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## **The Role of Method in the Practical Theological Disciplines and the Struggle of the Church**

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# 1. A Surprising Challenge and a Practical Theology Badly Theoretically Prepared

By both, the conference theme as a whole and my topic in particular, we find ourselves confronted with a surprising and demanding theoretical task. It is surprising, because practical theology as the vocational science of ministers — this is its traditional purpose — prepares for administering the divine service, for preaching, pastoral care, teaching, and, not to forget, dealing with "the hedgings, matchings and dispatchings", but the study of practical theology is neither primarily directed on coping with conflicts at general nor even with such a huge mountain as "the struggle over the future of the church." It is one thing to be involved in or to observe a struggle in the church (and there are a lot of them); it is quite another thing to make of it a subject of thorough practical theological research and systematical theory-building (and I deliberately emphasize both terms, the word "research" and the word "theory"). We are miles away from the latter with almost nothing in hand. Therefore, our task is also a herculean theoretical challenge.

Limited space forbids to explore the history of practical theology in any extensive way. But a quick glance already delivers an interesting result. The very origin of practical theology as a scientific discipline of its own falls into a period of church-history in Europe when a struggle over the future of the church sets in. In the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century the inner-church struggle between the confessional groups and the additional controversies between the camps within the denominations are dramatically superseded by a general dissociation of modern mind and a church-bound form of religion. The famous answer given by the younger Schleiermacher in defending at least "religion" as such (1799) is well-known. We realize less clearly that also his later description of theology as a scientific discipline including practical theology is a reaction to the new erosions in the spheres of religious mentality which threatened basically the future way of the church, not the future of private religiosity. As long as something is not put into question, it needs no special reflection. Since then this state of naivety is irretrievably gone.

A next logical step is done by C.I. Nitzsch who argues that practical theology has to discuss the church as a topic of its own beside of what systematical theology is used to say about it. The reason why is simple. What may be stated about the church in correct dogmatical terms can be wrong with respect to the practical life of the church in its exposure to the changing conditions of modernity.

We follow from it that practical theology has necessarily to deal with "church theory" ("Kirchentheorie"), which is adequately to be developed as one of its sub-disciplines at a prominent place. Our conference theme precisely aims at the point where the church as a whole is at stake in practical terms, in those of struggle. Consequently, I cannot enter in the following into any methodological considerations concerning homiletics, catechetics etc. before having discussed the overall function of practical theology in relation to the life and the way of the church as a whole.

Our brief historical retrospect delivers a second result when we remember the developments of the 20th century. "the struggle over the future of the church" was to become a constant issue. Our conference theme is not new as far as struggle as such is concerned.

In Germany, the decades before World War I were highly controversial. Should the grounds and aims of practical theology and all its disciplines be revised in a process of modernization or not? After the war the system of church and state broke apart; the statechurch was abolished. In spite of this deep shock churchleader hoped for "a century of the church". At three times, during the chancellorship of Bismarck, in the days of the Weimarian Republic and during the Nazi-regime between 1933 and 1945, the term "struggle" advanced to an explicitly used leading slogan. I mention the "Culture Struggle" ("Kulturkampf"), between the Prussian state and the Roman Catholic Church in the first case, the fierce "School Struggle" ("Schulkampf") between the churches and the socialist parties about the confessionalist character of the state schools in the second case and the "Church Struggle" ("Kirchenkampf") of "The Confessing Church" ("Bekennende Kirche") after 1933.

As a matter of fact one struggle was followed by another one, but who might have expected that after all practical theology would have resolutely built up a theoretical framework in order to clarify its general role in struggles and conflicts is disappointed.

## 2. Obstacles on the Way to a Methodological Discussion

There are many obstacles that up to now have prevented practical theologians from developing a consistent explanatory and actionleading theory relevant to our point. I mention three of them:

(1) For the neo-orthodox theology of Barthianism a *deductive normative position* is the typical starting-point. The future of the church is reflected in the light of the promise that the "proclamation" of "the word

of God" will create the true church as "the body of Christ". In this process it is God who separates and reconciles. The struggle is solved, as it were, "from above". Consequently, practical theology is more or less absorbed by dogmatic theology, losing much of its specific profile and task.

