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Normativity and Context in Practical Theology „The Interdisciplinary Issue“

I Introduction to the text

As introduction to this discussion, five major dimensions of practical theology (as reflected in the Princeton Ph.D. program) are briefly noted. This will supply the programmatic context of the subsequent discussion in which I will argue that the systematic dimension (II) is the key to the overall coherence, potential creativity, and consequent development of this field as a discipline.¹ It will be claimed that the

¹ A brief account of the notion of „discipline“ at work in the following discussion is called for here. A discipline is a powerful, complex, cultural construct. For Stephen Toulmin, a discipline comprises „a communal tradition of procedures and techniques for dealing with theoretical or practical problems“ (Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 378-411). It controls and directs how a given object of concern may be studied and known. Eventually, as one practices a discipline, it may even direct how one comports oneself with regard to knowing in general. „Once a scientist, always a scientist“ is a cryptic example.

Disciplines may increase in power through enculturation generation to generation (see Parson's model). The new recruit learns from the community of established scholars the repertory of intellectual techniques, procedures, skills, and methods of representation of an event or phenomenon that falls within the purview of the discipline.

But disciplines stay alive and potentially transcend their enculturation limitation, not through new recruits primarily, but by being open to change, *via* gradualism or by paradigm shifts, through time. The key to understanding the core of a discipline is to grasp what does not change or what maintains the continuity of a discipline as it unfolds historically. The core of a discipline is not its object of study nor its techniques, skills, etc. for studying such an object. Continuity resides in the generative problematic which, functioning almost like a „strange attractor“ in chaos theory, brings the object and ways of knowing it together in a concern that unites but transcends them both. When Wittgenstein's critics complained that what he was doing was „not philosophy,“ his answer was, „Maybe not, but what I am doing is the legitimate heir to that which was previously called 'philosophy.'“ (Toulmin, *op.cit.*, p. 146, fn. 1) The point is that grasping the generative problematic of a discipline is what enables one to transcend the enculturated structure of the discipline and invent new paradigms which depart from, but are nevertheless legitimate heirs of, what has gone before.

In practical theology, the core of the discipline is not its operations, procedures, practices, roles, congregations, and the like. Rather, its core problematic resides in why these must be studied; why these are a problem. There are countless superficial responses to such a question, but the fundamental problematic implied in this question, and what drives this discipline forward and generates its issues, is that such phenomena or events combine two incongruent, qualitatively distinct realities, the Divine and the human, in apparently congruent forms of action. Because this field requires an in-

other four dimensions of this field are fundamentally dependent for their interpretation in any given position on the methodology, or lack thereof, developed in dimension II.

The dimensions are:

(I) *Historical*: Although focus is on Schleiermacher in the modern period, practical theology must be traced back through the Reformation, the Medieval period, to the early church and its biblical roots. (e.g. Pannenberg, W., *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 231 ff. and 423 ff.; Schaff, Philip, *Theological Propaedeutic* (New York, Scribners & Sons, 1902), Book V „Practical Theology“)

(II) *Systematic*: Here the issue is the formulation of a methodology for interdisciplinarity which systematically relates theology and the human sciences. Extensive discussion of this dimension will comprise the following text, but it should be understood that the methodological position taken at this point ramifies backward into how one views the history of this field and forward in how one engages and interprets the following three dimensions.

(III) *Ecclesial*: This is the locus in which practical theology becomes most visible and manifest, and it is here that a position in this field becomes accountable both to the people of God and to the Spirit of God by whom the life of the church is created and sustained. The worshipping community is the generative and sustaining source, the paradigm case, of the whole enterprise of practical theology. It is the place in which practical theology works out its transformations within and of the whole field of human action. (See attached)

(IV) *Operational*: In this dimension, the above three dimensions are operationalized in various specialized forms of ministry (e.g. preaching, counseling, educating, and organizing). These operations or „practices“ are not the core of the discipline, but they are essential to the field of practical theology and often bring the central problematic of the field to its sharpest focus.

