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**Praktische Theologie zwischen Offenbarung
und gesellschaftlichem Kontext**
Normativity and Context in Practical Theology

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Zu diesem Heft

Die Fortsetzung des Gesprächs der *Internationalen Akademie für praktische Theologie* füllt dieses Heft. Dieser in jeder Hinsicht ökumenische wissenschaftliche Gesprächskreis fand sich in Bern im vergangenen Jahr zu seiner zweiten Sitzung zusammen. Wir bitten unsere deutschen Leser wieder um Verständnis, daß wegen dieser ökumenischen Ausrichtung viele Texte in englischer Sprache abgedruckt sind und wir aus Kostengründen auf Übersetzungen verzichten müssen. Die Einführung von Klaus Wegenast will über diese Schwierigkeiten hinweghelfen.

Wir hoffen, daß die Gesprächsteilnehmer in Seoul im April 1997 Nutzen aus diesem Heft ziehen werden und grüßen alle dort Versammelten auf diesem Wege herzlich.

R. Schmidt-Rost

Daß eine Klärung des angesprochenen Problems nicht allein innertheologisch möglich ist, war der Arbeitsgruppe dabei von Anfang an klar, wenn jeder Praktische Theologie fast täglich auf sozialwissenschaftlichen Diskurs angewiesen ist, wenn er seine Arbeit nicht ins Leere stellen sehen möchte. Wie immer, als eine Theorie, die Anteil hat an Theologie und Sozialwissenschaften, wird die Praktische Theologie nicht nur deutlich machen müssen, daß sie als theologische Bemühung, der es um die Frage nach Gott in Zusammenhang mit biblischen Traditionen geht, notwendig auf verschiedene Human- und Sozialwissenschaften angewiesen ist, sondern auch, wie sie als sozialgeschichtlich, pädagogisch oder psychologisch orientierte Wissenschaft in spezifischer Weise an der Gesamtaufgabe der Theologie Anteil hat. Das sich hier stellende Grundproblem lautet so: Wie kann eine theologische Grundlagenbesprechung als historische, systematische und auch praktische und das vor allem in der Praktischen Theologie ebenso wesentliche Handlungswissen so miteinander ins Verhältnis ge-

Klaus Wegenast

Praktische Theologie zwischen Offenbarung und gesellschaftlichem Kontext

Einleitende Bemerkungen

Das Heft 1 des 15. Jahrgangs dieser Zeitschrift aus dem Jahr 1995 dokumentierte die erste Session der ökumenischen „International Academy of Practical Theology“, welche im August 1993 in Princeton NJ stattgefunden hatte. Inzwischen hat die Academy vom 7.-11. Juni 1995 in Bern getagt. Das Gesamtthema dieser zweiten Session, das von einer Arbeitsgruppe vorbereitet worden ist, lautete „Normativity and Context in Practical Theology“. Mehr als bisher sollte das Verhältnis zwischen einer dem Sola Scriptura der Reformation oder auch dem Schriftbezug der katholischen Theologie verpflichteten wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten an den Fakultäten und Seminaren und der konkreten Abhängigkeit theologischen Fragens und Verstehens von gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen bewußt gemacht und kritisch-konstruktiv bearbeitet werden. Motiviert war die Arbeitsgruppe nicht zuerst von der nicht ganz neuen Einsicht, daß die Heilige Schrift nicht so etwas darstellt wie ein Kompendium für die Lösung aller Fragen aller Zeiten, sondern eher von der etwas neueren Erkenntnis, daß alles Fragen und Verstehen im Blick auf die Bibel jetzt und immer schon durch den jeweiligen gesellschaftlichen Kontext wesentlich mitbedingt ist.

Daß eine Klärung des anstehenden Problems nicht allein innertheologisch möglich ist, war der Arbeitsgruppe dabei von Anfang an klar, zumal jeder Praktische Theologe fast täglich auf sozialwissenschaftlichen Succurs angewiesen ist, wenn er seine Arbeit nicht ins Leere laufen sehen möchte. Wie immer, als eine Theorie, die Anteil hat an Theologie und Sozialwissenschaften, wird die Praktische Theologie nicht nur deutlich machen müssen, daß sie als *theologische* Bemühung, der es um die Frage nach Gott im Zusammenhang mit biblischen Traditionen geht, **notwendig** auf verschiedene Human- und Sozialwissenschaften angewiesen ist, sondern auch, wie sie als soziologisch, pädagogisch oder psychologisch orientierte Wissenschaft in spezifischer Weise an der Gesamtaufgabe der Theologie Anteil hat.

