

A Lutheran Educator In A Secular World

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Introduction

That we are living in a secularized world need scarcely any longer be said. What is, however, significant about our time is that secularism has identified itself with Christianity, or as may perhaps be said with greater truth, apostate Christians have adopted a secularist philosophy and yet have been unwilling to surrender the Christian name, and have even reinterpreted the orthodox terminology of the church to give it a purely secular meaning. Books that deal with the secular meaning of the Gospel and the secular nature of the Christian faith have been coming off the presses in increasing numbers.

Into this secularized world we have been called by God to serve as Lutheran educators. When we have said that we have already made it clear that while we are in this secularized world we are not of this world, for those who truly believe that they have been called by *God* to serve, and those who are truly Lutheran, can never be truly secularized men in a secularized world, as those terms are generally understood today.

Nevertheless, we have been called by God to serve in this secularized world as Lutheran educators, and if we are to try to reach the Pauline ideal of being all things to all men we must strive to understand this philosophy by which much of the world lives in our day and which has had its effect also on the young people who sit at our feet.

As we confront this philosophy which claims to be new but which is really only an old error in a new dress, we need first of all, however, to be clear in our own minds what the attitude of a Christian toward the secular world of material things ought to be, because it has been very easy for Christians under the guise of love for God to adopt a point of view which despises God's creation in an overreaction against secularist philosophy.

As Lutheran educators we might even ask whether such an overreaction has had its effect on the curricula of our Synodical schools. At the risk of hearing some of you say, "This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge," it might be asked, for example, whether our apparent lack of interest in the various areas of science is a reflection of an attitude toward this world which is more in keeping with the worldview of medieval monasticism than with the thought of Martin Luther.

Before we turn our attention to modern secularism, we shall, therefore, review some of the pertinent historical developments and some of the relevant Biblical perspectives as a basis on which we can deal more adequately with the problems created by modern secularist philosophy.

A Historical Review

As we survey the history of "Christian" thought, it is difficult to escape the conviction that Neo-platonism and the "Christian" heresies that grew out of it have left a mark on the church which to this day warps the Christian's view of material things. Gnosticism and Manichaeism were declared heresies and rejected by the church, and yet the Gnostic and Manichaean error which held that all matter is evil *per se* and that salvation is equivalent to the liberation of spirit from matter was not completely rooted out of the church.

Under the influence of Neo-platonic philosophy these ideas played a very significant role in the life of the church in the early middle ages. It was the legacy of men like Evagrius of

Pontus, John Cassian, Basil the Great, the two Gregories, Athanasius, and Augustine, all of whom to a greater or lesser degree had an unhealthy and un-Christian contempt for matter. Evagrius even went so far as to teach that the world which God created in the beginning was a purely spiritual world in which matter did not exist, and although he did not go to the Gnostic extreme of teaching that the material world was the creation of an evil god, yet he did hold that this visible world of matter was created as a consequence of the fall and as a concession to human weakness.¹

The whole monastic system of the Roman Church owes its existence in large measure to this *contemptu mundi*, which was the highest mark of true Christianity to the great majority of churchmen before the days of Martin Luther. At least the vows of chastity and poverty and, in some measure, even the vow of obedience flowed directly out of this veiled Gnosticism. Holiness became in large measure not a separation from all that was sinful but from that which is visible and material, so that Erasmus can record the boast of the monk who gloried in the sanctity which consisted in never touching money without wearing at least two pair of gloves.

There is a strange ambivalence in this view of holiness. To all outward appearances it manifests a contempt for the material world. And yet in reality it assigns to material possessions a value so great that to surrender these things is to bring a sacrifice so meritorious that it deserves salvation. A Christian ought to know that material things are not worth that much. He ought to know that the monastic ideal is a far cry from the spirit that says, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." To lose the things of this world is not irreparable loss. To give them up willingly is no meritorious sacrifice. And to gain them is not salvation.

Martin Luther, to whom the church owes so much in so many ways, has also in this area rendered invaluable service. Of the sanctity for which he strove in the monastery he learned to say, "The holier we became, the more we became children of the devil." He displayed a true understanding of the un-Christian nature of what was called the "spiritual life" when he wrote in the Large Catechism that the monks were violating the fifth commandment by fleeing out of the world into the monastery. He said that they "fled to the monasteries, so that they might not have to suffer wrong from anyone, or do anyone any good" (LC 1, 197).

