it can never quite reach debate, and the important thing is still conversion and the world is still sinful.

Now all three sub-groups are forward looking and dogmatic. They attack the culture not to transform it but when individuals are transformed it will be. Then you get the less individualistic orthodox liberalism. Clearly Towler was wrong in saying that theists do not as a whole maintain the divinity of Jesus. A great many do. What they do not do is insist on biblical details or the absolutism of traditions. A sociological function is not dominance or ignorance of the culture but trying to maintain the boundaries of Church belief while relating it to the modern world.

Bureaucratic authority means moderation and negotiation with a culture that has modernised itself. The theological impact is that details like the virgin birth and bodily resurrection are matters of scholarship and debate, but the centrality of the incarnation and resurrection, and some sense of the Trinity, and the definitiveness if not the uniqueness of Jesus, are seen as essential to maintain the boundaries. Different theologians do this in different ways but all try to uphold a sense of objectivity and identifiable truth.

As well as relating to the culture orthodox liberalism with bureaucratic authority tries to keep the old denominations together, as well as promoting ecumenism. Maybe the demise of Anglican Catholic traditionalism will allow some institutional ecumenism again, but I doubt this sector can hold old denominations together. The Durham Affair essentially blew it. The creation of Affirming Catholicism is an orthodox liberal pressure group, and now conversionists reject all liberals and traditionalists do too.

Towler' s theists do not subscribe to the divinity of Jesus. Exemplarists care little of God, gnostics focus on the Spirit and contemporary faith and then you get the unmentioned non-realists who are of critical spirituality. I think these are all of one umbrella type - they all lose some or all of the philosophical objectivity claimed for the Trinity.

I think this heterodox liberalism relates to systemic authority, because it means, as in sociology, like in "post-Fordism", taking responsibility for belief to yourself in a sense of asking questions, and having no boundary for those questions, yet being within a body of a task with a leadership. The believer as an expert has the right to formulate within a community of given faith his or her own interpretation of it without limits.

In pure theism, like that of Maurice Wiles or John Hick, the Trinity is undermined because Jesus really is human. John Hick has said Jesus is unique in the same way as Helen is my lover. These people relate well to other monotheistic faiths. Daphne Hampson is a post-Christian theist.

In exemplarism Jesus is a kind of tragic hero, faithful unto death. It is a human drama, and God is probably a bit of superstition. Don Cupitt was an exemplarist before he became a non-realist.

So it would be more accurate to reverse the stock phrase and speak not of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith but of the Jesus of faith and the dogmatic Christ of history (Cupitt, D., *Jesus and the Gospel of God*, Lutterworth Press, 1979, p. 28).

Of course a year later he became a critical non-realist, a faith of at first the individual facing the void and later a more collective postmodernism and language setting, drawing on continental philosophy. The New Zealander Lloyd Geering uses the language theme with a sense of historical evolution thrown in. Religion becomes a kind of social anthropology, a dance and drama, the arts, a cultural bit of story telling about how to organise your ethical and social life. It is ecumenical but into humanism too, and approaches Buddhism. The Sea of Faith Network, of which I am a founding committee member, is both heterodox liberal and radical, with objects that say religious faith is a human creation but no demand on any member for a statement of such faith.

Gnosticism is a kind of Holy Spirit syncretism. An example is Burton and Dolley who in *Christian Evolution* (1980) refer to ancient gnosticism in wishing see emerge a modernist global religion. This approach learns from Sufism, Baha'ism and Hinduism, incorporates humanism and faiths, and goes direct from the Gospel of Thomas to the New Age. It took on a postmodern quality out of so called "rave" services or by design. So far I discount rave services from Independent Churches which remain charismatic and dogmatic. Those from the Church of England in particular, such as Sheffield's Nine O' Clock Service or at St. Thomas, Huddersfield, liberalised and became highly creative liturgically. They use the dance culture for music and lights, and give worshippers a lot of space, recognising their secularity and struggle for meaning, can use pagan forms and they sympathise with eastern faiths. Gnosticism universalises faith and is feminist and pro-sexual. As for human relations authority, this is for those who move out of credal and ordered Churches to the specialised liberal groups like the Quakers and Unitarians, for whom faith is a consensus or division based on human decision. The faith content heavily overlaps with all systemic liberals.

