Research

5 session
1st Lecture - Fri. night

RSIII-A LECTU
--Bob Fishel
Fall-1968

How to deal with the very practical problem of Miss Big-bottom, the perverbial Sunday-School teacher, both a blessing and a nuisance, because in your imagaination you don't know how she fits in with that dream of what the Church could be.

Struggle with knowing that when I start this job, it is not going to be an easy one, but exceedingly difficult--not from the work-viewpoint, but the spirit energy that must be used up in doing the kind of work we're called upon to do this weekend. It seems the time has been given to wear yourself out in that wierd kind of activity; yet, at the deeps it seems that is what it is about--to be the Church--that kind of stance that even dares to create the Church itself.

That is what you are doing when you begin the task of model-building, particularly in the local congregation. This is not the place for those who do not see that task as a deep-spirit struggle. It is not a kind of game. The Church's condition is far too advanced for game-playing. This is not a time for pragmatists, because just doing what works is not enough; but the kind of work we are doing and the kind of position we are in demands a wild kind of eternality mixed in. This has to do with dreaming--not the kind of dreaming that is day-dreaming, building fancy plans, or fill themselves with ideas--this is the kind of flesh and blood, bricks and mortor, sweat, pews and old hymn books--the ugly practical--that is what our struggle is about.

LAYOUT OF THE WEEKEND

(first part left out).....tomorrow, all day, we are going to deal with the Local Church--parish,in the morning; the congregation,in the afternoon; and in the evening, the Cadre. Bracketed on either end is the Universal Church--the struggle with dealing with that dynamic in history. What kind of context are we part of as we start this job. Historical Church--what kind of radical particularities are we part of, that nurtured and sustained us, brought us into being and calls us into all kinds of activity. That's the struggle on Sunday morning. Similar structure to RS1--we'll start off with an art-form ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ lecture each time and then go into workshops, or fancy kind of game-playing in which we sort of pretend to let loose with each other--but utterly serious workshopping.

Tonight I want to talk a little bit about the Universal church, and to do that we need to refresh our memories, and to talk about the kind of times we find ourselves in as men of the 20th Century. I used to draw out the history or picture of that by showing the 19th c. as having brought the end of some great age, and in the 21st c. another kind of fantastic age of new understanding, and that we in the 20th c. were in kind of a gap. No, the gap in my time is still there, but it is a kind of interior gap; or to put it another way, whatever it was that we used to explain ourselves and talk about ourselves as human beings, when we look back in the 19th c. and talk about that century as being over, it is both over and not over. We are in an area of very hazy grey, in which whatever it meant to be a human being in those times has come to an end; not that day after tomorrow something else is going to come, but already it has begun--the understanding of what it means to be a human being and the demands that brings.

That interior gap, where our imagination--everything we know about ourselves as humanbeings--has come to an end, and is no longer adequate. I am walking around as some utterly new strange mutation compared to my grandparents. There is something utterly strange in what it means to be alive today, and to be in the midst of the old and in the midst of the new at the same time. It is that kind of Self we want to talk about...that kind of struggle.

Can use the metaphor of our social understanding.being forged out in the West. You are part of 3 great revolutions: the Cultural in the 20th C, the Economic in the 19th C, and the political in the 18th. That is just a western social understanding of what it means to be a humanbeing. But even the Cultural revolution--that fantastic explosion of myth, style, and symbol, of understanding who I am, and how I style my life, what kind of symbols I lift up, the place where all the action is today--that will someday be over and some other kind of metaphor will be used.

Or the metaphor of the civilized man, at a time when civilization itslf is being wrapped up, and that whatever is new in the social revelution sphere or new in the civilizational sphere--just as great a gap as when pre-civilization back before anyone even knew what a city was or before agriculture was invented or before you could go out and stick your hand on a wild beast without him either running off so fast or eating your hand off. Its as great as that change was. Or perhaps back so far when that pre-human took that great leap and became a kind of humanbeing--that life went from just life into conscious life--that it means to be alive.

In this gap we call the 20th C it means to be part of a dimensic shift in the categories of consciousness and Lord-knows-what-else. We talk about it from Kirkegaardian vocabulary as consciousness of consciousness. When those beings that live out past the 21st C. begin to forge out fantastic metephors of what it means to be a post-human man which will make the film "2001" look like child's play. You understand what it means to be alive in this time--they are making movies about it. What kind of pictures form in the mind that we do not even have categories for. Those are the times we are arriving upon.

The job of the Church, this body of people, this carrier of this understanding that life is made up of standing before a final reality, that you have no control over, that pushes you into the very middle, and in the midst of the most despairing or most exciting cuts you off without asking you, or requiring of you, demanding of you--doesn't ask. What does it mean to stand before that final reality and dare out of the Word to die to your illusion that life is made up of any but that. That you can live. Finally, it is THIS life you are forged and forced into and snatched out of; and the style of freedom of what it means to live here before this one and no other out of this word about what life is about. How does this wierd body which calls itself the Church, whose only task is to carry this event into history, begin to relate to those in this fantastic gap. Do you understand the depths of that problem?