Luther taught Christians once more to regard the natural world as a precious gift of God. His love for the trees, the flowers, and the birds of Wittenberg has been commented on so often that it is scarcely necessary to mention it again, but it is the sort of thing that one would not expect to find in a man who still labored under the misconceptions of Neo-platonic philosophy. Reformed church historians such as Schaff may find it necessary to defend Luther against the charge that he once said,

"Who loves not wife and wine and song,
Remains a fool his whole life long."

but I would guess that most Lutheran historians would consider it of little consequence whether he said it or not. Luther did not despise this material world. He would have approved wholeheartedly of the advice that C. S. Lewis gives when he says of the created world that we should offer it neither worship nor contempt.² He had cut himself loose from the medieval theology of which one Roman Catholic scholar says that "On the whole it produced the idea that

¹ Robert Bultot, "The Theology of Earthly Realities and Lay Spirituality" in *Spirituality in the Secular City, Concilium*, Vol. 19, Paulist Press, New York, 1966, pp. 47-50.

² C. S. Lewis, *Miracles, A Preliminary Study*, MacMillan, N.Y., 1947, p. 67.

in the beginning man was a spiritual or spiritualized being, alien to sex, world and secular activities, vowed solely to a contemplation of God placing him beyond the influence of time.”³

Yet those modern secularists who claim Luther as their spiritual father and who view present-day secularism as the normal consequence of the Lutheran Reformation have no warrant for this conclusion. The man who said that Martin Luther turned the whole world into a monastery and made every man a monk saw the spirit of Martin Luther more clearly than those who see in the Reformation the seed which produced our modern secularist world. Luther and the other reformers were far too concerned with man’s relationship to God to let secular and material concerns ever become the dominant motif in the Christian religion. Luther had only the sharpest criticism for those who said, “What do we care about heaven? What we need is flour.”⁴

In spite of the good example that we have in Martin Luther, even Lutherans are not completely free from the philosophical heritage of Platonism and Neo-platonism. One sometimes wonders what runs through the minds of many of our people when they sing,

“What is the world to me,
With all its sordid treasures?”

We might well ask ourselves whether we are not in the habit of using the word “world” exclusively in a pejorative sense which hardly leaves room for a truly grateful response to God for the created things He gives us richly to enjoy.

This medieval and Gnostic view of matter at times betrays its presence in the debate over the final destiny of this world. Some of us are annihilationists and some of us might be called restitutionists and we will not hereticize each other over a question that is not answered in Scripture, perhaps because we would not understand the answer if it were revealed to us. But whether we are annihilationists or not, one argument that is sometimes employed in defense of the annihilationist view ought surely be avoided by us as Lutherans. It has been said that annihilationism is more in keeping with the Christian faith because of the antimaterialistic nature of Christianity. But is the view that the matter of this world must go out of existence or at least be spiritualized related to the idea that the material visible world came into existence only after the fall? Antimaterialistic Christianity certainly is, but the Gnostic view of matter is also foreign to the Bible, and we ought to ask ourselves where we do not in our heart of hearts decide some questions on the basis of the premise that somehow matter is unfit to survive the holocaust of the final judgment. And the view that we hold concerning matter will color all of our thinking in regard to the secular world in which we are called to do our work as Lutheran educators.

A Biblical Perspective

Before proceeding to examine some of the features of modern secularism of which a Lutheran educator should be aware it will be well for us to review what the Bible has to say about this visible, material world and the creatures that inhabit it.

There are chiefly three Biblical doctrines that ought to make it completely impossible for a Christian to adopt a Gnostic view of matter or a medieval contempt for everything created. These three doctrines are the doctrine of creation, of the incarnation, and of resurrection.