Putting authority and belief together on the above bases means each have responses to the culture. Then each has groups of people integrating around these theological and authority positions. This is a systems approach.

The background of my theoretical approach to this comes initially from the verbose Talcott Parsons, and then moves on from Demerath and Hammond' s summary. The technical terms are these. An organisation maintains itself using latency (the world view), goal attainment (its specific goals within the world view), adaptation (the relationship with the outer environment), and integration (the internal collectivity). The organisation is an interactive system and a change in one effects a change throughout.

You can start at any one of the four system units. A world view implies a set of goals, a type of authority and integration, and demands a certain attitude to the world out there. Or perhaps if a chief goal is keeping the show on the road you then adapt to the environment, change your world view, and alter methods of organisation. Whatever, all elements must work together to be a functional whole. This sort of approach is called functionalism, aiming for a harmonious system. If a system does not work, it is called dysfunctional, and has to change in itself or divide up or collapse.

I use beliefs as world views. Each authority type fits a belief type to be functional. Adaptation of each set is derived, which can be for or against the wider culture depending on the nature of those sets. The strength of the resultant integrities then allows some assessment of loyalty to them as compared with loyalties to old denominations.

Charismatic authority via biblical interpretation and leadership through motivating personalities recreates an image of the New Testament culture which strongly opposes the general culture. Born again Christians carry strong self-identity and loyalty which stretches across denominational boundaries.

Traditionalists carry a strong integrity too but only within their own kind. Change and ecumenism weakens them, but they also invent their own traditions drawing on some mythic past for legitimacy and this can strengthen them. They defend a culture within the church walls different from the one outside, and their loyalty is to their old Church or part of it.

Different theologies, negotiating with the outside culture and managerialism within means that the orthodox liberal collectivity is weaker than conversionist and traditionalist camps.

Ecumenical it is but also it is very concerned with each current institution' s well being.

Systemic liberals are individuals in organisations so they tend to be loose even in their dissent.

They are easily ecumenical but they are neither insitutional with the old or the potential new.

They oppose old and new hierarchies and power systems. Occasionally they come together in common defence, but nothing is permanent so they are quite loose in integration as they variously theologise and philosophise faith with the culture.

Human relations authority is in comparison a bottom up worshipping community with a thoroughly liberal evolutionary basis of organising belief, and you tend to get two belief blocs evolving, almost like Hegel' s thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and none are very intellectually theological.

So considering integration: traditionalists and the conversionists are the most cohesive, and then, in order, the orthodox liberals, the mainstream heterodox liberals and the separated heterodox liberals. They have different adaptations to the general culture.

And you can think of this on an individual level too. If you're getting more authoritarian, you might find a belief to match and change attitude to the culture, or perhaps you want to be pro-culture so your belief and view of authority changes. Each affects the rest. It' s like this with these systems.

So what is the dynamic for change? Next time I suggest more on how these colectivities juggle loyalty and self definition to themselves and their historic denominations, the vertical distribution of the belief and authority types, the effect of who pays the piper and calls the tune, and the issue of resistance or friction to slow institutional change. This and crystal ball gazing about future possibilities.

Seminar questions

So is ecumenism only half the story?

Is conversionism one bloc? Is traditionalism bound to fracture? Are there really two kinds of liberalism? Is orthodoxy a shifting sandbank? Are heterodox liberals parasites?

Are mainstream Churches umbrellas of different kinds of authority views?

Do conversionists seek to recruit non-Christians and do liberals try to keep falling Christians from leaving?

Are there any system alternatives?