(V) *Contextual*: Social and cultural trends and movements, immediate and world wide, secular and ecclesial, inevitably permeate all dimensions of the field of practical theology and have direct bearing on how

clusive theory of action, even the methodology for approaching this problematic cannot itself be detached from its claims about action in the field at large. The methodology that attempts to come to terms with this problematic, and to bring it (including the self-involvement of the methodologist) into a form that can guide and govern the field as a whole, is the centerpiece of practical theology as a discipline.

the field is construed and how the disciplines may undergo change historically, yet without departing from its central problematic. Thus, it is of crucial importance to assess those social and cultural forces which impinge on any approach that one may take, or have taken, to this field. However, as I have indicated, the basis for such an assessment will inevitably reflect the position taken in II above.

The sequence in which these dimensions are listed is not indicative of any necessary relationship among them, but there is an order of priority of importance given to dimension II. All dimensions are distinct arenas of discourse, even though the issues they confront will often cut across their distinctiveness and permeate the entire field. We turn now to dimension II and to the methodological issue per se.

II Practical Theology: The Systematic Dimension

I have claimed that the discipline of practical theology, by name as well as by nature, must focus on some particular version of interdisciplinarity. Whatever else „practical“ may mean, it must refer to some form of human action and be guided by the disciplines that interpret such action. Likewise, „theology,“ whatever its multiple meanings, refers to the critical study of and accurate speech about God's revelation. Thus, one of its tasks is to point to the mystery of God's nature and action. In practical theology the disciplines that will help us to understand human action must be put into a constructive relationship with the disciplines that enable us to understand who God is from God's self-disclosure.² The systematic task of practical theology, then,

² As previously noted practical theology requires a comprehensive theory of human action, and it will have to exceed the scope of the discussions of Habermas, Gadamer, and post-critical approaches to practical reason. This footnote indicates a few of the elements operative in the theory of action presumed by the following discussion. The field of human action is governed by two forces which are never operative separately but one or the other is always predominant. Analysis reveals that they are frequently working at cross purposes or in contrary directions. They are *socialization*, understood broadly as including enculturation (see Parson's model) and *transformation* (see attached sheet „Transformations“). The relationality between these two is analogous to the life-death instincts in Freudian metapsychology or in assimilation-accommodation, two of the functional invariants in Piaget's thought. In the ordinary course of things, socialization is predominant, more or less gradually incorporating all transformational events into the system. The all-consuming power of this system can hardly be underestimated. Even theory-practice interactions which purport to bring about transformations within and, indeed, of the whole field (Habermas) must themselves be transformed or they will be enculturated. Even positions which propose to make the system critical of itself (Luhmann) will also be consumed because the human spirit cannot extricate itself from its own frailty and finitude.

is to preserve the integrity of such disciplines and, without losing that integrity, relate them so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question than any one such discipline may be able to provide by itself. At the same time, such a relation should enrich both sides of this interdisciplinary endeavor.

Thus practical theology must establish systematic procedures for remaining accountable to the phenomenon under investigation as well as to the disciplines involved in disclosing the inner substance, structure, and dynamics of that phenomenon. This means that reductionistic approaches for which no methodology has been specified or for which reductionism is uncritically sanctioned in the relationship between theology and human sciences must be dismissed at the outset.³

However, critical theological reflection on the system reveals that transformational events are eruptions of a higher order of meaning and purpose than the system itself can contain. Thus, such events point beyond themselves to an ultimate ground for all human action and upon which the whole field is contingent.

This indicates that no theory of action is adequate that fails to account for the action of God, specifically in this case, the action of God in the Spiritual Presence of Jesus Christ. The argument that this claim is not merely a further expression of the socializing and enculturating system, is similar to Pannenburg's argument for the historically definitive significance of the resurrection. What Parson's system and other such systems based on organic models overlook is the prevailing inevitability of the death of the organism and the built-in death of the system as signs of entropy, the ultimate death of the universe. The understanding of human action with which we must work is one that includes its own death in the Presence of One who brings life out of death and in so doing, in the midst of our deepest fears, fulfills our deepest human longings. Pannenburg's argument is that Jesus' resurrection qualifies him, Jesus, as the proleptic revelation of the end of history. Moving one step beyond Pannenburg, the position here is that since he stands beyond death, the action of his Spirit in the ongoing flow of history takes the full measure of the human action system (not vice-versa) and of the whole of history as well.