When modern secularists appeal to the doctrine of creation as a justification for their world-view we ought to recognize the cogency of their argument. There *are* implications in the Biblical doctrine of creation which ought to serve as a corrective to any temptation to despise

³ Robert Bultot, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

⁴ *LW*, 13, 125.

this world and everything in it. Not even the fall into sin, which we dare never forget and which our modern secularists have a tendency to ignore, has robbed the created world of all of its goodness. Living in a world that labored under the curse of sin, the apostle Paul could still say that every creature of God is good and to be received with thanksgiving. He keeps in mind both the creation and the fall when he encourages us to use the world without abusing it. And we dare never forget either that God loves this world which He has made in spite of man's sinfulness.

The Christian who looks around him where he is and says, "This is my Father's world," ought not to be ashamed of a deep and abiding interest in and concern for everything that is created. When we have learned to say with the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," we ought to realize also that the study of this created world, whether it be in the realm of biology, or chemistry, or physics is not unworthy of a Christian educator. The very existence of a school such as the one on whose campus we are meeting bears witness to the truth that the secular, material, visible world is not despised by us, even though, in some of our confused moments we may forget it.

John Milton may very well have been speaking the truth when he says in *Paradise Lost* that Adam was "for contemplation formed," but the Bible says that he was created to till the ground. He was to work in this world, with this world, and for this world. He was to bring all creation into subjection to himself.

If only our modern secularists would remember that it was *God* who created this world, that man has dominion over it only because God willed to give him that dominion, if only they would remember that man is a fallen, depraved sinner who liberates himself from divine restraint only to his own destruction, if only they would remember that this world is not all there is, we might at times take them more seriously when they call Christians to a life of activity and concern in this present world. Our quarrel here is often not so much with what they say but rather with what they leave unsaid. Surely a Lutheran who has learned to recite Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed with appreciation and understanding will recognize that this material, visible world was not made for us to spit on in contempt.

If the doctrine of creation should keep us from adopting a Gnostic view of matter and a monastic view of the secular life, the doctrine of the incarnation of our Lord should surely reinforce that rejection of such a world-view. Jesus Christ was wholly without sin and yet He had a body made of matter; He was totally sinless yet He was every inch a human being. He was a man who died to rescue other men from hell, and those who believe that, those who see in every other human being a creature for whom the Son of God laid down His life, they can never be uninterested and unconcerned about other people. And that concern will not be limited only to their eternal salvation in heaven. Christians do feed the hungry and clothe the naked and heal the sick, even though they may see little virtue in doing all this with other people's money. Our quarrel with the secularist ought not to be directed against his plea to be concerned with human welfare in this world. But we know that when the Bible says that Jesus came that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly, it is not speaking of a guaranteed annual wage and two cars in every garage; but it speaks instead of a restoration of that life which Adam lost when he fell into sin.

But, although secularists appeal to the Biblical doctrine of creation and to the humanity of Jesus as justification for their emphasis on this present world, it is hardly strange that they never appeal to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, even though this, too, is part of the Biblical witness to the importance of the material in God's plan of salvation.

The medieval view of salvation often ignored the body, and salvation was viewed in Platonic terms as a release of the soul from the flesh. Like the Christians in Corinth, we may have our difficulties in visualizing what a resurrected body will be like, but one thing we can surely say for certain. Whatever change in the form and structure of the body is involved, resurrection surely cannot be viewed as the annihilation of the material side of man's nature.

But what is more important than any of these questions is the fact that the resurrection, which surely says a great deal in opposition to the Gnostic view of matter, says every bit as much against the view of our modern secularists who insist that the present life of man here on this earth should be the object of our ultimate concern. It is rather remarkable that so many of the proponents of secularism in the church delight in describing their task as an attempt to find a way to live meaningful lives in a world from which God has been banished but have so little to say about living as though there were no resurrection. Can it possibly be that here their conscience has made cowards of them all?

It is obvious to anyone who takes the Bible seriously that even though the Bible cannot properly be used to justify a life of withdrawal from the world and that quietism is not compatible with full Christianity, it can be used fairly just as little or even less by those who seek to turn Christianity into a secular religion.

Modern Secularist Philosophy

As we turn our attention now to the secularist philosophy with which we must contend, I am reminded of a very gifted student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary who travelled all the way to Chicago to hear a speech by one of the modern spokesmen of this point of view. I gathered from my conversation with this student prior to the lecture that he expected to hear something that might be of some value, but when I asked him after he returned what his impression was, he said, in a rather disgusted tone of voice, "He's nothing but a dirty little atheist."

