

## ALC Lectures

I want to say, first of all, that I'm very glad to have been invited to be with you during your conference this fall. When the invitation was first extended to me, it looked like a very easy matter to accept. But then we were given opportunity to teach and live on the east coast this fall, and, for a number of good reasons, wanted very much to accept. I was afraid that the move to New York State would prevent my being here, although I made it clear to the people at Syracuse University, before I signed the contract, that I did have this one engagement in October I very much wanted to keep. It was on these terms that the arrangement with Syracuse University was made. Needless to say, I have been looking forward to these days with much anticipation for quite some time.

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The subject is contemporary developments in theology, or in religious sensitivity, or in both, since I understand theology and religious sensitivity to be intertwined. I've not decided which comes first, theology or religious sensitivity. I don't yet know whether events occur within the religious community before they become subjects for articulation within theological statements, or if ~~the new developments~~ the new developments are first of all conceived by theologians, then eventually find their way into the church. I imagine that both sequences are occurring simultaneously -- a kind of perpetual two-way traffic between ~~formal theological articulation~~ formal theological articulation and the inner tuggings, hunches, and expressed interests of persons, without formal theological training, within the churches. Each mirrors the other, I believe. The same developments occur in both places. So when I talk about specific developments with which certain theologians or thinkers are associated, I believe you will recognize the same to be interests which have been expressed by persons within your congregations.

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The subject, I repeat, is contemporary developments in theology,

but not via the laundry list -- this has happened, and this has happened, and something else has happened, a lot of it in Germany -- but developments which have occurred according to a discernible pattern. (The pattern is one of alternation, where opposite meets opposite, where contrary currents become interchangeable, where there is ~~fluctuation~~ fluctuation back and forth between contrasting emphases, the two most prominent of which are the actional and the contemplative (which distinction I'll get to in a little while). And, if I have ~~been~~ been given three specific blocks of time, I'd like to deal with three specific sets of contrary alternation: the first, as I have mentioned, between action and contemplation ~~as~~ these are characteristic of ~~present~~ present Christian religious enthusiasms; the second, the contrast between we and they as this distinction refers to the differences conceived by Christians between themselves and advocates of the non-Christian religions; and the third, a kind of summary statement on identity which will involve in part a treatment of the distinction between he and she. This means that the first presentation will be on ~~theological developments rather strictly defined. The s~~ logical developments rather strictly defined, that is, defined within the profession and within the Christian context. The second will reflect something of the intense current interest in the relation of Christian and non-Christian religions; and, as you know, from the interests of the youth within your congregations, as well as from some of the interests you may be cultivating on your own, there is an intriguing sort of religious syncretism which is occurring at the present time, an interweaving of strands from religious traditions east and west. The third presentation will deal with crucial identity questions. As someone who watches pastors rather carefully, I'd like to offer some comments on the ~~role~~ role of the pastor in a world like ours. What I'm doing, in short, is a little bit of everything.

I think it only fair that I convey my point of view at the outset. No, I won't go into autobiographical detail about my childhood, my upbringing in Lutheran churches in a Scandinavian family, my subsequent formal education, much of it in Lutheran schools. I'm referring more particularly to the way I view the current changes, indeed, upheavals, in the religious world. My viewpoint, in this respect, has been fashioned by my fascination with the theology of hope ala Jürgen Moltmann, Johannes Metz, and the German philosopher Ernst Bloch. Possibly because of the personal attractiveness of Jürgen Moltmann, who is as sane and agreeable a human being as one would want to meet, I've been a follower of the theology of hope for almost ten years. To say "follower" is not to admit or claim discipleship, for I don't think that I've ever gone so far with the theology of hope that I've come to regard it as a kind of summary of Christian truth. But I do think it re-affirmed some necessary aspects of the Christian gospel at an appropriate time. I found myself fascinated with it, and my fascination, though tempered somewhat, continues.

Perhaps this is the starting point, the viewpoint that human life can be conceived according to the analogy of the ship moving toward the harbor. This is Ernst Bloch's analogy, and he confesses to have conceived of it because of the juxtaposition of geographical and logistic factors in the town where he was born and raised. In the center of the town, running through the town and through the adjoining countryside, was the river; and in another section of town was a high hill on which was set the large cathedral. This provided an immediate contrast for Bloch, a contrast between process and permanence, which he said were symbolic of the way all of us order our experiences. Either life is like the river, flowing, ever moving on, or it is like cathedrals on hilltops. The one, Bloch said, is regulated by change; the other, bastion-like, functions to maintain what we regard as being eternal and sacred.