(2) Practical theology is really many positions, and the deductive-dogmatic one is certainly not the dominating approach. Instead, an *inductive-additive position* is most spread in Europe as well as supposedly on the North American continent. In our century an extensive reception of non-theological methods from the social sciences has taken place with psychological, sociological and educational methods now forming constituent elements of the different practical sub-disciplines. Some of them are relevant for our topic, as we will see below, because they directly relate to internal or external conflicts.

Psychoanalytical methods as they are used among others in pastoral care draw hypotheses from assumptions about unconscious inner conflicts in early childhood and later in life. The methods of ideology critique are related to contradictions between mind and reality, i.e., between the self understanding of the church and its empirical reality. Neo-Marxist analyses are used to start from the struggle between the rich and the poor; they have influenced Latin America liberation theology. However, all these methods, which certainly have enriched practical theology very much, have chiefly led to a diversification only without producing any coherent discussion on the struggle of the church over the future. What has grown, as it were, "from below" remained an additive proliferation with little systematic theory-building.

(3) The overall weakness in practical theology may be seen in the *lacking of meta-theoretical reflection* as such. What it means can be taken from what we are trying to do just now, i.e., not only to hold a position and to use a method, but also to reflect upon both from the perspective of our fundamental theological issue with the interest in the methodology to be applied. When the question is raised on our conference what practical theology as a discipline and what the methods of its sub-disciplines can contribute, we are not only asked to tell each other what we are for in the struggle, but mainly to clarify our instruments. Let me illustrate this difference from an analytical linguistic point of view.

Practical theological statements can be of two kinds. In saying "Christians have to fight against stubborn church-authorities and be advocates for priests becoming married including women as priests and homosexual persons as ministers", we are directly conveying a meaningful position, e.g. in a discussion between churchmembers in a

situation of adult education. The same is with a statement like the following in the homiletic situation of a sermon "We all know that God hates what is against his will in the struggle of the church against the satanic powers of today as are sexual promiscuity, abortion, homosexuality etc., therefore, fight together with our Lord!" Statements of this kind are directly related to the subject matter as such.

From these statements we have to distinguish those which express our theoretical reflection about the language and the procedures in adult education and homiletics just mentioned above. "What can they achieve? What, for instance, prevents church-authorities from learning? What, in other cases, prevents church-members or adults at general from learning? Which methods in church adult education are more hopeful than others to promote the desirable future of the church? How should the methods of preaching look like in struggles?" To sum up: It is not the methods of speaking, proclaiming, appealing etc. as such, namely as they are being used in the immediate practice, what is demanded from me, but an analysis about the logic of these methods. That is what the term "methodological" means.

### 3. "Struggle" as a Multi-dimensional Term and Issue

As a next step of clarification we have to ask what the term "struggle" implies.

Firstly, the conference theme speaks of "the struggle *over* the future of the church". We may understand this phrase as pointing at the controversies about the main direction in which the church should go. The German term for it is "Richtungsstreit".

As there is no consensus about the answers, we have also to deal, secondly, with struggles *within the churches*. The conference agenda has some of them put before us as the struggles on church-authority, sexuality and feminism.

Another section of this conference will deal with practical theology in diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, we are here not only composed of people from different regions of the globe, but also of Christian theologians from various churches or denominations. So it is world-wide with additional tensions. Therefore, thirdly, the word "struggle" also means *interchurch struggles*.

The paper delivered by Robert Wuthnow has discussed the struggle of the church in the context of modernity. The very heading implies already that innerchurch struggles can be caused by external social

factors, not only by an innertheological controversial setting. May be, this fourth constellation is even the most important at all, the struggle *between the church and its context*..

Today, in the "one world" of our globe, this context includes last, but not the least, as a fifth dimension of meaning the struggles *between different religions*.

In the following I shall understand the term "struggle" as a multidimensional issue with our conference theme formulation as a sort of embracing perspective. Or to put it in a more precise way: The different kinds of struggle — within a particular church, between churches, between churches and their contexts — can be regarded as the components of the struggle over the future of the different churches. In using the term "churches" in the plural form, "the" church as the "una sancta ecclesia" is included as a matter of Christian faith; it cannot and will not be the direct subject of my analyses.