Not all the secularistic theologians of our time can properly be classified as dirty little atheists, even though few of them deserve to be called theologians and might more properly be described as confused anthropologists. But what they all have in common is an old error which our fathers described as "Diesseitsreligion."

More than a quarter of a century ago Max Otto of the philosophy department of the University of Wisconsin at Madison read a paper on "Authoritarianism and Supernaturalism" which was a vicious attack on the otherworldliness of Christianity. In this paper he said,

The type of religion which looks to a realm other than the world about us for criteria of the good life is not a religion in man's interest. Those who aid in furthering that religion, whether they recognize what it implies or not, are making such contributions as they can toward man's intellectual and moral defeat.⁵

He went on to say that the organized forces that will not permit us to concentrate upon the problem of a good life in a good world reflect an outgrown stage in man's intellectual and spiritual evolution. What is, however, of greatest interest to us as Lutheran educators is his claim that if this retrogressive attempt to gain the upper hand succeeds it will mean the end of the

⁵ Max Otto, *Science and the Moral Life*, The New American Library, New York, 1949, p. 147f.

scientific enterprise and that “it will block moral progress in the new world that is coming into being.”⁶

And before Max Otto, Israel Zangwill had written:

The nymphs are gone, the fairies flown;
The ancient gods forever fled;
The stars are silent overhead:
The music of the spheres is still;
The night is dark, the wind is chill;
The later gods have followed Pan,
And man is left alone with man.”

When Harvey Cox, therefore, says that Bonhoeffer “was merely venturing a tardy theological interpretation of what had already been noticed by poets and novelists, sociologists and philosophers for decades ,”⁷ he can cite chapter and verse for his thesis, but if he imagines that this is a discovery made in the last decades for the first time he could not be more wrong. The secularist view of life seems to be characteristic of a civilization that is ripe for destruction. The children of Israel gave expression to it in the days before the captivity when they said, “The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.” And the words in which Jesus described the world before the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot would seem to indicate a purely secularistic view of life. They ate, they drank, they married and were given in marriage, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. It is rather remarkable that in that list of activities of a people ready for divine rejection not one crime is found, but the list clearly indicates a concern only for this world and this life.

And our modern secularists are unabashedly thisworldly in their outlook. Harvey Cox, for example, in *The Secular City*, says that the Gospel accounts that speak of Jesus casting out devils signify that

Men must be called away from their fascination with other worlds...and summoned to confront the concrete issues of this one, “wherein alone the true call of God can be found.” They must be freed from the narcotic vagaries...and from habitual forms of action or inaction stemming from these illusions. This is the work of social exorcism.⁸

Earlier in the same book he had written,

Secularization...is the loosing of the world from religious or quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols...Secularization occurs when man turns his attention from the world beyond and toward this world and this time.⁹

Paul Van Buren in his *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* expresses the same view when he says that the common feature in modern so-called Biblical theology and modern analytic philosophy is “a deep interest in questions of human life this side of the ‘beyond,’ and a corresponding lack of interest in what were once felt to be great metaphysical questions”¹⁰ and

⁶ Ibid., p. 148.

⁷ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1966, p. 2.

⁸ Op.cit., pp. 134f.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 1f.

¹⁰ Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1966, p. XIV.

unashamedly he asserts, “When we affirm a secular Christianity, we also call attention to the ‘thisworldly’ aspect of the Gospel.”¹¹

Even Roman Catholic theologians, who have a tendency to be more conservative than most Modernistic Protestants in this area because they still have a long way to come before they can be freed from the monastic point of view which characterized most of Romanism until our own day, have fallen prey to this infection. For example, Ernest Larkin, in the nineteenth volume of *Concilium*, echoes his Protestant counterparts when he says, “The spirituality of today is profoundly thisworldly, incarnational, even ‘religionless’ in Bonhoeffer’s sense.”¹²

In the midst of this atmosphere that pervades visible Christendom in our time, a conservative, Bible-believing Lutheran educator must particularly guard against what Carl Henry calls “the uneasy conscience of modern fundamentalism.” We need not, and we ought not, to be embarrassed by our failure to offer the world a solution to its political problems or an answer to its social questions, even though we may very well encourage our people to apply their talents to the effort designed to alleviate the worlds ills, whatever they may be.