Das sich hier stellende Grundproblem lautet so: Wie kann eine theologische Grundlagenbesinnung als historische, systematische und auch praktische und das vor allem in der Praktischen Theologie ebenso wesentliche Handlungswissen so miteinander ins Verhältnis ge-

setzt werden, daß das sich den Sozialwissenschaften verpflichtete Handlungswissen theologisch verantwortet erscheint und die Theologie sozial- und humanwissenschaftlich kommunizierbar ?

Unter dem Anspruch dieser Fragestellung wurde das Programm strukturiert.

Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, bekannt durch seine wichtigen Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Gesellschaft im Rahmen „nachchristlicher“ Verhältnisse, versuchte in seinem einleitenden Beitrag „Normativity and Context in Sociological Perspective“ uns Theologen zu zeigen, wie sich einem Soziologen das Verhältnis von Normgebundenheit und aktueller gesellschaftlicher Abhängigkeit des Fragens und Denkens darstellt.

Gleichsam als „Probe aufs Exempel“ unternahmen es in einem zweiten Durchgang drei Praktische Theologen aus drei verschiedenen Erdteilen und drei durchaus verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Bedingungsfeldern, das durch das Tagungsthema gestellte Problem in Angriff zu nehmen und kritisch zu erörtern. **Jürgen Henkys** berichtete aus *seiner Sicht* von den Wechselwirkungen zwischen einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft und einer Minderheitenkirche in der ehemaligen DDR. **Abraham A. Berinyuu** aus dem Entwicklungsland Ghana, in dessen Kontext er als Praktischer Theologe seine Pflicht darin sieht, „to reflect on the interplay between religious Experience, the tradition... through which that experience is interpreted and the cultural, spiritual, and psycho-social Context and the economic and political status of that person or group of persons.“

Joon Kwan Un endlich aus Süd-Korea zeichnete die Geschichte seiner Kirche in die Entwicklungen ein, die aus einer traditionell asiatischen Gesellschaft ein hochindustrialisiertes Schwellenland machten, das nach spezifisch anderen Paradigmata theologischer Arbeit fragen läßt, als sie gegenwärtig noch kirchenbestimmend erscheinen. Man ist gespannt, was da in den nächsten zehn Jahren geschieht.

Marcel Viau aus Quebec in Kanada und **Paul H. Ballard** aus Cardiff in Wales hatten die Aufgabe, „Kontext“ als Begriff einer praktisch-theologischen Theorie zu definieren und dabei zu zeigen, in welchem Verhältnis christlicher Glaube zu unserer konkreten weltlichen Existenz steht. Beide Referenten wurden dabei sehr konkret und ließen nicht nur vermuten, wie schwierig es ist, die beiden „Horizonte“ sinnvoll miteinander in Beziehung zu setzen, ja zu „verschmelzen“. Wo sind wir als Christen zum Widerstand gerufen, wo zur Anpassung?

Ein vierter Durchgang der Konferenz sollte zeigen, daß es durchaus verschiedene Fragehinsichten und Analyse-möglichkeiten gibt, wenn wir als Praktische Theologen das Verhältnis von „Glauben“ und Gesellschaft bedenken wollen. Wo gibt es da ein tertium comparationis, wo schließen sich verschiedene Fragestellungen geradezu gegenseitig aus? Natürlich war es uns nicht möglich, alle möglichen Perspektiven namhaft zu machen. Wir beschränkten uns deshalb auf die sog. feministische (**Riet Bons-Storm**, Groningen) und die empirische mit ihrer Grundfrage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen hermeneutischer und empirischer Methodologie, die noch kaum bearbeitet worden ist (**Gerben Heitink**, Amsterdam). Die Erkrankung der Referentin **Elaine Ramshaw** verhinderte eine Arbeit an der hermeneutischen Perspektive.