#### **4. The Interdependence of the Struggles over the Future of the Church and of Society**

The fact that internal and external struggles seem to be closely interrelated will hold true most in the field of moral issues. With this area practical theology has a lot to do, in particular in pastoral care. But even when listening to a seemingly spiritual sermon on a Sunday morning churchgoers are present in more than one role only. They feel themselves being addressed as church-members and as citizens, as partisans of camps within the congregation and within society, as adherents of progressive or conservative valuesystems, as human beings of white or coloured skin, as men or women. Therefore, it is understandable that attempts have been made to pull practical theology and Christian ethics together.

Another relevant factor which contributes to the interrelation of religion and society is the way how the churches conceive of the future and develop their image of God's acting in history. From this side the field of *politics* becomes a sphere of concurring visions.

The history of *American Protestantism* illustrates that also a system with a separation of state and church can develop a high degree of interdependence. On the new continent the American churches became the center of social and cultural organization. From the very beginning of settlement we can observe the linkage of individual piety and social theologies. The separation of state and church has not led to an ideological disconnection of the two spheres. The question has

ever been: "Which sort of faith for which church in which historical and societal world for the whole country"?

The struggle over the future of the church was and still is a struggle over the future of America. American Protestant religion has been future-oriented all the centuries with many hot debates whether the American society has already become true Christian or not. On the one hand the liberals believed that the "second coming" of Christ in which the kingdom of God was to flourish and prosper had already happened in the forms of blooming cultural development. On the other hand this postmillennialist standpoint was opposed by the premillennialist view of evangelicals who denied the cultural liberal optimism and refused to accept the identification of the given empirical reality of the American nation with God's Kingdom.

The arguments of post- and premillennialists were drawn from different interpretations of the course of history. The theology of "dispensationalism", the belief in a divine plan with particular dispensations given in particular epochs, necessarily implied the interpretation of concrete social issues as God's signs to humankind that our time has come near to its end. It is obvious how alarming from this angle moral issues concerning alcoholism, drugs, sexuality must appear.

The correlation of religious and social factors can also be observed in the field of *economics*. The "populist movement" at the end of the 19th century and the movement of "progressivism" with the "social gospel" as one of its main elements in the first half of our century are also simultaneously truly Protestant and truly American. If we had asked Protestants in that time for their view on the future of the church they would have answered in categories of social egalitarianism, general welfare, military strength and all this, of course, mixed up with the religious conviction of God being surely on their side.

On the old continent *European Protestantism* shows quite another type of interdependence between religious and social struggles. While in the North American development the Calvinist idea of a theocratic community was influential combined with a dynamic view of historical development, in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries the Lutheran "doctrine of the two realms" (Zweireichelehre) had laid the ground. If one believes according to this doctrine that God is reigning the hearts and souls by his Word in his spiritual realm to the right and the bodies by way of the parental, political and economic order in his worldly realm to the left, the political motto of the church has to be not to interfere with politics. What follows is more or less a general support of those in power and to oppose where the given order is questioned by emancipatory or revolutionary ideas.

One might suppose that the interdependence is less visible if we turn to the *Roman Catholic Church* which leaves to us the impression of a self-reliant, centrally governed body of high independence and little interdependence with its context. But this is only one side of the coin. The Roman Catholic Church has a very strong interest in shaping the surrounding world in accordance with its self-understanding as a "societas perfecta". Thus, the struggle over the future of the church obtains an unmistakable direction. It has been successful when a nation has become a Catholic nation, a schoolsystem a system of Catholic schools and so forth.

The results of this chapter can be summed up as follows. Struggles over the future of the church are in an intricate way composed of theological and non-theological factors and always embedded in a larger cultural historical process. They differ not only from continent to continent, but also according to the particular Christian traditions and specific cultural constellations. Of a major relevance is the nation of the church, the understanding of its mandate in the world. Practical theology has to take these different settings into account, if it is asked for its function in struggles.