Our attitude to the world is formed in one of these two ways, Bloch surmised, as well as ~~as~~ our attitude toward ourselves. From here Bloch went on to talk about the function of religion in the west, which ~~fun~~ function he saw primarily in terms of maintaining the eternal values. Western religion is of a permanence rather than a process type. It is not geared to ~~xxxx~~ <sup>keeping</sup> things moving and free, but, instead, to providing safeguards, to insuring sanctions, to keeping time from invading the cathedral, as it were. God is viewed as the God of permanence, the sustainer of the permanent moral code. Well, all of this began to sound very much like the contrast Charles Glock and his associates drew in the very perceptive book To Comfort and To Challenge. Some of you are familiar with the book, no doubt, and recall Glock's attempt to come to terms with the ruling dispositions of several New England churches. This, of course, is the meaning of the title, TO COMFORT and TO CHALLENGE. The sociologists discovered that ~~xxxx~~ these churches which were motivated toward keeping life moving and free were churches in serious trouble. They were the churches which had become involved in social issues. They had attempted to ~~make~~ have some effect upon processes of social and political change. They were working to ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ significantly alter society's status quo. These were the challenge churches; and, regardless of how effective they were in these ventures, they were all in serious difficulty internally. Many of them were split, ~~and~~ or had been split, or had gone through a series of pastors, or had pastors who had serious questions about their own vocations. On the other hand, there were Comfort churches which appeared to be functioning to maintain a sense of permanence. These were the ones which continued to offer their membership solace or peace or comfort or confidence; and while the others were talking about social change and political involvement, the comfort Churches were dealing with more private concerns, that is, with the specific spiritual needs of their own memberships. Glock found these

Comfort churches to be flourishing, unlike the turmoil which had invaded the Challenge churches. And yet his analysis really evokes the question about the degree to which Comfort churches had taken all the dictates of the gospel seriously.

Well, these were the thought that occurred to me as I read Ernst Bloch and was taken captive by his distinction ~~by~~ between the river and the cathedral. Bloch's point that the contrast is symbolic of larger attitudes toward ~~x~~ life seemed to be implicit in Glock's analysis of comfort and challenge churches. Not until later did I realize that the name Bloch sounds very much like ~~xxxxxxx~~ the name Glock. And I suppose it is too much to claim that Glock is something of a chip off the old Bloch.

But we are still some distance away from the theology of hope, because theology of hope is not simply a set of impressions regarding ~~xxx~~ attitudes toward the world, but an interpretation of the Christian scriptures as well. And it is here that the work of Gerhard van Rad in Old Testament interpretation and Ernst Kasemann in New Testament interpretation figures large. You recall my saying that Bloch developed the image of the ship moving toward the harbor. He went on to say that we are like that ship moving toward a place of identity, which he called home. Not until we arrive at the harbor will we be able to understand the journey, nor, more significantly, will we begin to sense just who we are. While the journey is occurring, we are only partially aware of its significance and we are ~~onlyxxx~~ partially aware of ourselves. Not until we arrive at the place of identity will we ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ really know ourselves. And Bloch wants this lesson construed in individual and personal terms as well as in a corporate sense. Not until humankind arrives at its destination -- very much like Buckminster Fuller's

"spaceship earth" -- can it acquire the significance of all that it has  
and  
been through ~~xxxxxxx~~ come to ~~fx~~ convincing self-understanding. Well,  
that was Ernst Bloch. And, as I said, the theology of hope also depends  
upon the insights of ~~xxxxxxx~~ renowned professional biblical scholars.  
Gerhard von Rad said, for example, that the Hebrew word of God, Jahweh,  
or YHWH, should be construed in the future tense, not, as is traditional,  
"I am Who I am," which is present tense, but "I will be Whom I will be."  
It is the image of the God of the exodus, who goes before and follows after  
his pilgrimage people, who meets Abraham on the way, who companies with  
nomads, ~~xxx~~ pilgrims, wayfarers, peoples on the move. The metaphor may be  
a variation on the image of the ship advancing toward harbor. Coupled  
with this was Ernst Kasemann's declaration that eschatology is the mother  
of all Christian theology, which is another way of saying that eschatology  
is the seed-bed, the formative context, in which the Christian vision was  
conceived. Well, ever-simply, this is all Jürgen Moltmann needed. The  
vision of Ernst Bloch coupled with the products of the very finest in  
biblical scholarship helped bring the theology of hope into being. It was  
easy for Moltmann to conceive of the relation of God to his people accor-  
ding to the ~~xxxxxx~~ classic exodus model; he could also construe Bloch's  
imagery in the same way. But it was the New Testament dictates which became  
even more compelling. For to say that eschatology is the ~~xxxxxx~~ mother of  
all theology is really to acknowledge that the eschatological vision ~~is~~ was  
normative for the earliest Christians. Take that vision away and early  
~~Christianity~~ Christianity quickly becomes something else.  
For the core-element of the New Testament is the great expectation that  
something is about to happen. "There are some standing here who will not  
taste death," Jesus says, "until the Kingdom of Heaven comes." And one can  
go on to suggest that the same motif is implicit in the teachings of the  
Sermon on the Mount or in St. Paul's wrestling with ethical issues. Always

the principle is the ~~shortness~~ shortness of the time, the expectation that the Kingdom of God is near, that Christ will return, and so on. Take this element away and the New Testament ~~loses~~ loses its vital nerve.