Lecture 3

I have suggested that the various umbrella Church belief and authority types relate together systematically as different responses to the wider culture of a memory-loss implicit religion. However, William H. Swatos Jr. (Cipriani, 1993, pp. 180-190) has criticised Robert Wuthnow in *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1987) for suggesting that, in American Christianity, liberalism to conservatism has surpassed denominationalism. Swatos says that organisational divisions may derive from ecumenical mergers, but whole Churches can be classified on the liberal-conservative continuum: Southern Baptists and Missouri Lutherans as conservative; the Episcopalians, United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalists (UUA) as liberal; with Methodists and Presbyterians ambiguous. Liberal denominations are more bureaucratic and less centred on locality compared with conservative Churches. Well, the UUA is locally based (for one) and the Episcopalians are arguably ambiguous! But let us move on to the locations and the distribution of belief and authority types within British ambiguous umbrella Churches. Theoretically this at least introduces social anthropology's long interest in religion being more

magical at a popular level and more rational at a higher level suggesting to some great and little traditions...

Age old Victorian anthropology was pretty sure that the highest form of religion was an evolved liberal Protestant Christianity, that which searched for the purity of Christian truth. This contrasted with Roman Catholicism and by the time you got to Indian Hinduism it was just pagan superstition. Religious development then was a function of social development. Of course Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism too showed centres of reasoning and areas of popular mass appeal. And Roman Catholicism has a strong theological tradition whatever its masses may do. Some social anthropology once suggested that the earth' s primitives use magic, the masses then put magic into religions and then the religions at the cosmopolitan level are at their purest. Robert Redfield says magical religion is the little tradition and the analysed stuff is the great tradition. Weber examines the different soteriologies or salvation types of magical and intellectual faith.

However, magical faith has informed leadership theology just as leadership theology codified belief back on to the masses. So which is great and which is little? And as for liberal Protestant Christianity, the next stage up is surely secularism. Is religion only a form of superstition and magic anyway? The old Unitarian task of finding a simple truth at the core of credal clutter has found a void and need to build from the bottom; Quakers have silence anyway; systemic postmodernists still attached to credal systems simply use them as a story time and subject their content to irony.

Then, between Churches and beyond, calling implicit religion a little tradition and organised Christianity a great tradition won;t do. Implicit religion is now too much out of touch with official Christianity and in any case humanism might be a great tradition instead. So I prefer to avoid these terms and just focus upon belief locations. Put simply, conversionism and traditionalism settle into the churches on the ground. Orthodox liberalism and heterodox liberalism are elsewhere.

One of the failings of orthodox liberalism is in its declining role of negotiation with civic and ordinary society. It also ultimately fails in the institutions of education where there is the raison d'être of questioning everything. Indeed Theology has in many places been replaced by Religious Studies: a once given knowledge becomes an analysis of beliefs. However, in theological colleges orthodox liberalism still has a role where questioning is part of the development of the ministers; confessing of faith. Even the most conservative theological college still has to question. Here orthodox liberalism still makes known its sociological function.

Heterodox liberalism then is most likely where the constraints are less. It happened, after all, eventually to biblical Puritan churches, which rejected creeds on the false assumption that the bible was sufficient guarantee of orthodoxy. And many intellectuals today develop heterodox faith where Churches are tolerant or beyond reach. Intellectual faith does relate to intellectual subculture, but there are a range of heterodoxies and the gnostic variety relates to implicit religion and the New Age forms.

But equally, orthodox liberalism and heterodox liberalism find it difficult to compete in most of the urban churches which aim to be distinctive. The big speciality here is conversionism and growing. It uses the pop culture and its modernity to pull the punters in and convert these individuals.

Traditionalisms are in the churches but like little ships tossing about on a choppy sea with their own memories and nowhere to land, unable to recruit.

There are a few exceptions on the ground. The first is the rural church when there remains a sense of wider community. This is in the analysis of Tonnies; *gemeinschaft* or community principle. Such a rural church has to be more broad and embracing than an urban one which in turn is based on the *gesellschaft* or association principle, where believers readily go across parish and circuit boundaries able to seek out their special church. Incidentally most ordinands these days are conversionists and a number end up in rural churches where they can get frustrated and cannot let rip with any great success.