In einem fünften Durchgang sollte der Versuch unternommen werden, die Kontextualität theologischer Arbeit im Rahmen der Praktischen Theologie als für alle Teildisziplinen grundlegende Kategorie theologisch zu reflektieren und als handlungsanweisende Fragehinsicht kenntlich zu machen. **Reiner Preul** unternahm in diesem Zusammenhang einen m.E. gelungenen Versuch, sich dieser Problematik anzunehmen. Der zweite Beitrag in diesem Durchgang stammte von **Rick Osmer** aus Princeton, den wir leider hier nicht abdrucken können, da er in einer anderen Zeitschrift erscheinen wird. Seine Stoßrichtung war eine ähnliche wie die R. Preuls. Der sechste und letzte Durchgang war dem Verhältnis der Praktischen Theologie zu anderen theologischen Disziplinen und zu den Humanwissenschaften gewidmet, dem auch **James Fowler** wichtige Passagen seines öffentlichen Vortrags unter dem Titel „**The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology**“ gewidmet hat.

Klaus Wegenast zeigte in seinem Beitrag, wie obsolet das normativ-deduktive Modell theologischer Arbeit vom Text zur Praxis als Einbahnstraße geworden ist angesichts der gesellschaftlichen Wandlungen seit der Aufklärung und schlägt neue Modelle einer möglichen Kooperation vor. **Duncan B. Forrester** aus Edinburgh wollte in verschiedenen Anläufen die Zusammengehörigkeit, aber auch die unüberwindbaren Unterschiede zwischen „Theologie“ als Discurs um Gott und mit Gott und ethischer Reflexion in einem bestimmten Kontext als Aufgabe von Universität und Kirche aufweisen. Die Konferenz endete mit dem weit ausladenden und grundlegenden Beitrag von **James E. Loder** aus Princeton, in dem das Verhältnis von Kontext und Offenbarung als interdisziplinäres Problem beschrieben und auch angegangen wird.

In allen Teilen der Konferenz von Bern war expressis verbis oder doch clam-heimlich das Problem virulent, in welchem Verhältnis sich Theologie, vor allem die Praktische, zu den Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften verstehen soll, genauer, wie sich hermeneutische und empirische Methoden im Haus der Praktischen Theologie zueinander verhalten.

Es ist hier nicht der Ort, breiter zu werden, aber doch die Gelegenheit, in einigen Thesen und Überlegungen etwas konkreter zu werden.

Zuerst 6 Thesen:

1. Theologie als Arbeit von Menschen für Menschen ist immer schon situativ, d.h. gesellschaftlich bedingt, und muß, will sie es vermeiden erfolglos zu bleiben und darüberhinaus für wechselnde Verwertungszusammenhänge mißbraucht zu werden, für eine Aufklärung ihrer Bedingtheit Sorge tragen.
2. Will Theologie eine verifizierbare Funktion haben für individuelle und gesellschaftliche Situationen, muß sie die Frage nach der Heilsbedeutsamkeit des Glaubens durch eine gleichintensive und gleichursprüngliche Frage nach den Voraussetzungen und Bedingungen des Glaubens und eines möglichen Verstehens durch bestimmte Adressaten ergänzen.
3. Daraus ergibt sich vor allem für die praktisch-theologische Forschung und Lehre die Notwendigkeit, neben hermeneutischen Erkenntnissen und Methoden solche der Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften zur Kenntnis zu nehmen und zum Gegenstand eigener Forschungen zu machen.
4. Als Gesprächspartnerin von Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften, welche als Theorie unmittelbaren Folgerungen für die Praxis sozialen Handelns offenstehen, kann die Praktische Theologie nicht einfach Wiederholung sozialwissenschaftlicher Theorie sein. Ihr Verhältnis ist ja nicht das der Analogie, ja nicht einmal das der Korrespondenz, sondern das des Dialogs in kritisch-konstruktiver Absicht, in dem Zustimmung und Widerspruch von beiden Seiten ihren Platz haben.
5. Immer wird es dabei darum zu tun sein, das beim Partner Gelernte nicht einfach zu wiederholen, sondern mit den Wesensaussagen der Tradition – ich denke an die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung – zu konfrontieren. So wird Praktische Theologie nicht nur im Rahmen der ihr gestellten Aufgabe der Vermittlung des Evangeliums vom sozialwissenschaftlichen Partner lernen, auch nicht allein im Zusammenhang mit einer längst notwendigen Analyse theologischer Arbeit mit Methoden der Sozialwissenschaften, sondern es wird auch notwendig sein für eine verantwortliche

Praktische **Theologie**, kritisch nach den vorwissenschaftlichen Voraussetzungen sozialwissenschaftlicher Theorie zu fragen und nach Vereinbarkeit und Unvereinbarkeit mit den Kernaussagen der eigenen Tradition.

