

11/13/72

Remarks on the LOCAL CHURCH

Don, I want to ask a question. I am going to ask the priors when they come in. Now, in order to do it, I have to make a two hour speech in 5 minutes. Think back to when we worked on the social triangles. In the old days we said that you not only had dynamics that fill up the triangles but that you had two other series of dynamics that were just as complicated as those there. But we intentionally bracketed those.

One of those bracketed was the structural, had to do with the structural form of sociology such as the state, and the family as a structural unit, and so on. And we will never finish this until we have that done, although in terms of our time I don't think we will be there for some time. This is not new however. One dimension of that structural sociality has to do with the religious structure, which we are particularly concerned with in the local church experiment. Now, if we focus for a moment, if you have the concepts there. If you focus with the same ideas on the local congregation itself, the local church itself, and I am going to narrow it down to the local congregation. You did have at least these three dynamics.

I don't really mean that. I mean to be more dogmatic. There are three dynamics. On the triangles of the local church, around which we have forged the local church experiment, there are the three dynamics. We have only done one. I call that the functional dynamic. Then there is another, that is the seminary, the college and the sodality, that the functional dynamic . . . sociological reality and then I would like to call the spiritual but I won't. I'll call it the Human Dynamic This is the one that grounds that in humanness. This would have to do with such things as the spirit dimension of humanness which the other world would point to. It would have . . . sanctification. And then it would point to the word dimension of humanness or the word that makes possible the selfunderstanding, or the justification pole. At the time, Luther called it a Thrust, this is the missional. and then the third at the top would have. Buber called it a Thrust. This is the missional dynamic. This is the sociality dynamic of humanness or it is the missional dynamic of humanness.

I see a big triangle that is down in the left hand corner. And the functional over in the right. as you face the triangle and up at there the structure which I am interested in. but if you don't see these other two, then you will never have that in focus.

Now, you and I have been here, not out in the local church experiment or a long time. We have experimented with this and in the last two years. we have come to consciousness. We haven't hit bottom yet, but this has to do with the structural. Ecclesiola, Congregation (these are structural categories) and Temple. The Ecclesiola is where your primal community goes on. Though this functional dynamic takes place in all three of these, that is where your primary engagement, primal community goes on. Though this functional dynamic takes place in all three, there is where it primarily takes place. And let's say for a moment, and we want to go back into church history and look at this because the ecclesiola has been there from the very beginning. . . . because this went on in those socalled Wednesday night meetings.

And I see the Ecclesiola gathering once a week into the congregation dynamic. which keeps the smaller unit from turning in on itself out toward the broader mission. Whatever else it does or it brings you in contact with foreigners without which you and I cannot maintain our inclusive perspective. Of course there is a limit to that, but when you talk about the dynamic, if you can't make the pole exist, at least you can go on Sunday morning to worship. and find some bastard who is of different quality who knows he is doing ecclesiola. It is the dynamic you are after, not the actuality.

The Temple dynamic - if you look at this in terms of the renewal of the church thru the eyes of the ecumenical push in our day. to me it is fantastically exciting. The temple then has to do with

congregation in your ecumenical parish and perhaps they will come together like we do once a month. I doubt it. I believe this is why our quarter system is sacred. Who ever invented the 13 week was a genius. That thirteen week is discontinuous into your Temple exercise. Which the moment we move to the parish that Temple is going to be life or death. I mean the Parish Tactics are going to be life or death.

I believe there is more, as a matter of fact I didn't mean to say this. That this quarter I was hoping that we would know what a congregation was about. We know what an ecclesiola is.

When we were in Sunday school I'm not sure we knew yet what a congregation is. And you have to play with the Temple long before you are really serious about it. And I was hoping next quarter we could come down to the temple and that means to me completely reforging what we call our house church. And that is probably the oldest sociological entity in our midst. That goes way back to when we were long ago in Austin. But we need to redo this and when we redo it this time, both in the congregation and the temple, focus on the temple that we try to design exactly the form of the services, as we called it when the meaning of that word meant office, or the public activity, and we get that exactly the way we want it. I wish now we could assign every one of us here to a local congregation. Methodist, Presbyterian. Catholic or whatever's right in this neighborhood to work toward that experiment.

Now, my very simple question. Have we got anywhere in this country an ecumenical parish in which all or most of the churches are either in a galaxy or could be in if we decided that we might go there to deal head on now in the self conscious experiment in the structuring dynamic of the congregational dynamic of the local church dynamic within the social structures dynamic?

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