Transformations within the context of human action, then, are signs of the ultimate transformation of the system as a whole by the Creator Spirit of Christ. Cryptically one might say that each „Eureka“ is a muted but proleptic „hallelujah“, declaring that by that same Spirit all socialization is unto transformation and so to conformation to the person of Jesus Christ (much more on this later). Moreover, in the transformed situation socialization and transformation are in a bipolar relational unity that is parabolic of Chalcedonian Christology. Note that although socialization is here subordinated to transformation, it can no more be separated from transformation than the humanity of Christ can be separated from his divinity. In this relationality we have the major premise for the theory of action operative in the following pages.

³ For a discussion of some of the subtleties of reductionism, see „Psychology and Theology“ by J. Loder in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990).

More acceptable are approaches which have recognized the central problematic of the discipline and have developed an explicit methodology by which they seek to bring human action and theology into dialogue and so into a systematic relationship. In each of the following examples, the methodology attempts to preserve disciplinary integrity, but it does so by moving to a *tertium quid*, a philosophical, empirical, or experiential baseline, in an attempt to construct out of that baseline interdisciplinary insights designed to yield new understandings of the phenomenon in question and to mutually enrich the disciplines involved. This *tertium quid* situation I consider to be the key problem common to interdisciplinary methodology in practical theology. It is problematic because, under the surface of the interdisciplinary discussion, it introduces an alternative reality that is not explicitly accountable to the terms of the theology-human science dialogue itself. By so doing, these approaches subvert the central problematic of practical theology as a discipline. This tacit dimension of the dialogue not only controls, in an unexamined way, the outcome of the dialogue but connotes an ethos within which it is assumed that the results of the dialogue must take place.⁴ Thus, following these few examples, I will suggest a different direction from that which is current in this field.

(I) In Seward Hiltner's perspectival *methodology* (*A Preface to Pastoral Theology*), empirical theology and psychoanalytic theory issued in an approach to practical theology which stressed functionalism and pragmatism focussed on the operations of ministry. The baseline here for distinguishing between truth and error is psychoanalytic theory and the empirical test to which „logic-centered“ theological reflection should be adapted.

(II) A counter pole to Hiltner's functional, empirical approach is Edward Farley's ecclesial approach (e.g. *Ecclesial Man and Theologia*), and his emphasis on theology as „*habitus*“. His methodology is grounded in phenomenology as the intuition of essence, so it marginalizes the human sciences and, operationally, it is heavily dependent on the cultivated intuition of the practitioner as he/she seeks to interpret situations. This antithesis to the empirical analytical approach not only relegates human sciences to the periphery of the interdisciplinary discussion, but elevates the formation of character (*aretè*) as the embodiment of an „invariant universal self-identity“ in the classical Hellenic sense, to a paramount position. The disciplines are, then, integrated in the essential formation of the person in relation to the com-

⁴ The epistemology behind this way of setting up the problem is spelled out most fully by Michael Polanyi in his classic study *Personal Knowledge*.

munity. The criterion for distinguishing between truth and error focusses on broad phenomenological distinctions such as the preference for „cosmos“ over „chaos,“ or the intuition of „ecclesial universals.“

(III) Wolfhart Pannenberg's fundamental and practical theology are embedded in a multidimensional view of history and the history of science. Even though the end of history is proleptically revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the midst of history, Pannenberg wants his theological claims to be credible because they are scientifically and historically sound.⁵ Accordingly, his approach to practical theology and its placing in the overall structure of theology stresses history, science, and the full political implications of the kingdom of God for the church's mission to the world. Since Pannenberg grounds all theology, including practical theology, in the indirect revelation of God through time, a coherent understanding of history becomes the preliminary test for truth, which cannot be final until the end of time.

(IV) As counter pole to Pannenberg's position, but generally in apposition to all the above, is the appeal to „experience“ as the basis for pulling theology and the sciences of human action together. This may refer, in the United States discussion, to „women's experience,“ the „black experience,“ the „Hispanic experience,“ or any number of other variations on this theme. Taking the case of women's experience (e.g. The Mudflower Collective's book, *God's Fierce Whimsy*), one can see that the challenge is to abandon appeals to human universals, including systematic integrations, and to exhibit an embodied spirituality, to be as politically concrete as possible, and to disclose in narrative forms the experience of God and the immediate claims of God upon human life, thereby expressing the primary reality of human relationality and the paramount necessity of justice.