6. Hüten sollten sich die Praktischen Theologen davor, ihre „Sache“ für immer schon gegeben und für alle Zeiten relevant zu halten und damit der Gefahr zu erliegen, Theologie und Kirche unversehens in den Verdacht der Entbehrlichkeit geraten zu lassen.

Es ist deutlich, Hermeneutik qua Auslegung normativer Tradition im Rahmen praktisch-theologischer Arbeit und empirische Erforschung z.B. der Praxis des Evangeliums in der Gesellschaft schließen einander nicht aus, ungeklärt ist aber nach wie vor die Frage, wie die beiden Komponenten praktisch-theologischer Arbeit aufeinander zu beziehen sind. Das gilt auch noch im Blick auf den sog. „theologisch-empirischen Zyklus“, wie ihn Johannes van der Ven (Entwurf einer empirischen Theologie (Theologie und Empirie, Weinheim 1990) als Dialog zwischen empirischer „Objektivität“ und interessegeleiteter Interpretation, von induktiver und normativ-deduktiver Arbeit beschrieben hat. Da gilt es weiterzuarbeiten und die humanwissenschaftlichen Partner zu ermuntern und zu bitten, ihre eigenen Interessen und Fragestellungen, methodischen Instrumentarien und Ergebnisse auch im Licht hermeneutischer Arbeit des theologischen Partners in den Blick zu nehmen. Erst wenn beide Partner sich im Dialog aufs Spiel setzen, wird es eine echte Kooperation geben, aus der alle Teile Gewinn ziehen können.

Also: Normativity and Context, Offenbarung und Empirie, Tradition und Situation, Heilige Schrift und emanzipierte Gesellschaft, Bindung und Aufbruch zu Neuem...

Da ist noch vieles unklar auch nach unserer Konferenz. Aber immerhin sind einige Probleme deutlicher als bisher. Die International Academy of Practical Theology wird 1997 in Seoul weiterarbeiten. Vielleicht wird es ihr dann auch gelingen, ihre theoretische Arbeit für andere theologische Disziplinen fruchtbar zu machen.

Members are welcome in the Academy. speakers should generally come from the membership in order to strengthen personal relationships and collegial cooperation, rather than having anonymous conferences with different people attending each meeting.

Members of the committee were: Mounzer Jumar, Emmanuel Leroy, Friedrich Schweitzer (chair), Johannes van der Ven, Klaus Wegenast. Consultant members were: Hendrik Pieterse, Daniel Schubert, John Kwan Liu, Krystian Wojacek.

Friedrich Schweitzer

Introduction

This volume contains the papers from the second meeting of the International Academy of Practical Theology which was held in Berne, Switzerland, in June 1995. The conference topic was „*Normativity and Context in Practical Theology*“. For reasons of space, only the plenary papers could be included in this volume. The collegial papers which were presented at the conference, would fill one or more additional volumes on practical theology.

The program of the conference was carefully prepared and planned in detail by an international program committee¹. The format of the conference was based on the idea of not just having a number of speakers who would address the conference topic independently of each other. Rather, there was to be a clear connection between the various presentations. Reading the papers of this volume, it might be helpful to keep this connection in mind.

Before a description of this connection can be given, some background information is necessary. During the first conference of the Academy (Princeton 1993), a number of concerns referring to the future work of the Academy were expressed:

- Plurality of contexts: Presentations should come from different parts of the world and from different positions from North and South, East and West, women and men.
- Plurality of approaches to practical theology – in dialogue: It is the Academy's expressed intention to include not just one approach to practical theology but to become aware of the existing plurality within this field. The aim is to establish dialogical relationships between the different approaches through comparative studies and applications.
- Seminar nature of conferences: While contributions from non-members are welcome in the Academy, speakers should generally come from the membership in order to strengthen personal relationships and collegial cooperation, rather than having anonymous conferences with different people attending each meeting.

¹ Members of the committee were: Maureen Junker, Emmanuel Lartey, Friedrich Schweitzer (chair), Johannes van der Ven, Klaus Wegenast. Consultant members were: Hendrik Pieterse, Daniel Schipani, Joon Kwan Un, Krystian Wojacek.

In the light of these concerns it seemed important to approach the conference theme from two perspectives: First, the plurality of different contexts, experiences, approaches, methodologies, and understandings of practical theology was to be presented. Second, the question of unity and identity of practical theology was to be posed, not independently of the contextual presentations but in reference to them. So the flow of the contributions which are contained in this volume, roughly follows a three step bottom-up procedure: Starting from a *description* of concrete diverse *experiences* (1), moving on to different *interpretations* of these experiences (2), finally placing both, experiences and interpretations, into the context of existing *methodologies and theories* of practical theology (3). It is hoped that this procedure may preserve plurality while not giving up the question of unity and identity.

