

Week 6: Theology of Communication and Politics

Building: Ends and Goods

Introductory Comments

Week 4 Framework, in a New Light

Framework: Communication as BUILDING, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

A New Light: Remember the *Telos*

All human action tries to enact – to BUILD in accord with - a vision of the *telos*: a goal that the person takes to be a “destination” that is “good.”

The *Telos*, Part I: According to 1 Cor 3 above, what is the “end” toward which we are building?

Vital qualifications: the world is first and foremost led to its *telos* BY GOD. We are given a part to play within God’s work, but the work is not “ours” in any DIRECT sense.

1. Therefore, we can never simply look at the *telos* (the Kingdom of God and perfect restoration of all things) and try to realize THAT, *directly*. That is NOT our part. Rather, we attend to the specific things God commands each of us to do, trusting that “in, with, and under” our action, God is ultimately taking things where HE wants them to go. For instance, instead of trying to totally reconfigure the entire United States into the kingdom of God, we carry out the specific vocations and actions God appoints us in specific times and places and leave “fixing the whole” up to God.
2. Justification vs. Sanctification

The *Telos*, Part II – 1 Cor 10:31b: “whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God”

According to this passage, what is the end toward which we are building in our action?

Is this passage, then, in competition with 1 Cor 3 above? Why or Why not?

Another paradigm for action toward the *telos*: “Priestly, Eucharistic Existence”

Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14-15

[Setup: The modern world notices that man consumes the material, and so concludes he is a hungry, material being oriented to the material, *rather than* the spiritual.]

“The Bible...also begins with man as a hungry being, with the man who is that which he eats. The perspective, however, is wholly different, for nowhere in the bible do we find the dichotomies which for us are the self-evident framework of all approaches to religion. In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with God*. The world as man’s food is not something ‘material’ and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically “spiritual” functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God’s gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man’s life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God *blesses* everything He creates, and in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Man is a hungry being. But he is hungry for God. Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him. To be sure, man is not the only hungry being. All that exists lives by ‘eating.’ The whole creation depends on food. But the unique position of man in the universe is that he alone is to *bless* God for the food and the life he receives from Him. He alone is to respond to God’s blessing with his blessing. The significant fact about the life in the Garden is that man is to *name* things. As soon as animals have been created to keep Adam company, God brings them to Adam to see what he will call them. ‘And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.’ Now in the Bible a name is infinitely more than a means to distinguish one thing from another. It reveals the very essence of a thing, or rather its essence as God’s gift. To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God.

To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it. And in the Bible to bless God is not a ‘religious’ or a ‘cultic’ act, but the very *way of life*. God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this ‘very good.’ So the only *natural* (and not “supernatural”) reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, to *see* the world as God sees it—in this act of gratitude and adoration—to know, name and possess the world. All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. ‘*Homo sapiens* [the human that knows],’ [and] ‘*Homo faber*’ [the human that makes]...yes, but first of all, “*homo adorans*” [the human that worships]. The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest*. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both

receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.

What does this passage add to our understanding of the fundamental form of human life as it aims at God’s *telos*?

Specifics - What *precisely* are we given in Christ to receive and build out?

Passages Set I:

Isa 43:18-19: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

2 Cor 5:17: “¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Phil 3:12-14: “¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

What is given and commanded, here?

Compare, Passages Set II:

John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh...”

Col 3:9-10: “⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on *the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*”

What is given and commanded, here?

Summation and Significance

So is our goal to build something *new* in history, or to preserve what has come before?

Given this, as Christians approach both Church and civil life, should we be “conservative” or should we be “progressive”?

Key Transition: within this Good of a concrete history drawing creation toward its ultimate goal, God assigns *different* concrete histories to specific people and to specific kinds of communities.

- Corollary: we cannot confuse God’s “mandates” for one community with his mandates to other communities. In particular, we cannot confuse God’s mandates to the Church *as Church* with his mandates for *the world* which by definition does not belong to the people of God whose specific core, mandated form IS faith.
- Next week, bring that home with a couple passages that add to our understanding of the Church’s specific form and also show how it is *distinct* from that of the world