Another exception is in an outer suburb church. Conversionism is not excluded at all but a well to do subculture can direct the ethos of the church giving moderation and respectability against extremes. This religion can get slightly stuffy.

Youth and young people' s subculture led to a response sometimes out of the charismatic movement and sometimes by design of gnostic ritual experiment, dealing with the missing generation where they are as a kind of outreach. Charismatics disown the services which use creation spirituality, Eastern insight, the four elements or New Age, questioning and space; worship which draws on the dance culture and meaning found in surface appearances.

Chaplaincies vary: universities can be the most radical, representing the educational subculture, which is why the Christian Unions often ignore them (Christian Unions are a home from home for the lost student); hospitals can be moderate and veer towards implicit religion; and if hospital religion is, say, "female", work chaplaincies are the most "male", plain and secular; and prisons are the most conversionist, where changing to a new inner life or looking like it means everything. Again they all specialise.

Even with these variations, the doctrinal nature of Christianity suggests a unilinear form where you either believe more faith or less, and liberalism equals doubts equals less. So, excepting liberal forms which do strive for creative difference, the usual liberal preacher in church ends up using a complex language which sounds orthodox but is full of code words for the trained ear. Anyway, churches in worship are not usually places of inquiry.

With this vertical arranging the mainstream triangle is complete. In one corner, rapidly rising to represent intellectual faith, we have different kinds of heterodox believing. It joins a middle grouping of the orthodox liberal theologies that defend an objective incarnation and resurrection. It drops down to cover rural and suburban churches and secularising work chaplaincies. On the lower level are the subtypes of belief of conversionism cutting across Protestant and Catholic, and to the other corner you get all the separate traditionalisms. Now any individual can stand in

any one place in the triangle. And the triangle at its boundaries runs into other Churches: Roman Catholicism, maintaining its own exclusivity, though it overlaps via traditionalism up to orthodox liberalism; and the Orthodox overlap with Catholic traditionalism, and you get continuing Churches, then Pentecostal, Independent Evangelical, House Churches, and Unitarians and Quakers overlapping heterodoxy.

It is not static. The vertical distribution and the conversionist piper paying and calling the tune, suggests change. All the momentum is to the corners. Increasingly churches draw less on historic assets from better days in favour of current income. So expect a bigger gap between conversionists and theology. This is why, I think, theological colleges have had to shift towards more practical training, and why Church leaders are even less publically orthodox liberal than they were. The controversy over David Jenkins was very fierce, but he was far more orthodox than John Robinson twenty years earlier. It is possible that if liberals do not go they may be pushed. So what is to stop these main Church tendencies becoming purer, more differentiated, more specialised, and more like those bodies already around the triangle?

Well, there is friction in the system, a term borrowed from economics. Things do not change freely. There is attachment to local churches and their existing worship, incompatibility of leadership systems, different circuit or parish structures and the slow rate of turnover of the more conservationist groups. Traditionalisms until recently also slowed the rate of ecumenical change to that of Local Ecumenical Projects, a kind of lowest common denominator.

Yet pan-denominational groups from the most heterodox of liberals to the most dogmatic of conversionists have developed, and they can be embryos of things to come. So it is time to crystal ball gaze.

Paid ministry, dependent on the resources of any institution, is always the first casualty of decline. So it is unsurprising perhaps that literature on this offers insight into church futures as a whole.

You can think of the Tiller Report of the 1980' s regarding the Church of England. Anthony Russell' s The Clerical Profession (1984) is critical of ministry drawing its model of activity from the professions rather than voluntary groups, and this encourages lay passivity. This and decline suggests to him reform to one of three futures.

The Church of the traditionalist future would decline but aim to be an anchor of stability in a changing world. It would be conservationist and defensive in style and theology. The Church would be sacramentalist in its Catholic forms with special activities restricted to the ordained ministry; Protestant bodies would also retain traditional roles.

