



# Secularity and the Gospel Being Missionaries to Our Own Children Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Session One ...

## Part One – Secularity and the Gospel – Being Missionaries to our own children

### Outline

1. Highlight the problem
2. Defining Secularity
3. The Complex Face of Secularity
4. Secularity as the Child of Judeo-Christianity
5. Trying to be Missionaries within Secularity

## II. Highlighting the problem

- i. A story – *“Being a missionary, by leaving the 99”*
- ii. The problem

- Emptying and graying church
- The growing marginalization of the churches in the mainstream culture
- The reluctance of so many of our own children to walk the path of explicit faith with us

## III. Defining Secularity

### A) On Secularity

#### i. What is it? Towards a definition

- Secularity as “Modernity”
- What is Mondernity, Modernism?

#### ❖ Four eras in Western Intellectual/Philosophical history

- ✚ 0–400 AD–The Ancient World
- ✚ 400-1600-The Medieval World
- ✚ 1600-1950s-The Modern World (Secular)
- ✚ 1950s-The Post Modern World

#### ❖ What defines each?

- ✚ **The Ancient World-Prior to St. Augustine (354-430)- Divine Authority** is the final arbiter of all things and the principle around which life is organized-but it largely animistic, polytheistic, and prone to superstition.

- ✚ **The Medieval World-St. Augustine to Rene Descartes (1596-1650)-Divine Authority**, purged of polytheism, animism, and superstition and maily wedded to the Judeo-Christian tradition becomes the final arbiter of everything and the organizing principle for common life.
- ✚ **Modernity, the Modern World-From Rene Descartes to the 1950s-Rationality, critical reason**, becomes the final arbiter for all things and the organizing principle for common life.
- ✚ **Post-Modernity, Post-Modernism-from 1950s today-Equal skepticism of both divine authority and critical reason** as the final arbiter and the organizing principle for common life

❖ Hence today we have four kinds of people meeting within the same generation

- Pre-Modern
- Modern-“Secular”
- Post-Modern
- Anti-Modern

#### IV. The Complex Face of Secularity

- Neither fully a **culture of death** nor a **culture of life** e.g. The country of Holland
- Is more “*post-ecclesial*” than “*post-Christian*”
- Various generations within the same generation
- Inside of sea of non-secularity

#### V. Secularity as the Child of Judeo-Christianity

- i. Is the child of Judeo-Christianity
- ii. Is our child, not our enemy-the opposite of secularity is not the church but the Taliban.
- iii. But is often an adolescent, grandiose, belligerent child, not bad but not finished.-an image-the17 year old!

Session Two ...

#### IV. Trying to be Missionaries inside of Secularity

##### a. The essential Catholic Approach – A biblical and “catholic” attitude towards secularity

- “Love the world, as God loves it”
- Love the world in spite of its opposition and sin
- Be in the world, but not of the world
- Be careful that in our challenging the world we are not fighting God
- Remember the Catholic principle: The world is flawed but not corrupt.
- Live in hope and faith in the Gospel: “*The Gospel can stand up to secularity!*”

## B) Struggling to be Missionaries Inside of this

- 1) Being non-combative and non-defensive – this is our child not our enemy.
- 2) Witnessing to a new maturity
- 3) In solidarity with the poor, vulnerable, dis-privileged
- 4) Trying to re-inflame the romantic imagination
- 5) Giving special witness to fidelity
- 6) Carrying the tension between love of the world and love of God
- 7) Having a wide, Catholic, inclusive embrace.
- 8) Being a prophetic voice within secularity

\*For forgiveness and reconciliation

\*For unity beyond ideology and polarization

\*For the non-violence of God

\*For simplicity of life

\*For the integrity of creation

- 9) Giving nuanced witness to both the “Kenotic” and the “Triumphal” Christ
  - 10) Re-imagining our ecclesial structures
  - 11) Living in prayer and hope
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## Session Three ...