Our memory goes back to a crucial event and we tell our story of who we are from this event; and maybe we can trace ourselves back even further, and maybe back before civilization in the old story of who we are...this begins to fade into kind of wierd wild stories of 7 days and 7 nights and floods that cover the earth. This is US, called and pushed into this kind of situation.

How do you move and how do you live and how do you operate, what kind of constructs do you talk about as the Church in this kind of situation we find ourselves in?

For me, I have to play a game with myself of abstraction in order to get ahold of it. There is a comprehensive church that I am a part of--or, it is both this body in the midst of history, but even a body that transcends. You go back to long before the story to walk with those unknown men, the pioneers of humanness itself, and they are part of the church. You can travel into the chaos of the unknown ahead of us, and talk about what it means to be the Church there. That comprehensive-style, I call that the Universal Church. What does it mean to be the universal Church?

But we also have this other thing on our hands--this thing called the Local Church. I am torn between seeing myself as part of that fantastic league that marches through history itself and being part of this fantastic, intricately complex local particular, not comprehensive, particular phenomena. If you picked it up and moved it over 3 blocks and merged it with the Methodists you would find on your hands an entirely different phenomena on your hands--you would have to draw an entirely new picture for that new particular.

I am on a tightrope walking back and forth, and the wierd thing is that you get right up to the comprehensive church and it disappears because you know it is all in Fishel's imagination; or you get right down to the local, and it disappears too, because even the most primtive Baptist that seems itself as a particular body related to absolutely no-one else is still operating out of the Bible, which was handed on by the ~~Comprehensive Church~~ Universal Church. So these are both imaginary and yet the most real possible. They are the poles of the true polarity, and what, I guess, we talk about there is the Historical church, holding the tension between those two.

One construct you can put in your mind tonight to leave there as we go through the weekend, would be this Universal Church. It is made up of three parts: first, there are the religious traditions--the place where what it means to be a humanbeing, what it means to participate in the sweep of history, explodes into human consciousness; and people sit down and do the kind of homework we are going to do this weekend in order to put concrete form to this fantastic image of being alive and ~~humanform~~ being a humanbeing. I don't care if it is Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or if we use the category "religion" at all; but wherever you find human beings struggling to put concrete form. The fantastic collection of human struggle is probably the key stone, the watershed for the Universal Church--that's the religious traditions of all men of all time.

There is a wierd second group that I call the Latent Church. Any time someone sets down to work on the concrete structures, there are some in the midst who say "you guys are all wet, you are wrong," or get kicked out of the concrete structures, or decide the concrete structures are a big fat "pile," and they would never be caught dead in the Church--guys like Ernest Hemingway, or D. H. Lawrence, or Piccaso, or those fantastic inventors who participated in the midst of humanness itself--the last thing they want to think about is the fact that they are participating in the human venture with the category "religion" or "church." They are aware of what they are doing, but the depth awareness--the fact that they are struggling with the basic ground of consciosness of humananity itself is not what they are clear about. They are going out to be a good university student, doing my job, running a fantastic xxxx revolution, creating fantastic pictures, but don't saddle me with that category--don't even raise the question of the Church, it is irrelevant. And if you asked one of them, "Did you know you were a great latent-churchman?" I don't have any idea why you would say that, but why don't you give me ten bucks to help get this revolution going. Go up to Che Guevara and say, "Che, did you know you are a great latent churchman?"

Now according to the Church, the Church is the only one that can put the label "latent churchman" on anyone. The latent churchman would not use that expression. He would say he was a good revolutionary, or a good inventor, a good soldier, a good writer, or I'm just struggling to be myself. But we, the Church, can say, "He doesn't know it, but he is doing the Lord's work."

In 1965 Eugene Carson Blake came on the radio and said he wanted every Christian to show up in Selma on Tuesday morning; and some of us went there and were upset because we weren't in charge. There were guys down there working for five years before the Church woke up to the fact that if it was to be any place at all it was to be in Selma. The latent Church was there struggling with what it meant to be a humanbeing. Don't make any mistake, though, once you are the self-conscious church you can never retreat back to the latent Church. You cannot decide to be the Latent Church any more. You can only decide to be the Church or not be the Church.

One of the greatest demons to crop up when it becomes too much to struggle, struggle, struggle with the structures--let me just go out and be me. No, no. You are all <u>marked</u>.

Over here are those called the Intentional Church--those in history who have done what the Lord demanded to be done, and dared to struggle with the tradition or ground that tradition in the historic process; and dared to put the name Jesus Christ on that. That is what the struggle was about. That struggle was pronounced good in the Word of Jesus Christ. That is the body I am talking about as the Intentional Church. As we talk about the rest of the weekend we have to talk about this body here as the dream part of this mud, sweat, and tears in the particularity.