Although vital as a corrective to the other forms of practical theology, and often compelling in itself, it does not sufficiently address the interdisciplinary issue. As David Kelsey (*Between Athens and Berlin*) points out in his inquiry into the Mudflower Collective's position, it is by no means clear what the word „God“ refers to when „experience“ mediates and, indeed, constitutes the substance of theology and its relation to human action. Moreover, when the baseline is experiential, it may implicitly legitimate incoherence since it overtly rejects human

⁵ Pannenberg has attempted to reverse this emphasis, which worked „from the bottom up“; in his systematic theology, he says he works „from the top down.“ However, his arguments continue to be shaped by the integrative power of history and by his apologetic concerns directed toward a scientific culture.

universals and simultaneously affirms justice and narrative as universally applicable.

This is not to say anything to detract from the considerable substance and contributions all these views have made to advance the cause of practical theology. It is rather that in these approaches and in the theological types they represent, the specific issue of interdisciplinarity has not been worked out satisfactorily. Thus, the overall coherence and potential constructive contribution of each of the above approaches is in jeopardy on that account.

Although the following paragraphs are only suggestive, they indicate that each methodological example represents not only a normative approach to practical theology but also a type of intellectual ethos⁶ which shapes the tacit dimension of the view of practical theology that issues from that methodology. In essence, each methodology connotes an ethos which may have more subtle, pervasive, and formative power than the methodology itself. Following David Kelsey's lead in his study of approaches to theological education (*Between Athens and Berlin*), I will suggest four intellectual ethoi represented by four great metropolitan centers of learning, to the end that a fifth may be added to fill in a glaring omission.

To begin, recall that Manchester was the first great industrial city in the western world; by hosting the industrial revolution, it became fertile ground for growth of science and technology. Seward Hiltner's emphasis on empirical theology and others who stress as the baseline the operationalizing and empirical testing of the functions of the church and its ministry suggest the ethos of Manchester. In the second instance, the Athenian *ethos* stresses that knowledge in all its aspects be harmonized in the formation of sound judgment in the virtuous person (*aretè*). If Farley's notion of *habitus* and its formative power for practical theology is the enveloping context for the formation of theological virtue and the integration of knowledge, then his approach to practical theology suggests the ethos of Athens. Third, if the ethos of Berlin can be characterized by systematic theory construction and a derivative professional competence as a basis for practical the-

⁶ Recall that ethics, in its root meaning, refers to *ethos*. From the notion of „stall“ (το εδος), first applied to animals, comes the stability and security of custom, the socially constructed glue, and reflection upon it, that hold people together in the balanced distance necessary for responsible action. Christian theological ethics implies a transformation of conscience that transcends the public-private distinction. A theonomous conscience may be exemplified in Calvin's „inner integrity of heart.“ More of this in the „ecclesial“ section which follows. Lehmann, Paul, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) p. 23-25.

ology, then Pannenberg's approach is exemplary. Fourth, if a metropolitan *ethos* were to be found for those approaches which stress the irreducible ground of experience, particularly experiences of marginality, then the city might be Delphi, the city of oracles, where the muse who spoke her word to Socrates made inspired utterance culturally formative.

Such an outline may not be significant in itself, except for the urban *ethos* that seems to be missing, namely, Jerusalem. The tendency to seek out a supposedly neutral or non-theological baseline for meeting the interdisciplinary issue tends to lead the whole enterprise of practical theology tacitly, if not explicitly, away from its theological center. Of course, there are roads that lead from all of these „cities“ to Jerusalem, but it will be the downfall of practical theology if it does not recognize the centrality of Jerusalem and the Judeo-Christian *ethos* it connotes. Thus, I want to center the interdisciplinary aspect of practical theology in Jerusalem as both a city of suffering and the birthplace of the church in the power of the Spirit.