However, what can we realistically expect? Can practical theology as a discipline exert a major influence at all, if the historical transformations are as complex as it is the case? If religion, society and culture are interrelated, the future of each of these areas of life will depend on that of the others. In view of this fact it might be that theology plays much more a reacting than an activating role and that for instance liberalism and fundamentalism are two forms of adaptation to the processes of modernization, or to be more precise, fundamentalism is the reaction to the reaction of liberalism. In short, we are warned to overestimate the influence of practical theology.

An accompanying result of this section is the divergence in the meaning of the term "church", the typical Protestant church in America being the local congregation, the Church of England or of Sweden being state-churches, the Roman Catholic Church a centralized global church. Each of them shows rather different types of authority so that the role of practical theology has to be considerably modified.

## 5. The Churches and the Contradictions of Modernity — between the Protagonists of Prophetic Renewal and Apocalyptic Fundamentalism

Many specific innerchurch struggles can be regarded as indicators of the embracing struggle over the future of the church on the whole (see above chap.3). They are rooted today, as it seems, in the negative judgements about the frustrating course of history at general and that of the church in particular, both being closely intertwined (chap. 4). As this history is the history of modern ages, my next thesis is derived from the *crisis of modernity*, "modernità in coma", as an Italian journalist recently has put it in a floppy ironical way. Most of the present conflicts in the churches probably mirror this crisis, in a different way, however. The controversial reactions differ according to what one considers to be worst and what ought to be altered first.

Modernity has become universal and so have their contradictions. The process of modernization has reached its geographical universality, but, as seen from a first standpoint, it has failed to fulfill its promises. With the eyes of a second stand, the modern spirit has not remained behind its own standards, but has followed completely wrong standards.

From the first perspective the Christian heritage has been a constructive element at the dawn of modern times since the age of reformation and the epoch of Enlightenment. Beside other influences, groups of Christians have transferred the idea of religious freedom to the political reality of freedom for religion. The ideas of social justice and equal human rights go back to biblical roots, too.

But who has profited by these ideas in the further historical developments? White people much more than black and coloured people, the northern hemisphere more than the southern, the rich more than the poor, men more than women. This discrepancy between promise and reality is the first source of a deep and justified disappointment and the reason why Christians raise their voice of protest. From this perspective of a determined *Christian humanism and socialism* the struggle over the future of the church and of society — we remember the interdependence has to be decided on the issues of human rights, social justice and — more recently — the preservation of life on our globe. The practical activities have received today a specific uncompromising determination with regard to the liberation of disadvantaged and oppressed groups. Church authorities are accused of being accomplices with the political powers and of clinging to authoritarian and patriarchal structures of their own at that.

In quite another direction *the public resurgence of evangelicalism, fundamentalism and traditionalism* is pointing. While on the side just mentioned the crisis of modernity is still experienced as a lack of freedom and autonomy, it is now just the opposite, the lack of order and integration, of clear-cut truth and obedience to eternal fundamentals that arouses the deepest irritation. There a "yes" to pluralism, here a "no".

Research on the fundamentalist revolt against modernism is baffled by its vast present dimensions and its quick growth. The studies observe similar phenomena among Protestants and Catholics, with Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, in the forms of religious, cultural and political fundamentalism.

In the religious area we have on the Protestant side to distinguish between radical fundamentalists and more moderate evangelicals. Their common denominator is the resistance against the liberal heritage of the Enlightenment. According of Martin E. Marty's and R. Scott Appleby's study project the chief theological characteristic of fundamentalism is its "oppositionalist" nature, "one beats back" — beating back as a constitutive principle, "struggle" as God's demanding mandate.

The theological attacks are directed against hermeneutics in terms of historical-critical research, against pluralism and relativism and against the theories of evolution. The spearhead of all of this is the fight against the idea of a free, self-sustaining and critical subject as a criterion of truth experience. Truth is given and final, not preliminary. While the Christian movements on the one end of this polarisation draw on the prophetic traditions of the Old and New Testament in order to motivate their cry for change, it is on this end more or less an apocalyptic vision that propels the mind. Not human powers, but Christ and the Antichrist are regarded as the true subjects of history. The human individual is expropriated as far as his or her private experience and independent reflection are concerned, it is seen as a mighty instrument in respect to the overall divine plan in God's hand.