Together, the contributions which are documented in the pages below, were to form a sequence which, at least in theory, can be described as follows:

1. *Discovery of Context in Theology*: The introductory lecture (Franz-Xaver Kaufmann) had a twofold task. The first task was to attempt a phenomenology of theology's treatment of context. The second was to evaluate and to critically reflect upon the respective developments.
2. *The Tension Between Normativity and Context in Theory and Praxis within Theology*: This topic was addressed in three subsections, each with speakers from different backgrounds and with different perspectives.
 - 2.1 *Experiences of Context in Different Locations*: This section is to bring out the various ways in which people actually experience „context“ (Jürgen Henkys, Abraham A. Berinyuu, Joon Kwan Un).
 - 2.2 *Comparative and Fundamental Perspectives*: This section is focussed on the understanding of „context“ as a theoretical term (Paul Ballard, Marcel Viau). The reports from the previous section were to be the prime basis for these reflections – an idea which, unfortunately, could not be fully realized because of technical delays.
 - 2.3 *Different Models of Analysis*: The idea for this section is to present various different models for analyzing the tension between normativity and context (for example: hermeneutical, feminist, empirical, marxist, liberation theology, historical) (Riet Bons-Storm, Gerben Heitink).
3. *The Contribution and Identity of Academic Practical Theology*: In this section, the question is raised if, how and where the various contributions of the conference may come together as practical

theology and what this means for practical theology as an academic discipline. Since again consensus can not be presupposed, the approach was to be inductive. Four subsections are included here:

- 3.1 *The Variety of Analytical Models and the Identity of the Discipline:* The focus here is on the variety of different approaches within practical theology as well as on their relationship with each other, including the question of a possible disciplinary core (Reiner Preul, Richard R. Osmer [this paper is not included in this volume since it will be published elsewhere]).
- 3.2 *Practical Theology and its Relation to other Theological Disciplines:* The question of the identity of practical theology can not be answered only from within but also needs to take account of the expectations of other theological disciplines, especially exegetical and systematic theology (Klaus Wegenast).
- 3.3 *Practical Theology and Ethics:* Given the close relationship between both fields (in some countries they are actually taught by the same person or even are considered as a unity), the identity of practical theology has to include an understanding of its relationship to ethics (Duncan B. Forrester).
- 3.4 *Interdisciplinary Relationships:* Practical theology has often been described as an interdisciplinary enterprise. Here especially the relationship to the social sciences has to be addressed (James E. Loder).

The lecture of James W. Fowler was held as a public lecture at the University of Berne. In many ways, it may be read as a first summary of the conference.

We are grateful that this journal has made it possible that these papers become accessible to a wider public. The Academy will continue its work through future conferences and international research.

Franz-Xaver Kaufmann

Normativity and Context in Sociological Perspective

What brings practical theologians to ask a sociologist for the introduction to the subject of „Normativity and Context in Practical Theology“? What can theology learn from sociology, a science which stems from the tradition of enlightenment and the reactions to it, a science which obviously argues „etsi Deus non daretur“? Sociologists are said to have a wicked view of society and thus also of religion. Aren't they the ones of faith and trust which undermine the sense of obligation and thus the true foundations of what practical theology relies upon to legitimize its claim to normativity? Indeed, sociology is the science of what is self-evident among people, and it questions this evidence by „improper“ comparisons and by uncovering the latent functions of beliefs and norms. Sociologists, at least in the European tradition, are those who try to make things always more complicated than they are. I have to apologize to Americans and other pragmatists for my troubles.

A.