Yet, conscious of the impact that the modern world is making on those who sit at our feet, we ought to redouble our efforts to make it clear that true, orthodox, Bible-believing Christianity is an otherworld religion, unashamedly promising men “pie in the sky by and by when they die.” That does not mean that we will neglect our fellowman who needs our help and our love. But we will not only bind up his wounds. We will also carry him to the inn of the Christian church so that he might find there help which keeps him safe through all the endless future. The two endeavors, to help the neighbor in this life and to help him for eternity need not exclude each other. Certainly they are not antithetical.

As one who lived in and through the decay of what was once a great church body, I would like to speak a word of warning to my brethren in the Wisconsin Synod. All of us have a tendency to feel the need to defend ourselves when we are criticized, and we feel that same need to make an apology when our theology is under attack. But we ought to remember that even though our defense may be valid, it may well serve to hide our light under a bushel.

For example, when the enemies of verbal inspiration charge that our doctrine of inspiration is mechanical, our first reaction always seems to be an attempt, to show that we do not make machines out of the holy writers, which is perfectly true, but which to many people means only that if we are pressed we will not defend the proposition that even if the writers were true human beings they did not err in recording the revelation of God.

Similarly when we are accused of proclaiming a religion of fear, our standard defense is to lay a great deal of stress on the grace and mercy and love of God, and it may well be that our well-intentioned emphasis on the Gospel message may serve only to confirm our critic in his view that when the chips are down God is finally a God of love and not a God of perfect justice. Instead we might well take up the challenge and admit that our religion is a religion of fear and terror for all those who have not yet learned to confess their sin in true repentance, but at the same time it is a religion of surpassing comfort for terrified sinners.

In that same way, when we are accused of proclaiming a “pie-in-the-sky” religion, when we are accused of having an otherworld religion, a *Jenseitsreligion*, our theological conditioned reflex seemingly consists in showing how much stress we lay on a life of service here on this earth. It might be far more effective if we would tell those who put us on the defensive that we

¹¹ *Op.cit.*, p. 195

¹² Ernest Larkin, “Asceticism in Modern Life” in *Spirituality in the Secular City, Concilium*, Vol. 19, Paulist Press, New York, 1966, p. 105.

have no apologies to make for being otherworld theologians because we don't want to see them in hell and that in the meantime they can come to our house for dinner if they are hungry. When we have a tendency to let ourselves be trapped by false antitheses, we might find a great deal of help in the words of Jesus, "These things ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone." An "otherworld religion," in spite of what Max Otto and his cohorts may say, does not rule out a healthy interest in this world, especially not for people who have learned to recite the explanation to the First Article really "by heart." But a healthy interest in this world and its problems is one which always sees all things *sub specie aeternitatis*. The admonition not to love the world must never keep the child of God from seeing every tree and every flower, every fish and every pheasant, food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods, as gracious gifts of the heavenly Father's love, objects neither of our worship nor our contempt. For those who have learned to see the world in that light the thisworldliness of modern secularism can have little appeal.

The thisworldliness of secularism is also usually coupled with conceptions which have a tendency to make "dirty little atheists" out of them. While the atheism of some secularists is worn in the open for all to see, yet many of them practise a subtler type of atheism which has a particularly strong appeal to the immature who feel the need to demonstrate maturity.

The phrase that appeals to the pride of so many in the gospel of secularism is the watchword, "a world come of age." A "world come of age" is a world that is ready to strike out on its own, a world that feels little need for the Father's love and the Father's concern and even less for fatherly guidance and restraint. Such an attitude flourishes best in an affluent society that can count on a guaranteed annual income from the government, just as it is often most blatantly displayed by college students who receive a regular monthly check from home. The diabolical pride that underlies modern secularism is well illustrated by the remark made by one of the best-known spokesmen for this point of view, who says, "Secularization signifies the removal of religious and metaphysical supports and putting man on his own. It is unlocking the playpen and turning man loose in an open universe."