The emergence of fundamentalism is nourished by several important sociological and psychological factors. Fundamentalism has been explained as the escape from the challenges of a free and plural society and from a church which follows similar patterns. One has seen that, indeed, our situation overstrains the individual. It is true that on the one hand modern societies highly esteem the individual while on the other hand they leave it alone in its search for meaning, shelter and ultimate security. Thus, people become prone to conversions whatever kind if these grant what is felt as missing.

In this chapter, to sum up, I have tried to show that two different aspects of modernity have created two corresponding reactions which oppose each other although both start from a negative appraisal of the same situation. The clash is unavoidable in the church as well as in other areas of society, since those who complain of unfulfilled promises do want the human potentials of our time to become accomplished whereas the other side refutes just this vision as an expression of hybris and sin.

The fierceness of struggle is additionally nourished by other structural similarities here and there, the most important of them being the passionate orientation towards the future itself. It is just these movements which are struggling over the future of the church whereas the middle of the spectrum is much less keen on any major future renewal at all.

## **6. Practical Theological Methods as Subordinate Instruments in Struggles**

The opposing powers outlined in the previous chapter which allow to define at least one of the major conflicts over the future of the church today are very active including political campaigns. The main emphasis is laid by them on a visible transformation of the Church. Everyone is summoned to practical commitment, be it on behalf of evangelization and mission or of emancipation and liberation. The older Pietism already used to define the true theological theory according to the true Christian praxis. A similar subordination of theological thinking to practical action can be observed in the present.

What is the role of practical theology as a discipline on this background? What is the part the methods of the practical theological disciplines are to play? Future-oriented Christian movements will expect practical theology to become an ally in the fights against the opponents with the effect that the methods of the sub-disciplines become instruments in the practical campaigns.

### *(1) The Technological Role of Methods*

One of the most conspicuous example to illustrate a first type of instrumentalisation is the usage of modern means of audiovisual communication by fundamentalist TV-churches. In their revolt against modernism they do not despise modern techniques. Hereby the arsenal of homiletic methods to proclaim the gospel is surely broadened. This

does not imply, however, that to the same degree a self-critical methodological reflection is developed.

The studies on new evangelical and charismatic movements as well as those on new syncretistic cults show that "new religiosity" is definitely group-religiosity. Again the corresponding interest in methods of group-psychology is high, but purely functional because the purposes are fixed and beyond discussion.

To put it in more general terms, we may state that the practical theological methods are taken as auxiliary technological devices in a purpose-means-relation by which practical theology is robbed of its character as an independent theoretical discipline.

## (2) *The Experimental Role of Methods*

Another kind of onesidedly emphasizing the adjective "practical" in practical theology is to be found where the struggle over the future of the church aims at a new Christian life-style by way of experiment and discovery. The still growing development started in the 70ies and has been widely influenced by the ecumenical movement. In the meantime workshops on "spirituality" and experiments with new Christian community have been powerfully supplemented by ecological initiatives. Although research has also identified some forms of a so-called "green fundamentalism", the leading principles of most of these initiatives, action groups and basic communities are much more shaped by self-criticism and openness than by religious self-security and the ardour to convert others to homogeneous standards.

The effects on methods are also different. They are used in an experimental role according to the experimental style of probing the future by new spiritual, ecological, feminist, intercultural or interreligious patterns of life and dialogue.

For illustration let us first touch methods of Christian adult education. There has been as classical debate on the methodology of the work of Lay Academies. Should they be only a "forum", i.e. an open-minded platform of discussion, or also a "factor", i.e. a driving force by supporting transformations of the church from a partial point of view? In the second case academy "courses" will become "workshops" or even "training-camps" where the new shape of faith and life is propagated and actually exercised. Practical theologians are expected to join and to deliver ideas apt for concrete progress.

From the methodological discussion in the field of modern education the type of "action research" is well known among experts. Its chief characteristic is the linkage of research and a particular project of practical innovation, e.g. the experimental testing of a new kind of schooling. In practical theology such a model can be found in a way — this reservation has to be added — in forms of "pastoral clinical training".