Of course, the danger in a strong theological emphasis is that experience and the sciences of human action will be dismissed out of hand, and important ways of making fitting theological statements and claims will thereby be forfeited. However, theological reductionism or a regression to traditionalism need not be the result of beginning with theology; indeed, theology may have a way within itself for relating itself to our post-modern mentality and specifically to experience and the sciences of human action, thereby unfolding its inherent richness and simultaneously extending the implications of experience and of those sciences into a more comprehensive view of what it means to be human.

The basis and starting point for developing this alternative, I suggest, is the person of Jesus Christ as described by the Chalcedonian formulation. Jesus' being fully God and fully human, two natures, one person, already provides us with the decisive form of relationality which we seek. The underlying assumption behind this claim and at work in the following discussion is that in the completed and perfect work of Christ, which is not an on-going process, more or less accomplished here or there, the world has been reconciled to God. In the sphere of Christ's Spirit, we recognize that „He himself is the whole“ (IV/1,20).⁷

⁷ The references here are to Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, but it will be noted that the basically Barthian position developed in this essay is appropriated through T. F. Torrance, particularly in his seminal article „The Natural Theology of Karl Barth.“ (*Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*; Belfast: Christian

Although Jesus Christ is „single, unitary, consistent and free from contradiction, yet for all his singularity and unity his form is inexhaustibly rich.“ Thus, it is not merely legitimate but mandatory that „faith should continually see and understand the forms of Christ in new lights and aspects.“ (IV/1,763) „He does not present himself in one form but in many – indeed, he is not in himself uniform but multi-form. How can it be otherwise when he is ... eternally rich.“ (IV/1,763) Thus, as manifest in Christ, the fundamental relationality with which we have to do is infinitely varied and rich, but always marked by the „indissoluble differentiation,“ „inseparable unity,“ and „indestructible (asymmetrical) order“ which is evident in his person. (III/2,437) In this, the person of Christ replaces all metaphysics of being or becoming. By implication, then, the interplay between theology and the human sciences properly reflects his nature when these are the characteristics of the *relationality*⁸ that establishes their differentiated unity.

In her illuminating work on Karl Barth in pastoral counseling, Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger⁹ provides this concise illustration. In Jesus' healing of the paralytic, Jesus first says, „My son, your sins are forgiven“ (Mark 2:5), but, upon seeing the Scribes' reaction, he says,

„Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?“

Then Jesus demonstrates that he has the power to *forgive* sins, *healing* the paralytic.

Barth's interpretation of this text, as Hunsinger shows, is in keeping with the Chalcedonian model of relationality. Healing and forgiveness are seen to occur in a differentiated unity. They occur together (unity), but each remains distinct (differentiation), and the divine power to forgive sins is understood as logically and ontologically prior to and in-

Journals Ltd. 1984, Ch. 9) In this article, Barth agrees with Torrance that the transformational appropriation of scientific understandings is a consistent and proper work of theology. The aim for Torrance is to overcome the dualism implicit in the theology-science dialogue, and yet preserve the distinctive contributions to each side.

⁸ In his recent work on the post-modern mentality, Robert Kegan (*In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994; Section IV) describes the move from modern to post-modern as a move recognizing relationality as definitive of polarity, rather than stressing fixed polarities which then generate a relationality between them. This corresponds to the Christian theological understanding of life in the Spirit and the Spiritual Presence of Christ by whom all ultimate bipolar dichotomies are held in an asymmetrical differentiated unity.

⁹ Hunsinger, Deborah van Deusen, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995) p. 65-69.

dependent of the act of healing (asymmetrical order). The two notions of healing and forgiveness are so ordered that forgiveness is *free* and unconditioned, but healing is seen as existing in the service of Jesus' power to forgive sins.

The far-reaching methodological implications of this Barthian approach, read through the lenses of T. F. Torrance, centers upon neither side of this interplay but upon the relationality itself. When the relationality is Christomorphic, then each part includes the whole, but the whole is properly understood only as the relationality which constitutes it is recognized as an asymmetrical, bipolar unity. Thus, the mediator is Jesus Christ understood through the Chalcedonian formulation.