Bonhoeffer's remark that we must learn to live in the world as if there were no God has been quoted so often that it is happily on the way to becoming trite, but the spirit that breathes in those words is very much alive today. It is to be hoped that Van Buren is wrong when he says that "whatever ancient man may have thought about the supernatural, few men are able to ascribe 'reality' to it as they would to the things, people, or relationships that matter to them."¹³ Atheism is, as Sartre says, "a long and difficult enterprise"¹⁴ and yet there are countless college students in our time who listen avidly to men like Van Buren when they speak of "a world 'come of age' in which men no longer believe in a transcendent realm where their longings will be fulfilled."¹⁵

What makes this development doubly tragic and doubly deceptive and dangerous is that many of these "dirty little atheists" give every indication of being honestly concerned about the world's problems and needs. They participate ostensibly in Camus' struggle to find a way in which man can live "with direction and integrity in a world without God."¹⁶ But the more one reads of what these men have to say and the more one sees what the world is becoming under the influence of this secularist philosophy, which is only the vocal expression of a process that has

¹³ *Op.cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Quoted by Christian Duquoc in "Theology and Spirituality", in *Concilium*, Vol. 19 (*op.cit.*), p. 96.

¹⁵ *Op.cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Quoted by Harvey Cox in *op.cit.*, p. 61.

been quietly at work ever since the days of Hegel, Marx, and Darwin, the more one is overcome by the horror of “setting men free” (as they delight in speaking of it) without making them good. E. A. Hooton of Harvard was certainly right when he said that the theory of evolution has a tendency to free men from religious inhibitions and fears which alone make them socially tolerable.¹⁷

It seems to me that we are not yet seriously affected by this disease at the seminary, and by the time these young men come to us they have usually passed the stage in life in which this philosophy is likely to be appealing to them. In 1937, the president of the University of Minnesota said to a class of entering freshmen, “If you run into anyone on this campus who tells you that there is no God, put him down as a sophomore, because all the juniors and seniors know better.”

Yet it is probably safe to say that if this cancer ever invades our seminary it will very likely come by way of the colleges and preparatory schools. The smog of atheism, at least of practical, if not theoretical atheism, pollutes the atmosphere of our world and defiles the air our young people breathe. And they are most susceptible to its damaging effects in their later teens, and therefore it behooves us as Lutheran educators to be aware of the way the wind is blowing and to redouble our efforts at bearing witness to the truth as it has been revealed to us in the verbally inspired and inerrant Word, so that through it the Spirit of God may do His blessed work in the hearts of those whom we teach. Luther once said that if men begin to ask whether there is a God it is already too late.

The thisworldliness and the practical atheism of our secularistic “theologians” has had a very predictable effect on their conception of the mission of the church.

The secularists still speak of sin but for them sin is not a violation of the law of God. There is, in fact, no law of God. According to them, man’s modern standard of values rests on consensus. How pervasive this notion is in our world is perhaps indicated by the popularity of the bumper sticker which a few years ago was seen even on church parking lots, “The law is the will of the people.” After commenting on the importance of Mt. Sinai for the secularist view of life and finding in the prohibition of idols an event that made all values relative, Harvey Cox goes on to say that “there is no reason that man must believe the ethical standards he lives by came down from heaven inscribed on golden tablets.”¹⁸ It is no surprise that in a society which lives by such standards we should see the spectacle of obviously concerned people protesting the execution of vicious criminals as a remnant of primitive savagery and advocating the butchering of unborn babies as a charitable effort at relieving human misery.

Together with the disappearance of a truly divine law from the secularized world the elimination of every truly objective divine revelation goes hand in hand. In some ways this is perhaps the most significant feature of modern secularism as it effects the work of a Lutheran educator. It has led to what Christian Duquoc calls “the inflation of uncertainty and the idolatrous worship of the question.”¹⁹

As Lutheran educators who are convinced that we have the truth of God revealed in a verbally inspired book we ought to recognize that our task is not to arouse doubt and uncertainty in the minds of those we teach in an effort “to make them think” and to find their own answers. We are not to be intellectual chefs offering a varied menu and inviting our students to choose that which pleases them. We have a point of view to put across, under God, and we offer it as the

¹⁷ E. A. Hooton, *Apes, Men, and Morons*, Putnam, N.Y., 1937, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Op.cit.*, p. 89.

only option. Truly Lutheran education ought to be a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. If that seems to be narrow and bigoted, we might note that when men become uncertain about the revelation of God they suddenly become very certain about other things which are not revealed in God's Word. There are hundreds of the products of modern seminaries who are not sure that there is a God but who are divinely sure that the war in Vietnam is unjust, who are not sure whether Jesus is what He claims to be, but who are fully persuaded that ecumenicalism will save Christianity.

