

The Church lost its power in various fields by over-asserting its authority

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In the course of its history the Christian Church has been compelled to relinquish its regency in more and more areas of human activity. The Church has lost its voice in economics, politics, science, philosophy, philanthropy, and psychology, successively. Today the Church is losing futurology -- the images and ideas which project future expectations. Instead of being the carrier of a new future for individual and collective mankind, the Church has retreated to the point where it is concerned primarily with its own future survival. Consequently, its future is threatened.

It is significant irony that the Church lost its power in various fields by over-asserting its authority. For example, the Church lost its prophetic role as the Voice of God to the political sphere as it developed secular political aspirations of its own. The Church as worldly rival to the kingdom of men has no leverage with which to proclaim the Kingdom of God. "He who seeks to save his life shall lose it...." The way for the Church to win back its future is to lose itself for the sake of the world. As Carl Braaten points out in his book, *The Future of God*, "This is why religious professionals tend to be conservative. They are filled with anxiety, lest in tampering with the forms, the substance of religion itself leaks out. This anxiety must be overcome by hope, lest in refusing new forms, the norms of religion have a perverse effect on all of life."

This anxiety must be overcome with faith, hope and practicality (love). The key role for the Church is to be the mediator between God and the World. There are forces at work to change the world from both the heavenly and the earthly side, and the Church (i.e., the churches) must be the center of harmony between the two, heavenly and earthly. Yet today, the Church is paranoid and therefore paralyzed. Witnessing the decline in membership, income, and youth impact, the Church lives in fear for its survival: "This horror of the future is perhaps best understood as a sign of the degree to which modern theology as a function of the Church has succumbed to the establishmentarian mentality that has the Christian movement crippled in Modern times, and set in opposition to the revolutionary forces at work to change the world," Braaten says.

Instead of being the most radical organization of all (here the word "radical" is used in its "root" meaning of getting to the heart or origin of something), the Church has become a social form which tends to impede the coming of the Kingdom. Nowadays, the Communists have kindly offered to bring the Kingdom in for us, and it is a sign of the Church's retreat that it does not 'lee this as a challenge.

Other problems which the Church experiences are connected to this fear/survival complex. The problem of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation), so much discussed today, is powered by the attempt to find a way of maintaining old standards (past recollected forward) in new situations. As Braaten writes: "... the Bible belongs to a past world-view and makes little contact with the present situation of modern man. All our talk about hermeneutics today is a tell-tale sign of our difficulty."

If you tell me that my mother's Bible is a collection of myth, parable, theology and hearsay, you are likely to be called anti-Christ. The violence or resentment of my reaction is due not nearly so much to the fact that you have slandered Holy Writ, as to the perception that you are shaking my future model. (By future model, I mean the collection of images, thought, expectations and memories which inform our view of all future events. It is the grid work through which we perceive reality. It is often unconscious, but always present.) I expected to interpret life in the light of the Bible. If you ask me to reverse the process, to use an external standard to judge the Bible, you have shaken my foundations. The strong talk of the Inerrancy of God's Word is (albeit in part) a defensive maneuver against such "heresy." Under the circumstances in

which one's salvation -- survival -- is dependent solely upon believing the right creed, then anything which threatens that creed threatens that person's soul. His reaction will automatically be violently defensive (especially the strong offense brand of defense). The problem of threatened survival is analogous in both individual and collective cases.

The corrective for this paralyzing paranoia is to remember that often it is not Satan but God who is "rattling the dishes," shaking the future model in order to bring in new possibilities. As Robert Benne writes in *Wandering in the Wilderness*, "The Lord of History is the destroyer of men and their comfortable worlds. He is particularly active in the midst of the struggle between the old and the new.... This insight is very hard for many American church people to accept because they have been reared with the near heretical notion that God is only associated with 'good' experiences...."

"Individuals and societies cannot long remain within their mastered worlds. Pressures of new possibilities from within themselves, unpredictable events in the external world, claims of persons or other societies, and limitations and contradictions shatter it. This shattering of our mastered worlds is accompanied both by terror and hope."

The point is that this is a period of accelerated change -- in values, technology, etc. For the modern church, that change can be a threat, a challenge or a source of hope. On the specific problem of hermeneutics, Braaten remarks, "...the hermeneutical gap between the Bible and modern culture can be narrowed only within the horizon of the future common to both." Other problems which the church faces can also be analyzed in terms of the future model crisis. Dr. Braaten traces the source of the Death-of-God theology to the loss of the biblical eschatological perspective: "It is this loss of eschatology which has precipitated that mood in theology which feels it has lost God. Hopelessness is God-lessness, because both are future-lessness."