What is the common structure of the two kinds of defining the role of methods either according to the technological or the experimental model? With a positive undertone one may say that in both cases practical theological methods are applied in a close connection to practical issues. But what is the price? The involvement in controversial processes happens at the cost of a loss of theoretical independence and profile. The experimental role leaves more room though for creative and critical reflection, compared with the technological model and its classical streamlining subordination. But is this sufficient?

## **7. The Critical Assessment of Methods by Practical Theology as a Theoretical Discipline**

Although I am personally much in favour of the experimental role of methods, their possible contribution in clarifying or solving church conflicts is rather weak. As to the technological model a constructive role is completely lacking.

In the nature of struggle that one has given up the standpoint of an observer in order to become a participant involved in controversial actions. This loss of a position which enables to take the perspectives of both opposing parties can imply a corresponding loss of competence and trustworthiness. Partisans are no good mediators. It would not be very wise though to play off against each other the standpoints of academic impartiality and practical partiality. There is no neutrality in disciplines like ours. What counts is, however, the competence of simultaneously being committed and being able to keep a certain self-critical distance. The factors pertinent are the power of historical and systematical analysis, the degree of metatheoretical reflection and on the whole the relative independence of practical theology as a scientific discipline.

(1) *Church Struggles and Methods in the Light of Historical Research*

Historical research is indispensable. Historical studies can lay open some of the roots of present day conflicts. Our understanding of the motivations can be enriched, our biases be corrected. We are learning to deal with religious struggles more realistically, looking at them from different sides now with a growing feeling for the wins and losses.

(2) *Church Struggles and Methods as a Subject of Systematic Reflection According to Theological Principles*

In our discipline we also need a good deal of systematic reflection. One of its tasks is to make sure of the leading practical theological principles. Whatever our private theological preferences and religious affinities may be, without a safe knowledge of its fundamental convictions a church will lose its orientation. Church boards have a right to expect practical theologians to be competent as to what matters.

As a Lutheran practical theologian, to give an example, I have to know how to differentiate between the priesthood of all believers and the function of the ecclesiastical office of ministry. Shall laypersons without official vocation be admitted to public preaching and the public administration of sacraments? This is an old and an ever new struggle in my own church over the expectations of Pietist groups. The booming Charismatic movement goes still further in challenging the churches in Germany to admit a second baptism and independent Charismatic local congregations. All this is being propagated on behalf of a renewed church in the future. Whatever now the governing church bodies responsible for the decisions to be taken for the sake of the church as a whole may find out, they ought to know what they are doing. Practical theology can assist an informed and deliberate church leadership.

3) *Church Struggles and Methods in View of Positional Programmes or from the Perspective of a Critical Metatheoretical Assessment*

As a theoretical discipline practical theology has to serve, thirdly, by critically assessing those practical theological concepts, strategies and methods which more or less self-sufficiently present their ideas and procedures without calling them in question. Although such a "positionalist" or "programmatical" approach may certainly compare the favoured methods of one's own in homiletics, poimenics and catechetics with competing programmes, critical defense and offense included, this kind of criticism is not what we understand by a meta-

theoretical critique which intends the systematic comparison of positions.

To begin with the character of statements, i.e., the linguistic status of propositions, positional thinking tends to programmatic sentences. A programme, however, is bent on success and keen on beating the opposing position. Programmes are no theories. The more statements, and actions based upon them, are onesidedly programmatic, the more they will aggravate integration and reconciliation. At worst they heat the struggle and provoke the opponent's counteractions. Instead, the function of a systematic critical assessment can and should be to foster a more balanced understanding of the pros and cons.

In summing up, I would like to say that it is by this nature as a theoretical enterprise, as "the *theory* of the praxis" of the church (not the praxis itself), to quote Schleiermacher, that the practical theological disciplines in dealing with methods can play a more constructive role for the use of praxis than by being too much directly absorbed by praxis. This does not exclude that practical theologians will actively take part in a struggle as protagonists of this or that position. They cannot avoid being involved. But their trademark, so to speak, is to secure and to make visible the distinction between the one thing and the other.

## **8. The Methods of Practical Theological Disciplines and the Culture of Struggle**

As a next step it is necessary to look at methods in more detail. Are there at all specifically theological methods in theology? Schleiermacher's famous negative answer is well-known. There are not, and what makes out their theological character is their purpose only.