As Torrance's position suggests (see fn. 9), the relationality that pertains between theology and the human sciences only becomes what it is through the transforming action of Christ's Spirit in and through the human spirit (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 2:10). On the one side, this takes the form of a theological transformation of assumptions and conceptualizations in the human sciences. In this transformation, the negation of theological reality implicit in typically functionalist methodologies will itself be negated, and those functionalist understandings will be reappropriated theologically.¹⁰ By this dialectic, theological understandings transform functionalist insights into participatory signs of the theological reality at stake. On the other side, relevant theological claims are in turn manifested and concretized in terms of human action according to the specifics of the functional situation. Thus, in the example above, the claim of forgiveness negates any presumed functional independence of healing (i.e. Jesus' forgiveness negates the negation of divine reality implicit in healing as a mere function). This is in order that healing may not be merely a return to so-called normal function-

¹⁰ See Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 1994). Milbank recognizes that current leaders in the field of the sociology of religion (Geertz, Berger, Luckmann, Bellah and Luhmann) are fundamentally followers of Parson's theory, even when that connection is denied (p. 106). Such a sociologist may say, „A function of the Eucharist is to bind together the disparate elements of the Christian community.“ But, since this explains a phenomenon in terms of what it is and does, it not only verges on tautology, but it reduces an essentially theological reality to a universalizing abstraction doing violence to the intrinsic significance of the event. Moving beyond Milbank's answer to this, the approach taken here is: theological reflection needs, then, to negate this negation, and reappropriate functionalist insights so they can contribute to the communion creating presence of Jesus Christ, whereby the Eucharistic bond created is preeminently in the Eucharist, and only secondarily in the sociology of the situation. Theology, then, retains an asymmetrical bipolar relationality to relevant social science understandings as transformed for an interpretation of the Eucharist.

ing but, instead, be a specific and manifest expression of the power of God in Christ to forgive and to redeem all creation. Healing, still decisive in itself, is then placed in a context of purpose and meaning of trans-cosmological proportions and, through its transformation, the specific act, including its interpretation, takes on a Christomorphic character. Thus, given our ultimately perfected but proximately imperfect human condition (*simul justus et peccator*), the Christomorphic relationality at stake in interdisciplinary studies calls forth a *transformational dynamic* which is repeatedly awakening us to contradictions between theology and human sciences, intensifying oppositions until there is a new insight, finally bringing about a reappropriation of the original situation as parabolic of the relationality in Christ.¹¹

It must now be added that the quality of relationality revealed in Christ's person and illuminated at Chalcedon, points beyond the human condition to and participates in the perichoretic relationality of the immanent trinity. In trinitarian thought, as in Christology, a shift from substance and entities to relationality also pertains. In keeping with the Cappadocian Church fathers, the argument to be made here is that the inner unity of the trinity is its relationality. Thus, if the Spirit may be briefly conceptualized as „the go-between God,“ it can be said that God both is Spirit (John 4:24) as God's relational unity, and God *has* Spirit, the third person in the classic view (Acts 2).

It is a widely discussed¹² possibility that human life in the Spirit is designed by that Spirit to replicate the inner life of God. „Koinonia,“ the communion-creating Presence of Christ's Spirit, is also a word used by the church fathers to describe the perichoretic relationality of the immanent trinity. However, whenever the human context is involved, the relationality of Christ's bipolar unity requires that the asymmetrical aspect of the relationality between the Divine and the human pertain. Thus, the perichoretic unity and the relationality of the Godhead stands in an asymmetrical relation to the human Koinonia created by the Spiritual Presence of Christ, transforming human sociality into the

¹¹ The dynamics of transformation described generally here are brought into an analogical relation to Karl Barth's „act of faith“ (acknowledgement, recognition, and confession) in a monograph by Elizabeth Frykberg, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* (pub. Princeton Theological Seminary), Vol. I, No. 3, Summer 1993, esp. p. 11 ff. This study also shows that there are many forms of transformation, but none can exceed in power or explanatory value the nature of the mediator, who determines what transformation is *from* and what it is *into*. (See also this author's *The Transforming Moment*.)

¹² This approach had its roots in Augustine (*De Trinitate*), but in different ways it has flourished in the present with such figures as Moltmann, Lacugna, Torrance, Lehmann, Schipani, and Boff. See also *The Knight's Move*, Ch. 13.

communion of Christ.¹³ These trinitarian understandings implicit in Christ's person are the basis upon which a subsequent section of this paper (the ecclesial dimension (III)) is developed.