When we closed down RS1, this picture was burned, I believe, on many people's consciousnesss's--that body of people who dared to stand between the no-longer and the not-yet; and they stood there to forge out this fantastic thing we call history, out of responding to the

demand, erupting out of the future itself--or to put it another way, to respond to the Lord of history itself--to create that which was not yet would be; and to do that not for their own sake, but for that fantastic complex of structures of social institutions that made up the complexity of human life. We struggled with what does it mean to stand at this point and see oneself as part of that revolutionary cadre which takes that particular relationship to history. That image talks about a spirit decision that every human being has to make at every minute of his existence. You don't wake up there out on the point--every moment suicide or crucifixion are the options I have in dealing with my life. Am I going to live my life on behalf of all mankind and respond to the demands of total reality itself, or is my life going to be that which is either subtely, opening, or hiddenly gobbled up. That is the only decision that any human being has to make.

One way to talk about how the Church, these people, relate to me, is to just be here so that any time any humanbeing wants to know what the struggle is in his life it is there for him to see, and he only has one decision--am I going to create history or is history going to be that which pulls me? The church's job is to be that possibility. It is this body's job to make manifest, a clear sign by its living, this Word. That is what our papas talked about when they said be a little Christ--you live as ALL is good. This is not a stance reduced to one small part--everyone down here who voted for Richard Nixon, or that little part that voted for Humphrey. This style is a style for all--it pronounces all as <u>good.</u> No living out of druthers, guilt, or fear, or dreams, or that desire to be alive, or the desire to be dead, or any particular combination of those--but the style to live out of being totally RECEIVED, that lives out of the fact that all those fantastic complexities that I am are received; and that one who lives out of the revolutionary past, if you will--the Word pronounces all that as APPROVED; and the Word that says everything on the otherside of the gap is POSSIBLE--anything. You are not bound by anything. You can create what you cannot even imagine. These are the ones who have that WORD ground into their being.

How do you fit this to the world. That's great for the basement of 3444 Congress Parkway, but when you leave, the question is how do you get this into the practics--that's the struggle.

If we had CS1 together you would have heard all this before--I am going to have to go too fast, in order to understand how this relates to the world we are in.

We talk about model-building, or what does it mean to bring the Christ Word to the world? What are the practics, as a 20th C. man, to do this.

Every man shows up with a question in his bowels. Am I going to live or am I going to die? That question never comes in your mail as a card with "check one--Suicide or Crucifixion?" It doesn't come that way--it always comes like "what in the hell am I going to do now?" It is not intellectual, it is from way

down here as a demand--not a question you thought up because you didn't have anything else to do. It is a question of life--it asks you. How do I respond? How do I respond to that which boxes me and demands that question be asked?

Let's go back and look at grandmother a little bit. When she got asked questions like that she had two choices--two ethical umbrellas to provide answers. You chose good over evil or bad. (Philosophers had a fancy name for that kind of ethics.) Over here she had the right vs. the wrong. Grandma got into trouble when she disdovered what was good was wrong. She found she couldn't carry both umbrellas out when it was raining. So she would pick one umbrella or the other. Now we in the 20th C. have an advantage over grandma,(and we didn't have to read Bultmann or Bonhoeffer to discover this) these are not the way we respond today; but in one sense we have worked out a new ethical umbrella.

This umbrella we sometimes call contextual ethics or ethics of responsibility--here the question is the responsible over against the irresponsible. Bonhoeffer put under the responsible OBED. and FREE, and under the irresponsible put JUST the obedient or JUST the free. How would I be both obedient and free? or the question of how I am going to live.

(section not clear)

There is also the danger of trying to answer this question by saying this is the Lord putting the question on my bowels, but this is a problem I have as an American; in otherwords, instead of living out of the most universal it is safer, easier, to decide about Nixon and Hubert; it is easier to struggle with how I live with Nixon as my President. Out here you have Chinese, Viet Namese, Chekoslvkns; its not narrowed down to just my own kind. Or safer to narrow down Nixon to my suburban neighborhood, or my family (though that's a bit hard to imagine), or maybe Nixon and me--think of the dialogue you could have. You see the danger of reductionism--the problem of dealing with Nixon as my president shrinks down to where it is not even a problem anymore.

That is the biggest problem with contextual ethics is what context you have for your question very much effects your answer.

(garbled)

The church's job is to show people how they can answer the questions that show up on their bowels. The church of God must forge out a methodology....(garbled)

We can talk about it as making a journey both into the past and into the future. You show up here with a question put upon you by Ultimate Reality. The way you answer is to project ahead to ask "what kind of impossible does the future demand I create to answer this question?" I anticipate the way this question should be answered in the future, and then move back and gather up the past to bring into the present moment, in order that the future can be forged out.

We struggle to gather up all the wisdom out of the past (garbled) ....you sit down and create a concrete picture, a story, about this past that has brought you to this point. EX: I am an American citizen because I live on a hunk of geography that looks like this: (grid abstract of US) --to draw that fantastic kind of picture of who you are. You not only grid the U.S., but the whole world--even start with it--from the global down to the local.

(garbled) (goes into the geo-social grid categories)

What has the past brought me to and the future demands I create? (garbled)
Requires an ordered existence, or that it is never entered into haphazardly, but always with a kind of wild intentionality.

(garbled)