Indeed, the procedures in homiletics are composed of hermeneutical, rhetorical and semiotical methods. In pastoral care methods of psychoanalysis, client-centered therapy and behavioural psychology play a considerable role beside others. In the educational field, church education, religious education in schools and Christian adult education share many insights with general education, not to mention the amount of knowledge adopted from sociology and psychology, among others from learning theory; youth research, developmental psychology and life span research. All these methods become theological ones by the religious tasks and purposes they are attributed to. What follows for their function in religious conflicts? To answer this question we have to distinguish between, as it were, the 'natural' potentiality of

a method and its function within its specific context of application in the church.

My argument in this chapter now is that at present almost all methods of our sub-disciplines are by virtue of the 'nature' of their own already children of the spirit of modernism since the times of Enlightenment. Thereby our task becomes ambivalent. On the one hand practical theology ought to serve all groups in the struggles over the future of the church. On the other hand its methods are not neutral although by a technological use much of their character can be neutralized in a problematic sense as we have seen. How can the modern character of methods be described?

Struggles within the churches and over their future call for two things, for *scientific analysis* and *constructive solutions*. At first let us look at the analytical power of practical theological methods.

#### (1) *The Analytical Function of Practical Theological Methods in Struggles*

*Psychoanalysis* is a classical case of conflict-oriented analysis as we all know from the attempts of explaining behaviour by tracing it back to unconscious conflicts in childhood and later. Studies on fundamentalism, dogmatism and fanaticism help to understand why religious struggles can often assume a sharpness which makes any peaceful solution impossible. As to fundamentalist attitudes deep-rooted anxieties seem to nourish the extreme rigidity in keeping to one truth, one doctrine, one strategy, a standpoint that does not allow any compromise. The ability and readiness to accept a compromise, however, is a basic prerequisite of a peaceful life in a world shaped by Christian and religious pluralism. In knowing about the psychological backgrounds pastoral care might perhaps be better able to intervene in conflicts, in particular on the level of local congregation. By consultation pastoral interventions would help to mitigate a conflict provided the persons in question allow these interventions.

*Semiotical analyses* of sermons can reveal the indoctrinating nature of what a preaching minister may by him- or herself regard as the proclamation of the pure gospel. A rather harmless example is the word "we" — "we see, we believe, we agree upon" etc. — as it is disguising the minister's private religious position he or she wants to transmit as the only valid opinion. Of a direct influence upon conflicts are semantical dichotomics, here "us", there "the others", here the believers, there the unbelievers. In dealing with a biblical text the tendency to make one reading to the only valid reading has stabilizing effects upon the one group, but deterrent effects upon others.

As to Christian *adult education* faith development theories inform us that many church-members conceptualize their convictions in sort of a 'closed system', in a "synthetic-conventional" structure, whereas others spell out their faith in an "individuating-reflective" structure as a next step, but that it will last rather long until a "conjunctive" structure of faith enables to take the perspectives of opposite stands and to become more tolerant. By the explanatory power of structural developmental theories we understand much better why some constellations of struggle are so hopeless. The transformation of the deep-structures of thinking and believing depends on many factors which cannot easily be influenced.

The ambivalent situation is always the same. Scientific methods like those mentioned above can be helpful by their analytical results in enlightening the background of religious struggles. Thereby they can initiate new learning, but the contrary is possible, too. Attitudes of dogmatism prevent people from learning, and scientific insights will be no argument.

(2) *Hermeneutical and Dialogical Functions of Practical Theological Methods in Struggles*

Most of the methods in practical theology follow the principles of hermeneutics and dialogue. Hermeneutical criteria form a constitutive part of homiletic work beginning with the interpretation of the biblical text and including the interpretation of the present situation of the listeners. In religious instruction they have a safe place, too. The same priority is given to the spirit of dialogue and free discussion in all dimensions of religious education as well as in pastoral care. Authoritarian methods do more or less belong to the past.