In such a philosophical system, which turns every proposition into a question, sin can no longer be what it is in Christian theology. The state of sin is described by a prominent secularist in the church as being that state in which men have "a deformed and distorted vision of themselves, society, and reality as a whole," and repentance he defines as a process of maturing and assuming responsibility.²⁰ It is all too obvious that maturing and assuming responsibility means to lose all faith and trust in God and to bend all one's efforts toward making this world into as much of a utopia as we can by our best efforts. In another place the same author defines repentance as letting go of previous ways of organizing urban education and to find new patterns which will cohere with emerging urban reality.²¹

What such men will say about the mission of the church is a foregone conclusion. The church will need to alter its message to conform to the thought-forms of the present time. The efforts of Bultmann at demythologizing are designed to give the church a theology which will no longer be an offense to human reason, which will be in harmony with "the way men think today," and which will no longer require the *sacrificium intellectus* of contemporary Christians. What these men forget is that the Gospel has always been an offense to natural man and a stumbling-block for human reason, and a Gospel that is no longer an offense to the unconverted is not the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As Lutheran educators it is important that we should consciously, under God, reconsecrate ourselves to the task of proclaiming that Gospel in its intended meaning, and that we seek to instill in our students that same uncompromising loyalty to the Word that characterized our Synod by God's grace in the controversies of the past, but which is in danger of being lost today by us as it has been lost by others.

But what is perhaps most ominous, though it may well be viewed as a sign of hope by the ecumeniacs in the church, there seems to be developing a consensus about the mission of the church that cuts diagonally across all denominational lines. When the Sunday School literature of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, for example, implies that the mission of the church is not to save souls but to heal bodies, it only echoes a note that reverberates through all larger denominations in Christendom today.

One hears it, for example, in rather chaste and conservative terms from a Roman Catholic who says,

It is necessary to find a better definition of the church's mission.

One can no longer do this as if the history of salvation were but a history of souls to be rescued from the wreck of creation: what is saved is this creation itself.²²

On the Protestant side, Paul Van Buren defines the mission of the church as the way on which the Christian finds himself, the way toward the neighbor, not the way of trying to make

²⁰ Cox, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²² Robert Bultot, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

others into Christians,²³ and Harvey Cox expresses a view identical to that of Van Buren, when he says,

The church has no purpose other than to make known to the world what God has done and is doing in history to break down the hostilities between people and to reconcile men to each other...The Gospel ... does not reconcile people by converting them. It frees people to live with each other *despite* radically differing ideologies, theologies, and politics, as men with men.²⁴

When these pronouncements are analyzed it becomes obvious that we have here a verbose paraphrase of the second table of the law divorced from all objective standards of right and wrong and a definition of love divorced from truth and justice.

The mission of the church can hardly be understood otherwise when men have once ruled the next world out of their thinking. Some years ago I was discussing the mission of the church with the dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. After it became apparent that to him the function and the mission of the church was limited to this world, I asked him, "What do you do about the immortality of the soul?" and he replied, "I am not interested in the immortality of the soul. I am a theologian, not a philosopher."