In sum, the definitive notion of relationality with which this methodology proposes to work is revealed in Christ as an „indissoluble differentiation,“ an „inseparable unity,“ and an „indestructible asymmetrical order“ (III/2,437). As such, this relationality is a rich source of insight for this entire field, but now, in keeping with the thesis that the solution to interdisciplinarity (dimension II) shapes the entire field, the light cast upon practical theology from this Source could be prismatically refracted in several different directions. This methodological approach would recast certain central concerns of the field as it is now envisioned. I will mention four such refractions. The first is the concern to develop a critical perspective on transpositions of Christomorphic relationality, and the second is the concern for the theory-practice issue. The third focusses the Chalcedonian model on the operational dimension (IV), and the fourth focusses it on the ecclesial dimension (III). Space limitations will permit only two of these, (I) and (III).

II.1 Chalcedon and Complementarity

To envision this field as a discipline via the relationality in Chalcedon requires a critical perspective on its transpositions. Complementarity provides a coherent and intelligible way of preserving the primacy of relationality in the context of rationality; at the same time, it provides an analytical and critical perspective on bipolar limit situations so as to determine when they are and are not parabolic expressions of the Chalcedonian model. By definition, complementarity is an asymmetrical logical relation between two sets of concepts applicable to a single phenomenon which, though mutually exclusive, are nevertheless both necessary for a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon.

Complementarity, as a unique form of logic, was conceived by the Copenhagen physicist, Niels Bohr, and his student and one-time colleague Werner Heisenberg, (*The Philosophy of Niels Bohr*, 3 volumes) when they realized that no single model can adequately explain all the observations made of subatomic systems in varying experimental contexts. For example, the evidence compels observers to conclude that the nature of light must be described as both „fully wave“

¹³ See footnote 4.

and „fully particle“ (to use Chalcedonian phraseology),¹⁴ but the wave description resides in mathematical space, and so produces an asymmetry with the particle description exercising marginal control over the particle description. Since this difference lies in how the observer enters into the experimental situation, it is argued that all observations at the subatomic level are observer conditioned. In physics, as in Chalcedon, complementarity is an asymmetric bipolarity which necessarily requires that the knower be a participant appropriate to the epistemological situation – not a detached observer. Indeed, the observer cannot avoid being a participant and so altering what is being studied in the course of studying it. In theological context, faith is the appropriate participatory stance, but here the observer is him/herself modified by the One being observed.

Of course, this is not to legitimate Chalcedonian logic by reference to the hard sciences; it is just the opposite. It is to show that one of the many manifestations of the ultimate relationality in Christ is the logic of complementarity. But it is also to argue implicitly that no Christology could be adequately formulated without recourse to this form of logic. Once the primacy of this relationality in Christ is realized, it is possible to recognize further expressions of complementarity such as: the relation between tacit and explicit dimensions in the scientific epistemology of Michael Polanyi and the mind-body relationship in the neurological studies of Wilder Penfield. Further, complementarity is analogous to the „strange loop“ logic¹⁵ described by Douglas Hofstadter for Gödel's mathematics, Escher's drawings, and Bach's music. This logic is a unique form of rationality that appears when reason reaches, by its most rigorous inquiry, a situation made unthinkable by the evidence and the inherent limits of reason itself, yet which nevertheless must be stated as precisely as possible within those limits. It is important that the richness of the Chalcedonian imagination be allowed to play itself out, but it is equally important that equivocation be avoided and situations genuinely requiring the logic of complementarity be rigorously distinguished from those that simply need more thought.

¹⁴ This is not a spurious suggestion since Bohr was deeply influenced by reading Kierkegaard, whose central thesis is the paradox of the God-man, his version of Chalcedon. See *The Knight's Move* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992) Ch. 5.

¹⁵ The reader is advised that it may be useful to refer to figure (1) in the following section where a model of this relationality is constructed.