In short, we meet with a similar general picture. The aspects of our methodology just mentioned are the result of modern developments. While the hermeneutical perspectives mirror the modern historical understanding of truth as being bound to human forms of expression in the flow of cultural change, the principles of free discussion and dialogue express the basic self-understanding of a democratic, open society. With these statements we are returning to the main contemporary struggle as outlined above and the dilemma is obvious, too.

(3) *The Modern Character of Practical Theological Methods and the Struggle over Modernity — a Dilemma*

If we as practical theologians are convinced that in the struggles in question practical theology is to play a role as a discipline — and if we know what we mean in using the word "discipline" which is a definitely

scientific term — we have to realize that already the very theme of our conference is in a way taking side. The same is with the topic of my paper. In applying the metatheoretical critical assessment to ourselves we see that the question concerning the role of methods is also by itself a fruit of modern theological reflectivity. As to the methods in detail we have come to the same result.

My intention has been to argue for a role of practical theology in the struggles over the future of the church by which our discipline appears as a reliable and competent partner to all different combatants. But how can this be, if a modern discipline is involved in a struggle over just these modern implications? How can rules and procedures in homiletics, poimenics and catechetics help, if a broad opposing alliance will reject them? What about our whole argumentation in favour of the analytical power of methods and their contribution to understanding and dialogue, if all this is regarded as irrelevant or even dangerous because it breathes the spirit of intellectualism, liberalism and relativism?

We have to be very honest about ourselves as to what we are doing. We are not located outside of church and society and their conflicts over the future. The very fact that our discipline has developed as it has is already an answer to our issue.

(4) *Phronesis or the General Impact of Practical Theology as a Discipline towards a Culture of Struggle*

The development of practical theology since Schleiermacher and Nitzsch points to a contribution to the future in following terms. The education of ministry today as I have had the chance to observe it at Protestant and Catholic faculties in Germany is, firstly, interested in a historical orientation about the backgrounds of recent developments and conflicts. Secondly, emphasis is laid upon the ability to compare controversial methods or programmes and to discuss their value for renewal according to the theological standards of each particular church. Finally, we more and more learn about the constructive role an empirical practical theology can play to clarify the interplay of psychological, sociological, political and religious factors in conflicts. The general impact of all these endeavours which surely need further development is what can be called the attitude of "phronesis", of circumspection, of "Besonnenheit".

Whether this answer will satisfy the combatants in a struggle depends on how far they will agree with the rules and principles underlying this self-understanding of practical theology as a discipline. If they do, they can probably profit from it in several respects. These are a greater

emphasis for others, a better understanding of the different motivations and the readiness for living together in a pluralistic Christianity and a pluralistic modern culture challenged by severe crises.

This conclusion has nothing to do with a harmonizing view of our global and local situations in church and society. Nor are we allowed to evade struggle where it is vitally necessary. It has a lot to do, however, with a humane culture of struggle among Christians as an example for the world.

## **9. Practical Theological Competence as a Profession and as a Habitus**

We need both a struggle over the future of the churches and a humane way of acting in conflicts so that we must not be ashamed as Christians and can prove our competence as professional theologians.

Practical theology as a discipline is by itself a piece of praxis by which we are involved in the life of the church including their controversies. But our superior task in a professionalist understanding of our profession is different from the processes in the immediacy of life.

We are members of a certain profession which is responsible for the theological education of ministers and teachers in the church, not to mention the contributions to neighboured professions. Although the professions of ministry and teaching do not possess all characteristics of full professionalization, the elements of academic training, of a corporative ethos and a certain degree of self-responsibility provide ministers and teachers, in particular Protestant, with an independence which enables them to fulfill a constructive role of their own. A main quality of this professional competence has to be trustworthiness hopefully bestowed upon them by different opposing groups.

How can this happen? Let me conclude with the assumption that it is presumably the influence of the education in all practical theological disciplines together as it is exerted upon the person as a whole which matters. It is the 'habitus' which will speak to others in controversial situations. This personal factor should not be forgotten.

We urgently need a great variety of free and daring experiments in order to renew our local congregations and our churches in large. It would be a good thing if the commitment of practical theology as a discipline is represented by educated and balanced personalities.

<sup>1</sup> Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Theology in the Americas* (New York: Books, 1975), p. 3.