I had this lesson brought to me with some force when I met Norman O. Brown one day at a ~~faculty~~ faculty gathering in Santa Cruz. I came into this luncheon, introduced myself to Professor Brown, and was startled by his response (when I surmised that we'd only make small-talk): He said, "Oh, I've been wanting to meet you." Somewhat taken ~~aback~~ aback, for I couldn't understand why, I waited, not really masking my surprise. And he added, "I understand that you are a Christian." Well, I do count myself a Christian, but, please understand that this is a faculty gathering at a state university, where such talk, though not ruled out by the circumstances, does not always prevail. When Professor Brown noticed my hesitancy, he said, "You are a Christian aren't you?" I replied at once. "Yes, I am a Christian, but I'm not sure ~~that~~ that you and I are using that term in the same way." His response was immediate and forceful. "Certainly we could agree on what it is to be a Christian. A Christian is one who is praying the last words of the New Testament fervently." When I looked startled, he added, "You do remember the last words of the New Testament, don't you." I replied that I did, and then we said the words together, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

I went away from that exchange stunned, and the more I reflect on the exchange, the more ~~shrewd~~ taken I am by it. How shrewd it was of him to define being a Christian in that way: one who is praying the last words of the New Testament fervently. And, of course, Moltmann would go on to say that if this prayer is not being prayed fervently, if the expectation has been dulled or has become non-existent, something very

serious and debilitating has happened to Christian faith. Perhaps we've found ways to accommodate the faith to the ~~skak~~ contemporary state of the world so that challenging the status-quo isn't necessary any longer. But this, in Moltmann's view, is not the dictate of the New Testament's fundamental motif.

That was the point of orientation, and I found myself, like many of you, looking for more and more ways to keep life moving and free. It also became the day of tremendous innovation -- within the churches, within the human being. ~~kkkkkk~~ Liturgies were changing. Permanence-type choral music was abandoned for music swinging and groovier. Life styles changed. Hair grew longer. ~~kkkkkk~~ Neck ties were scrapped for turtlenecks and beads and Nehru jackets and ~~kkkkkk~~ pendants. And it became the era of Sister Cerita, with her innovative serigraphs; Harvey Cox, with his celebration of the secular city; the Berrigans, with their graphic social protests, and always the students and the advocates of the counter-culture. Moltmann's new theology of hope didn't inspire all of this, by any means, but it articulated well with all of it. For time had indeed invaded the cathedral. Permanence had been challenged by process. A previous dedication to fortresses, bastions, eternal ~~gx~~ values, permanent moral codes gave way to a fascination with change and ~~xxx~~ movement and flexibility and fluidity. ~~kkkkkk~~ It was ~~kkkkkk~~ as though life itself was liberated... No more shackles. No ~~kkkk~~ artificial bondage. And we were free, indeed, compelled to turn our attention to the disadvantaged, the ~~xxx~~ poor, the hungry, the outcast, the deprived, the persecuted, the neglected ~~x~~ -- all of this as an appropriate enunciation of the Christian gospel.

Well, this was something of the vision that inspired us -- or some of us -- at that time, not so very long ago. And, as we reflect on it, I want you to recall that my attitude toward contemporary developments in religion and theology is ~~kkkkkk~~ regulated by the fact of necessary alternation.



Could one really have it both ways? Was it to be "public housing" one Sunday and "a mystery I can trust" the next? Was "public housing" to be construed as "a mystery I can trust?" Could ~~we~~ one do both at once? And what really was the both that were called for at once?

Perhaps the next significant event for me was a full coming to terms with monastic life, yes, monastic life in this country. I remember how we used to treat monasticism as ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ an ~~xxxxx~~ unworthy form of world-denial in the seminary, and I recall that I really paid little or no attention to them as we'd pass one of them on the highway. I knew that Trappists didn't talk much, and I knew that monks got up very early, and didn't get married, and ~~xxx~~ prayed a lot. But that was about all. Until ~~we~~ one day some students and I visited a small monastery, a rather austere monastery, in Santa Barbara, a monastery of women called The Monastery of Peer Claires. What an odd sort of day that was as ~~were~~ we were ushered into that small room in the middle of the monastery and waited ~~for~~ for something more to happen. We noticed that on one side of the room was a little opening, with a shade pulled down, and some grill-work on our side of the opening.

That was enough. But it led me from there to other monastic centers, from New Camaldole near Big Sur to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Oregon, then to Mt. Saviour in New York and to Oka near Montreal. Around and ~~around~~ around until our children can't help but say, "Dad, not another monastery."

Well, it may be crazy, but it's a hunch. The hunch ~~ix~~ doesn't really concern the eventual fate of the Church, but, instead, the ~~ixx~~ eventual fate of the counter-culture. I believe that the counter culture is destined to play a role somewhat similar to the role played by monastic centers. And I guess that hunch ~~h~~ is sustained by the intense interest contemporary students find in the writings of Thomas Merton, the Trappist hermit, monk, who did ~~ih~~ Bangkok in 1968. But the most significant observation is that I wonder if monastic centers might eventually become agents of social reconstruction, like they were in St. Benedict's time, when they became the chief means through which classical culture was transmitted into the Middle Ages and from there on to us.