AKC 5 General – Autumn Term 2006 – Christianity and Culture

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CLERGY – THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES: OR HOW CHURCHES EVOLVE TO ‘FIT’ ENVIRONMENTS

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A. Introduction – Creationism and Blueprint Ecclesiologies:

1. ‘Myths’ about origins. [a] simplistic forms of biblical functionalism; [b] romanticised genealogies; [c] secular and/or reductionist correlations.

B. The Analogical Use of Evolutionary Theory: Ministry as Development:

1. Chance, Creationism and Intelligent Design...accounts for origins in ecclesiology. A ‘natural history’ of ministry?
2. Question: can we account for similarities, differences, common ‘traits’, specialisation, development, extinction, etc? Darwin’s finches, tortoises, lizards, etc – a journey to the Galapagos (and its ecclesial equivalents – e.g., Ethiopian Coptic Church). Or the URC as a ‘hybrid’ (i.e., horse + donkey = mule). Phylogeny (shared ancestry) and taxonomy (similarities).
3. Darwin’s reasoning: [a] like begets like, but with some variation; [b] all living things produce offspring; [c] organisms that are most ‘fit’ (i.e., adaptable) to their environment do better, creating ‘favourable variations’ over time = ‘natural selection’.
4. To ponder: ‘ecclesial DNA’ – inherited but tacit ‘traits’, such as irony, capacity for ambivalence, concreteness, etc.

C. Evolutionary Conditions and Application:

1. Trends in denominations – the shift from first generation charismatic leadership to organisational bureaucracy.
3. The nineteenth century – compression of ‘professional identity’ caused by urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation, etc. Growth in *intensity* of religion – but loss of *extensity*. Non-English examples – e.g., South Korea; revivalism as exemplar.

D. Further Reflections on Development:

E. Praxis and Survival:

1. Engagement with culture – three case studies in age, gender and power. The contested nature of the core tradition; how ecclesial bodies to adapt.
2. Anglo-Catholicism and the Iberian Lynx. The creation of protected environs (‘reserves’) that safeguard continuity.
3. Methodism as a movement or a church? The struggle for identity.
4. Emergent New Churches and the problem of success; ‘charismatic’ High Table ecclesial prefix. Eventual loss of identity?

F. Ministry and Evolution:

1. The personal nature of vocation. The Holy Spirit and ecclesial discernment. Ministry as apprenticeship. Learned traits.
2. Fluctuations in fecundity – why numbers of clergy rise and fall, and rise again: cultural reasoning. (Hoge & Wenger, 2005).
3. Power in ministry – strategies and tactics. Performative and performed dimensions. Response to crises – greater concentration on rationales for order and organisation (e.g., episcopacy).
4. Learning in ministry – tacit knowledge; stories and reflection. Common traits across denominations: [a] public, not private; [b] deep ecclesial formation; [c] sacramental material; [d] incompleteness; [e] the role evolves – but also remains the same. Traceable DNA?

G. Coda:

1. Cultural displacement as opportunity and crisis.
3. Correlative theological methods and the study of ecclesiology.

Further Reading

martyn percy, : with contemporary culture: christianity, theology and the concrete church (explorations in practical, pastoral, and empirical theology) (ashgate, 2005)
martyn percy, : the origin of species (continuum international publishing group – academi, 2006)
grace davie and david martin, religion in britain since 1945: believing without belonging (making contemporary britain) (blackwell publishers, 1994)
n. j. g. pounds, : the culture of religion from augustine to victoria (cambridge university press, 2004)