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WW '72: CHAPTER 1 WORSHIP IN AN AGE OF CHANGE

I ~ THE CONTEXT: THE FOURTH REVOLUTION

Those of us alive in the first years of the Twenty-First Century are living through one of the great turmoils in human history. In every area of life, the old institutions that used to give our society a sense of stability and permanence are being radically reappraised. The old values that gave



direction to our decisions and our destinies in the past are being challenged or overturned. Almost without doubt, future historians will look back on our age, at least in the West, as a tumultuous one, ranking perhaps with the Reformation or Renaissance (or with the Fall of the Roman Empire!) as an age of far-reaching social upheaval.

Furthermore, it would not be difficult to document the case that the world has changed more radically within our own lifetime than in all the previous centuries of human history. My grandfather must surely have held more in common, culturally speaking, with Luther, with Augustine or even with Abraham, than with me. We are living through one of the great social revolutions of human history, a revolution fought with guns and bloodshed in many parts of the world today, and just as surely fought in the contest of ideology and idea in other parts of the world.

Like it or not, the Christian Church cannot help but be affected.

So any close look at the life of the Church in our time will have to take into account this

new context: that of a reformation or revolution of transforming proportion and potential; a revolution, one might say, that has begun to rage, within the Church, on at least four fronts — all of them intimately interrelated.

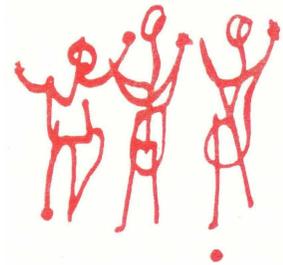
First, there is what might be called the theological-biblical-educational revolution within the Church, concerned with the ancient content of the Christian faith, its recasting in the thought and language of today, and its proclamation to our “post-modern” world.

Second, there is what might be called the social-ethical revolution within the church, concerned with the Church’s role as servant of Word and world in the midst of modern society.

Third, there is what might be called a morphological or structural revolution within the Church, concerned with the organizational or institutional forms the Church must assume in order to do its job in a vastly changed and changing world.

Fourth, there is the liturgical revolution within the Church, which is our specific concern in these pages. How can we make each Sunday’s worship, in every Christian parish, a working model of the Gospel?

Now that’s the context of our concern. I’d like to think of these four revolutions in terms of the Four C’s: Creed, Code, Cult, and Constitution.



Creed: That’s the first revolution I noted above, the doctrinal or theological. It’s an attempt to make the faith accessible, believable, credible.

Code: That’s the second area of Church reform or revolution. It’s an attempt to shape for our age a model for living out our beliefs in value system or moral code.

Cult: That’s ritual, worship, liturgy, our concern in these pages.

And even Constitution: That’s Church order, institutional form, governance.

I remind you of this context for three reasons:

First, because it’s wise to remember that our liturgical revolution, our homework in reforming the Church’s worship, is after all only one out of four! If we sometimes feel that it’s exciting here, in the Church’s worship renewal — on this part of the battlefield, to extend my metaphor — let’s also remember that the battle is also pretty exciting on three other fronts. It’s not only equally exciting elsewhere; it’s equally important! And all four fronts of the church’s revolution are inextricably inter-related. What affects one is likely to affect all.



At the same time — and this is a second good reason for recalling the totality of the reformation exploding around us — there are large numbers of people of good will who ignore this part of the battle, the liturgical, as though (a) it were somehow unimportant and not worth the effort, or, worse yet, (b) it were a lost cause, an old-fashioned kind of thing that no one takes seriously any more.

I am assuming here that we take it seriously, you and I. Worship renewal may be only one aspect of the Church's current work. But it is one, perceptions to the contrary notwithstanding. The Christian Gospel must make sense at 11:00 am Sunday morning, or it won't make sense, period!

The third reason for recalling the context for our concern is this: to point out that this is no time for what one might call reductionism. We are in a revolution, and, if you're a revolutionary, you'll need all the friends you can get. You'll need all the insight, all the knowledge, all the perspective, and all the vast variety of experience and opinion that you'll be able to muster. This is not the time for authoritarian consensus or uniformity. It is the time, I would suppose, for the broadest kind of diversity, plurality, tolerance, openness — *aggiornamento* — catholicity! We simply need every viewpoint we can manage to hear. It's time to recall and to rehearse the insight of Chairman Mao: "Let a thousand flowers bloom."

As for our friends and allies in this work, we are likely to find them in unlikely places. So, for instance, the Principle of *Mana* is one of the foundations on which this book is based. *Mana*, as I have it, is Polynesian for "special power or "extraordinary gift". To respect the gifts of the gifted is only simple prudence, although it contains also an important theological affirmation which we will investigate later. The point now is this: The Christian Church cannot afford to overlook the insights and abilities of a whole host of specialists and professionals, in a world which threatens to become increasingly specialized and professionalized. Our finest friends and allies in liturgical renewal will very likely turn out to be the "secular" artists in our society, those who have familiarity with — and competence in — the arts and culture of our day.

Experience in the Church's marginal ministries — mission congregations, campus ministries, military and hospital chaplaincies — suggests that all ministries in the church will profit from the competence and creativity you can find in the contemporary culture, even at its most "secular." We in the Church simply must become scrupulously sensitive to the insights of the secular. Remember, we are revolutionaries, in a revolution! We need all the help we can get!

Next month Parts 2 and 3: "Bonhoeffer was wrong!"