But it is not only the immortality of the soul that is excluded from theological discussion. It soon becomes obvious when one "enters into dialog" with the secular theologians that they are not interested at all in any Christian doctrine. The whole area of Christian doctrine is ignored. There was a time when Christians argued about doctrine because they were convinced that there is such a thing as truth and error. In the theology of secularism, such questions are not debated. They are not even discussed. The Gospel is seen not as a message of salvation to be accepted in faith but "a summons to leave behind the society and symbols of a dying era, and to assume responsibility for devising new ones."²⁵

It soon becomes apparent too that secular theology is just another name devised to make the old social gospel sound like something new and different. The central thrust of this theology becomes clear when we hear Harvey Cox say,

Speaking of God in a secular fashion, is thus a political issue. It entails our discerning where God is working and then joining His work. Standing in a picket line is a way of speaking. By doing it, a Christian speaks of God.²⁶

The same view was expressed by the French Catholic who has become one of the heroes of the secularist movement, Teilhard de Chardin, when he said,

To adore, formerly, meant preferring God to things, by referring them back to him and sacrificing them for him. To adore now, has come to mean pledging oneself body and soul to the creative act, by associating oneself with it, so as to bring the world to its fulfillment by effort and research.²⁷

Since God has been dethroned, the world has become man's task and man's responsibility. A generation ago, Edgar Sheffield Brightman propounded his theory of a God who was perfectly

²³ *Op.cit.*, p. 191.

²⁴ *Op.cit.*, p. 199.

²⁵ Cox, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

²⁷ Quoted by Larkin in *op.cit.*, p. 86.

good but not omniscient and not almighty, a God whom he compared to a competent scientist working skillfully in a laboratory without knowing how his various experiments will turn out, and he felt that the highest motivation toward Christian service lay in the thought that we can help this God by devoting our best efforts to experiments which will help him to make this a better world. Today men are being called upon to do it all by themselves, with the understanding that this will spur them on to redouble their efforts at working out their own social salvation.

It goes without saying that the secularist theology is also rabidly ecumenical. Cox says, for example, that any church work “which is not radically ecumenical has no place on the university campus, or indeed anywhere else.”²⁸ It is significant for us to note, (because it applies to us perhaps more than to most “Christians”), that the spokesmen for secularism who call upon us to live in “love” with all our fellowmen despite all our theological, ideological, and political differences are apparently not willing to extend this courtesy to those whose theology is antiecumenical, as that word would be understood in our world.

Is it not strange that a man who has called on all men to live together in peace and community despite their theological differences should write

In the secular city, a church divided along ethnic, racial, or denominational lines cannot even begin to perform its function ... such a church... is not a church at all ... With considerably less restraint than has been exercised here, the Reformers called such churches “antichurches” and their leaders representative of the Antichrist. Such language is not popular today, but the point should not be missed. Jesus Christ comes to people not primarily through ecclesiastical traditions, but through social change?²⁹

How the Wisconsin Synod with its present theological position will fare in a society constructed by these architects is easy to imagine.

Conclusion

The question that we need to ask, however, is not how we shall fare, but what we should do in a world and a Christendom that seems attracted to this theology. Surely, we will be on our guard against the temptation that would suggest that we prove to these secularists that we are after all interested in the same thing that they are by suddenly developing an interest in secular affairs. We need to remind ourselves and we ought to demonstrate to the world that our theology is a *Jenseitsreligion*, that our affections are set on things above where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Yet we must also recognize that quietism and withdrawal from this world is not a Christian virtue and interest in the temporal welfare of our fellowmen and concern for this present world is not an area that is the exclusive preserve of secularists and social gospellers. We do not want to develop a Lutheran monasticism nor turn our schools into Bible Colleges. This is our Father’s world and the people in it have all been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. As Lutheran Christians we ought to do what we can to help make this world a place where we can lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty and where the Gospel can be preached without let or hindrance. If we keep our political opinions out of the pulpit it ought not to be because we don’t have any or because we don’t even want to have any because the only

²⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 207.

²⁹ *Op.cit.*, p. 128.

thing that interests us in this present world is the score of the last professional basketball or football game.

This concern ought surely to be reflected also in the curricula that we develop for our schools. The type of curricula we develop can reflect a monastic flight from reality. When I laid my transcript on the desk of the dean of the graduate school of the University of Minnesota in 1937, his only comment was: "A typical medieval curriculum." While I object most vehemently against the use of "The Death of a Salesman" as a text-book for the first course in dogmatics, as was done at Concordia Teachers College while I was there, I also do not believe that one gains a thorough understanding of the world's culture by reading twenty lines of Iphigenia in Tauris every day for thirteen weeks or by reading half of the first book of the Iliad in a semester. And that would be a good place to stop for discussion.