The Church of the adaptationist future would tackle the resource problem and increase relevance in modern society but without major internal changes. This would mean more non-stipendary ministers and a greater role for the laity; but ordained ministers would preserve their unique eucharist and traditional roles.

The Church of the reformist future would commit itself to being in the world. Its basis would shift not to the parish and the circuit, but the cell and the network. There would be ordination but an active laity would carry out all roles including the eucharist.

Well! The Church of the traditional future fits in with traditionalism, the Church of the adaptationist future can be related to bureaucratic authority and its negotiations and the Church of the reformist future can be roughly equated with systemic authority, although in my view the latter risks human relations authority. My approach is to better relate these ideas to belief and authority types. So let' s leap into the future.

The Churches of the fixed future are like the traditional model. They are inflexible like Christ in defence of the rump, male led, which conserve and reinvent the past. Worship is unchanging.

The Church of the dynamic future attempts to reinvent New Testament practices but also use the pop culture to gain converts. It develops a network of approved leaders and interpreters

justified by the claimed presence of the Holy Spirit. It is clerical and lay, and predominantly male led. They are organised into teams with tasks in order to produce results with a heavy fellowship orientation which also facilitates further growth into churches. There is a structural conflict between congregationalism and elders in a network. Worship is experimental but super-orthodox. It is unsuitable for the rites of passage of non-church implicit religion.

The Church of the functional future is practical, committee based, producing reports. It closes under-used churches and redeploys the ministry. Financial savings are made, efficient means of outreach are investigated and forms of worship are streamlined. It tackles big theological and ethical issues by attempted consensus, to relate its general faith to society and politics and in return listens to social religion without absorbing it. Nothing in the bureaucracy of churches is ever completely local. An example would be the Anglican' s recent Turnbull Report calling for centralised rationalisation. Worship is modernised in language but not in doctrine, although individuals would have to consent to less than the doctrinal total of the worship.

The Church of the radical future is itself destructive of systemic authority because it is cut loose. Its main requirement is freedom of belief. The practicality of using a main liturgy is lost because it is a pointless conservatism: everything can be experimental and unorthodox. Indeed the Christian heritage itself is overwhelmed by pluralism, other faith insights and humanism. Peculiarly, theology itself, that tension between an inherited faith and modern thought, breaks down into subjective and private opinion. Theology becomes philosophy, sociology, anthropology and history. The justification of any separate ministry breaks down except from the point of view of convenience and pastoral service.

We may not be there yet but imagine if or when the conversionists become dominant and indeed call the tune. The heterodox will have to go. No doubt some orthodox liberals would find ways to fit in. Marginal doubters always have. Most would go, the doctrinal cut off point being set too high.

Orthodox liberalism itself would have lost most of its bureaucratic function and its balance would

shift from orthodoxy to liberalism. It is possible, therefore, that both heterodox and orthodox could be in the same new Church. This might avoid some of the potential nihilism of the fully heterodox liberal Church. But orthodox liberal views would therefore become a tolerated choice of those free to believe. You would still in the end get a human relations type Church, and it would be quite small. Another possibility is a diversity and diffusion into many liberal groups.

This has been an institutional analysis. Another view is that somehow these institutions are being passed by anyway, that into the new millenium religion is escaping from institutions and their dependent theologies. Effective religion is in homes, on the hillsides and in hired halls. My robes are as good as your robes. If so then implicit religion, a tendency to gnosticism, atomised meaning, leads the way: or holy chaos and flexible choice.

Institutionally, the conclusion is that the old Church, denomination and sect continuum has broken down. New belief types match authority types, each with different responses to the religious culture and its continued decline in church contact. Only the fading traditionalisms stay fully loyal to parts of old denominations, the bigger conversionists have new loyalties, the orthodox liberals lose their way, and the heterodox liberals don;t really care. If you take this to its logical end, you get a New Reformation. That' s it.

Seminar

Great and Little tradition analysis: useful but must be discarded?

Chaplaincies and rural/ suburban churches: orthodox liberalism' s last hope?

If not these futures, then what?

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