II.2 Chalcedon in Theory and Practice (omitted to save space)

II.3 Chalcedon in Operations

In the *operational* dimension (IV) of practical theology, the methodology developed above redefines the subfield of Christian education disclosing that the name „Christian Education“ is an oxymoron, a fundamental contradiction in terms. That is, education, governed primarily by socialization and enculturation dynamics, is a tension-reduction, pattern-maintenance system (Parson's model). This does not fit well with the Christian theological concern to participate in the redemptive transformation of the whole arena of human action (fn. 4, p. 3). Yet both transformation and socialization are necessary for an explanation of the whole subfield of Christian education. In fact, to recognize that „Christian“ stands in opposition to „education,“ yet is inseparable from it in this context, is to recognize how the general problematic of practical theology comes to focus in the operational dimension (IV), at the crux of Christian education.

Both sets of dynamics must be maintained in a differentiated relationality that will preserve the bipolar unity of this subfield. However, as discussed above, in the ordinary course of things education governed by its socialization dynamics exercises predominance over those transformational events, situations, and dynamics that point to the ultimate transcendence of the Divine over the human. Thus, the most common educational situation inverts the pattern of Christ and so contributes to the cultural captivity of his Spirit. This calls for reclaiming the predominance of transformation as against socialization, so all socialization can be *unto* transformation. This is to bring education into conformity to the asymmetry implicit in the Chalcedonian formula.

To that end, the teaching-learning interaction is not primarily focused upon information, mental development, conscience formation, character, social adaptation, or even on biblical and doctrinal content — although all of that is important and will necessarily be involved in any Christian pedagogical situation. Rather, the teaching-learning interaction is focused on awakening and empowering the human spirit.¹⁶ The

¹⁶ The attached chart describing transformations in various aspects of the field of human action is a diagrammatic description of the basic pattern and range of the human spirit as it is being used here. Extensive discussion of the spirit to Spirit relationality may be

teacher is to be understood as the provocateur of the human spirit, letting it feel its inherent power, mystery, and capacity for wonder in relation to whatever content, issue, or situation is of pedagogical concern. At the same time, the teacher will alert the learner to the inherent pitfalls and ultimate groundlessness of that same spirit.

Arguably, in the course of human development, the human spirit repeatedly encounters its own limits and either tacitly or explicitly goes in search of an ultimate ground which is to be uniquely discovered in Spiritus Creator, Spirit to spirit. Thus, the biblical analogy, (1 Cor. 2:10-11) „the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God.“ This analogy (also Romans 8:16) points toward the groundedness in the Divine Spirit which preserves the fullness of the human spirit in the face of its finitude and otherwise debilitating fragility and proneness to perversity. Thus the human spirit, for all its inherent transformational potential, must itself receive the ultimate transformation for which it longs. In this transformation, transformation itself is transformed in order that the spiritual life not simply begin and end in the cultural captivity of the human ego, but, in agreement with that Spirit, begin again and end in God.

Thus the spirit-to-Spirit relationality is the only fitting dynamic for learning the inherently bipolar and relational biblical and theological content of the faith. It is the only dynamic for appropriating the differentiated, inseparable relationality between justice and mercy, between love and death, and all the other great claims of the Christian faith as they are rooted in and expressive of the person of Christ. By focussing on appropriation in the Spirit, Christian education can maximize the transformational potential in „Christian“ and reverse the degenerative forces of socialization and enculturation implicit in „education.“ However, it must not be forgotten that both are necessary to this subfield as both divinity and humanity are necessary to the person of Christ. Thus, if Christ is not to be divided or apostasized, then Christian education as a subfield of operations (IV) in practical theology does well to be guided by the methodology which governs the whole of practical theology as a discipline.¹⁷

found in two books by the present author: *The Transforming Moment and The Knight's Move* (with W. Jim Neidhardt).

¹⁷ It should be noted again that what has been described here for Christian education has been methodologically developed for pastoral counseling by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger in her forthcoming volume, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A*

II.4 Chalcedon in *Ecclesia* (omitted to save space)

New Interdisciplinary Approach (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995). Developing out of her dissertation, suggestively titled „Becoming Bilingual,” she has applied the Chalcedonian description of reality to counseling in a fashion that recognizes that the two languages of theology and psychology both need to be employed with integrity, without reductionism, and in a relationality that is created in and through the counselling process, again in conformity to Christ's Spirit as it testifies ultimately to His person.