### Part Two – Sowing the Seed within Secularity Today – The Soil, The Sowers, and the Sower

#### Outline

- i) The Soil – The Western context
- ii) The Sowers – At their worst and at their best – Liberal and Conservative approaches
- iii) THE SOWER – Some perspectives from Jesus

#### I. The Soil – The Western Context today – In terms of its receptivity and its resistance

- **Its receptivity –**

- o an interest in spirituality
- o the staying power of God, religion, and church
- o some major moral gains – racism, sexism, tolerance

- **Its resistance**

- o Is not friendly to the churches

- o  Emptying, graying churches
- o  a growing marginalization of the churches by the culture

- ✚ strong anti-ecclesial and anti-clerical streams inside the culture
- ✚ the church perceived as old, tired, tired, and lacking
- ✚ adolescent grandiosity inside of secularity
- o The death of public life in the culture, fueled by an excessive individuality.
- o The culture itself as a “narcotic” – its powerful intoxicating elements
- ✚ \*Lack of contemplativeness and interiority
- ✚ \*A conspiracy against interiority

## II. The Sowers – At their worst and at their best – Liberal and Conservative Approaches

- Two taboo subjects, two jokes – religion and politics
- Moral: God isn’t liberal and God isn’t conservative

### A) Conservatives at their worst: “Mean-spirited, narrow, and grandiose”

- o see secularity as the enemy
- o sees secular culture as “*the culture of death*”
- o sees secular culture as godless and “*a tyranny of relativity*”
- o its instinct is to protect, circumscribe, re-entrench, reduce all ambiguity, have clarity trump all else
- o Its litmus test – abortion and sexuality
- o Prone to – fundamentalism and intolerance
- o Its major fault – mean-spirited and “power-prone”, solve things by authority
- o God is a hammer!

### B) Liberals at their worst – “Naïve, adolescent, and arrogant”

- o sees secularity as having the moral high ground
- o sees secularity as the exclusive agent in having brought about the liberation of human freedom,
- o freeing it from animism, superstition, and false authority
- o sees secularity as being the exclusive agent in the struggle against racism, sexism, and other forms of inequality and social injustice.
- o Its instinct: Open up everything, there are no taboos
- o \*Its litmus test – “Pro-choice and Gay marriage”
- o (Complaint of a young Democrat in Boston: “In the Democratic party today you can openly say you’ve had an abortion or are gay, but you can’t say you are a Christian who takes the bible seriously.”)
- o Prone to – secular fundamentalism, and to be blind to its own roots.
- o Its major fault – Intellectual intimidation and adolescent grandiosity

- o God should be excluded from public discourse.

### **C) Conservatives – at their best (instinct)**

Its insight...

- i) Energy isn't friendly
  - Taboos exist for a reason
  - It is not good just to go into dark places because we can
- ii) Every kingdom needs to be protected
- iii) Sexuality is not unimportant and is not an exempt area and the protection of the family is critical
- iv) There are some absolutes
- v) Deep archetypal structures should not be tampered with irresponsibly

### **D) Liberals – at their best (instinct)**

- i) Freedom is a divine gift
  - has been bought at a great historical price
  - should never be denigrated in God's name
- ii) There are equal risks in being too safe.
- iii) Historically the church and the culture have been too anti-erotic, and too unfair to non-white races and to women
- iv) The opoosite of secularity is not the church, but the Taliban.
- v) Catholicity means a wide, inclusive embrace

## **III. THE SOWER – Some perspectives from Jesus.**

### **i) Evangelization today as a call for a new maturity**

- deeper freedom calls for deeper maturity
- Jesus as exemplar – “To go into all dark place, but not sin and take God's light and grace there”

### **ii) The challenge**

- To hold a great tension – to love the world and to love God
  - o Teilhard de Chardin as an example
  - o To hold “energy” and “wisdom” in proper tension
- To stand with Jesus on the Borders of Samaria
- Step forward rather than to look over our shoulders – You are the one that you've been waiting for! Be the one to change the water into wine
- Witness to hope – not just wishful thinking
- Live out a more personal mysticism – and an affective relationship with God.
- Be FOR what you are more than AGAINST what you are against
- Be compassionate, gracious, and understanding, even as you hold your moral ground
- Witness to health – calmness, life, gratitude, forgiveness, and humor

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