The problem of ecumenism -- the drive for and against cooperation with other churches on the part of the various denominations -- is also a reflection of a religious collectivity faced with existential dread in the realization of its own possible, imminent death. Some feel that the only way the church can survive is through consolidation; while others feel that the mixing of faiths is a theological sin tantamount to hellfire for all concerned. Since both of these viewpoints are asking the wrong question -- How can I save my own life? -- They will both tend to weaken the church's influence. As Carlyle Marney writes on the state of the Church: "...the churches, by and large, are closed communions, ghettos, refuges of sick and miserable people.... Our little institutions will neither civilize nor redeem nor save nor make.... But we believe in the salvation of the world -- not the salvation of the church."

The basic problem of the modern church is that it's trying to save its own neck!

Today, many people are concerned about shaping the future. They no longer want to rely on God as a sort of deus ex machina to solve all of our problems. As John Gardner wrote in Robert Theobald's *Futures Conditional* collection: "Less and less do men suppose, even those who believe devoutly in a Supreme Being, that God busies himself with the day-to-day micro-administration of the world. [Man] has replaced his fervent prayer to God with a shrill cry of anger against his own institutions." (Typical American Deist!)

While the church may affirm (I believe -- should affirm) the active presence of God in present history, it must answer those who are not able to see it that way by becoming involved in the transformation of society itself. As Braaten puts it, "Revolutionary change is the responsibility of eschatological hope."

And Marney agreed: "It is a death of God and our illusion to ask God to do that which lies within our power."

And Robert Theobald, from his future-planners viewpoint adds, "There is no way to come to understand the real options involved in the future unless you start to become involved in creating them.... Man has to create his future for himself."

Many people are excited today about the possibilities of man's control over nature. They expect a brighter future based on man's manipulation of the elements. The church should be wise enough to know that the real problem is man's relationship to history, which is the joint enterprise of God and man. Therefore, while rejoicing in its theological insight, the church must leave its cloister and identify and sanctify the legitimate sources of social change, claiming them for God.

It is time to recognize that change is coming. There is a New Age dawning, rough hew it how we may. As Carlyle Marney describes, "Nearly all of my negative mail is from people who just cannot stand the thought of a new faith. They say I talk against the Gospel. But something new is coming. It always has. And you can bet that it will be partly new, it will be partly old and it will be religion.... And God who is God will be in on it.... With all the confident arrogance I can muster I say, too, that a new day has dawned and I do not know when or where it began or even who its chief spokesman may be, but it is already here."

And if we can hear, we shall be part of it."

In conclusion, three "words" are appropriate to the Christian church in general, and to the Unification Church in particular: Faith -- "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) The ultimate promise of the Kingdom of God, and the faithfulness of God the Father is the unconditional forgiving love which frees the individual and the Church from paranoia concerning the future.

Hope -- "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 16:25) To the extent that the Church is able to sacrifice the idea of its own survival for the sake of the salvation of the world, to just that extent will it become the vehicle through which God will reconcile the world to himself. The person who is not worried about the survival of his own life, or the organization which is not concerned with its own private welfare -- these will be the forces in history through which God will work to restore the world. If a witness is not troubled about his own life, or his own success, but only for the welfare of the other and The Other (God), then that person is less likely to be perceived as a threat to the person whom he is trying to influence and help.

Practicality (the practice of love) -- "You will be faced with many things in the future, so I am going to tell you about several important things. An evangelist is a mediator between God and man in order to connect these two. In the political, economic and cultural worlds, the one who is playing the role of mediator must know clearly and precisely what is taking place on both sides. Especially, as a mediator, you must be between the two, and in that case you must not be strongly protesting what you are going to say to them in the beginning. You must be calm; showing God that you are strongly on His side; and before the people, you must be entirely like those who are on the people's side. Both parties would not like the idea of having to lose something there. So, you must be going back and forth between God and the people...." -- Rev. Sun Myung Moon ("The Attitude of the Evangelist")

The individual evangelist and the whole church exist solely in the position of mediator, to unite God and man. The Church must accept this eschatological future as its own, and give up its life and energy and organization toward the salvation of the whole world--and that means salvation in the kind of worldly categories which touch people at their heart (Future Model). People will follow those who will secure their future for them--in this world and the next. If the Christian churches want to regain their vitality, they must go before God as one who lives solely for Him, and before the people as one who lives solely for them--never as one who is seeking to justify himself, and that means changing a great deal to meet the radically changing "felt needs" of people today. If the Church is willing to do this, not only will its own life be preserved by heaven, but also it will be drawn to recognize the new future possibilities offered by the Unification Church. If the Unification Church embodies these words of Reverend Moon, and becomes an evangelist for God in the true sense, then the Christian church will find in the Unification Church not a threat, not a challenge, but a hope for the salvation of itself and the whole world.