

3. Public Theology: Declaring the Preeminent Jesus

a) Our 'public' task

- Construction
- Re-possession
- Demolition

b) What to do...

- i) The need for prayer
- ii) The need for authentic contextualization

"Contextualization is not giving people what they want. It is giving God's answers (which they probably do not want) to the questions they are asking and in forms they can comprehend." (Keller)

iii) The need to be wisely thick and offensive in public

- common ground is not neutral ground but 'borrowed capital'
- public theology *is* public apologetics *is* public evangelism

iv) The need for joined-up thinking

- *Between top down and bottom up*
- *Between church gathered and Christians in the world*

"The Church should not be even the smallest direct centre of culture, but she must be the greatest indirect cultural force" (Schilder)

- *Between people's 'material needs' and their 'spiritual needs'*
- *Between love for neighbour and priority of love for believers (Gal. 6:10)*
- *Between church leaders and those under their care*
- *Between local gospel churches*

v) The need for God-given courage (1 Pet. 3:13-17)

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Public Theology – A Biblical Perspective

Introduction

- Public theology: "...the careful, theological thinking about why and how Christians should bear witness in the public square. Included here are questions about how a believer personally relates to public institutions, how Christians thinks about the best way public order should be constituted, how and to what extent a Christian should strive to influence public policy." (Bolt)
- Delineating the 'public' from the 'political' (Hunter)
- Delineating 'church gathered' from 'Christians in the world.'

1. Public Theology: False Steps

A Diluted Jesus

a) Features:

- The cry for social justice
- The goal of societal transformation
- The focus on 'bridging activities' (Jer. 29)
- e.g. The Good Samaritan
- The cultural appeal of the Gospel

b) Dangers:

- i) The anthropological problem
 - forgetting 'the antithesis' (Col. 2:6-8)
 - accepting the secular division of 'faith' vs. 'no faith'
- ii) The sociological problem
 - 'culture is religion externalized' (H. Van Til)

"The Fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system also began to whither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment." (Wilberforce)

iii) The Christological problem

- room for Jesus as long as he's not pre-eminent

A Delimited Jesus

a) Features:

- The cry of justification by faith alone
- The goal of personal transformation
- The focus on 'bonding activities' (Gal. 6:10)
- e.g. The Perfect Samaritan
- The counter-cultural offence of the gospel

b) Dangers:

i) The anthropological problem

- forgetting the *imago Dei* and common grace
- accepting the secular division of sacred vs. secular

"I find it very odd that Reformed people who believe in a sovereign God who is the ruler of heaven and earth are happy to accept the position given to them by modernism. To denigrate Christian involvement in society is to accept the place the world had given us." (Hughes)

ii) The sociological problem

"A plausibility structure is a web of beliefs that are so embedded in the hearts and minds of the bulk of a society that people hold them either unconsciously or so firmly that they never think to ask if they are true. In short, a plausibility structure is a worldview of a society, the heart of a community...One of the main functions of a plausibility structure is to provide the background of beliefs that makes arguments easy or hard to accept. (Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, p. 112.)"

iii) The Christological problem

- Christ has the right to be lord of all & Christians have a duty to challenge areas where this rule is not respected (2 Cor. 10:5)

2. Public Theology: A Biblical Framework

What is the gospel?

- Gospel on the ground / zoom-focus lens
- Gospel in the air / wide-angle lens

We're all 'now and not yet' but.....

1. Are we more like 'resident aliens' or more 'alienated residents'?
2. Are we more like pilgrims on the earth, or more like owners of the earth?
3. Are our 'good works' in Christ more like an 'audition' for the new heaven and the new earth, or more like a 'rehearsal'?

1. Rule

God creates humans in His image to rule over His creation, under His Lordship and for His glory. (Key texts: Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:6-10)

2. Ruined

The Fall reverses creation by replacing God with idols which rule us and destroy our relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. (Key texts: Gen. 3; Rom. 1:18-32)

Culture is what a society has made of God's creation, together with its ideals of what it ought to make. Or maybe we should put the ideal first. People make things, because they already have plan in view, a purpose, a goal, an ideal. The ideal comes first, then making things. First the norm, then the cultivation, the culture. So now we can see how culture is related to religion. When we talk of values and ideals, we are talking religion. In the broad sense a person's religion is what his heart most strongly, what motivates him most deeply. It is the value which transcends all other values... It is interesting that the Latin term *colere*... also refers to religious service, and comes into English as *cult*, *cultic* and so on.

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Culture and cult go together. If a society worships idols, false gods, that worship will govern the culture of that society. If a society worships the true God, that worship will deeply influence, even pervade its culture. If like ours, a society is religiously divided, then it will reveal a mixture of religious influences. (Frame)

3. Restrained

In the story of Noah, God shows his restraining power and His ultimate intention to redeem all creation through a second Adam. (Key Texts: Gen. 9)

4. Role-Modelled

Israel is a pattern illustrating of what God's rule looks like in all areas of human life and culture. (Key Texts: Ex. 19:6)

5. Rescued

Jesus Christ is the second Adam who in his role as prophet, priest and King, rules over everything. (Key Texts: Col. 1:15-20; Rom. 11:36; Eph 1:21)

6. Restored

In the gospel, Christians are united to Jesus and are restored to their role as rulers over creation. (Key Texts: Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:29)

The Great Commission is what the Cultural mandate looks after the resurrection. We must be clear that from the beginning God called into existence and unto Himself a spiritual Body that would rule over all He had created, establishing his magisterial rights at every level of society. The centuries of revelation to follow have provided deeper and fuller explanation and application of God's first dictum but have added nothing to its essential message. Once more, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." is not in addition to "...fill the earth and subdue it," but is a final phase in the unveiling of what God meant when He said "...fill the earth and subdue."

The product of Christians harnessing the first creation *is culture*, not a form of culture. In fact, this is the purest form of culture. This much we share with Adam. Where we differ with Adam, and with the Old Testament saints, is in the fact that the resurrection has inaugurated a new cosmic order. It is this order that has shifted the perspective of our dominion from one related to the first creation by looking retrospectively to what God did at the creation, to one that related to the first creation by looking prospectively in anticipation of the 'new creation'. (Barber)

7. Renewed

Christians look forward to a new heaven and new earth which is this creation renewed and restored fully and for eternity (Rev. 21)

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