The Tension between Normativity and Context in Theory and Praxis within Theology

Basic Votes

There is an old tradition of the use of religion, but I do not want to bore you with historical retrospect. I do not doubt that professors theology following Schleiermacher has been able to plead its cause with intellectual integrity, also in the light of a critique of religion; and even the Catholic church has again joined the arena of current debates since the Council of Vatican II. Moreover, sociology has been forced to abstain from arrogance by which it deemed to relegate religion into the prehistory of modernity from Auguste Comte and Karl Marx to Max Weber. The critique of ideology which was an early instrument of sociology to impose its superiority over other forms of knowledge has finally been also directed toward sociology itself, following Karl Mannheims general questioning of the ideological character of human thinking. *From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge today there is no thinking without presuppositions rooted in a social and cultural context and its basic beliefs.* There is no cognition which can establish its own validity except by circular arguments. And this is also the position of the actual philosophy of science. The post-modern way of thinking renounces the claim that a homogeneous form of rationality may lead to reasonable conclusions. Reasonable thought is unable to grasp the totality of being. Reason manifests itself

Franz-Xaver Kaufmann

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There is an old tradition of sociological critique of religion, but I do not want to bore you with historical retrospect. I do not doubt that protestant theology following Schleiermacher has been able to plead its cause with intellectual integrity, also in the light of a critique of religion; and even the Catholic church has again joined the arena of current debates since the Council of Vatican II. Moreover, sociology has been forced to abstain from arrogance by which it deemed to relegate religion into the prehistory of modernity from Auguste Comte and Karl Marx to Max Weber. The critique of ideology which was an early instrument of sociology to impose its superiority over other forms of knowledge has finally been also directed toward sociology itself, following Karl Mannheims general questioning of the ideological character of human thinking. *From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge today there is no thinking without presuppositions rooted in a social and cultural context and its basic beliefs.* There is no cognition which can establish its own validity except by circular arguments. And this is also the position of the actual philosophy of science. The post-modern way of thinking renounces the claim that a homogeneous form of rationality may lead to reasonable conclusions. Reasonable thought is unable to grasp the totality of being. Reason manifests itself

as „transversal reason“ (W. Welsch) by combining different rationalities and intellectual perspectives with respect to a localised frame of reference.¹ The background to this shift from modern rationalism to post-modern pluralism is of course a further development of what in the last thirty years has commonly been referred to as a process of modernization.

There is now a broad consensus among western sociologists that a dominant feature of modernization — i.e. the far-reaching transformation of societies whose paradigm has been the European link of enlightenment, industrialisation and democratisation — is the substitution of hierarchical differentiation and integration of society by a 'horizontal' differentiation around specific functions. The dominant social structuration is no longer distinguished by similarities and differences in individual status, but rather by differences of economic, political, juridical, religious, scientific, familial, etc., functions. Economy, polity, law, religion, science, and the family have developed specific forms of communication and find their identity by different 'logics' which are formulated by appropriate sciences. There are *uncontested areas* within the realm of these institutions and they shape the many processes of everyday life we take for granted.

But there are also *contested areas*: the issues of our public and semi-public debates, for example, on ecology, on social justice, on the status of immigrants in society, on peace and on the limits of human life. These are areas in which interpretation is contested by the different logics of functional subsystems. *It is precisely the clash between the underlying beliefs and methods of these logics which make the facts of life concerned to be perceived as public problems.* And there is no ultimate authority which can solve the conflicts we are involved in. It is only by patient debate and continual effort as well as by incremental changes of practice that complex modern societies seem to find gradual improvements to such problems.

It is in this post-modern context that the religious perspective which had been relegated to the inferior status of irrational thought and practice by the dominant rationalistic paradigm has regained respect and a place in society. *But religion is no more, as in premodern times,*

¹ For discussion of what constitutes post-modern society and thinking, see Wolfgang Welsch: *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Weinheim: VH 1988²; Jean Ladrière: *Le panorama de l'Europe du point de vue de la philosophie des sciences de l'esprit - un terrain difficile pour la théologie*. In: Association Européenne des théologiens catholiques: *La Nouvelle Europe - Défi à l'Église et à la théologie*. Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1994, 45-65. (German translation in: P. Hünermann (Hg.) *Das neue Europa - Herausforderungen für Theologie und Kirche*. QD 144, Freiburg i.Br. 1993, 42-62.)

the overarching highest authority. It represents rather a particular perspective among others. Following Auguste Comte, theology had been dethroned by philosophy as the queen of sciences, and in the period which he proclaimed to be the 'positive age', sociology would dethrone philosophy. But there is no longer a queen of sciences. Every science finds itself in the good or bad company of other sciences, and trials to establish superiority amount to nothing more than the idiosyncrasy and vanity of some scientists. The validity of saying „philosophia ancilla theologiae“, and its expressed principle of dominant and auxiliary science have long been rendered obsolete. *The dominant pattern is now debate among sciences of equal standing but with specific values, presuppositions and foundations which are rather heterogenous and rooted in beliefs that can neither be proven nor refuted by either.* Thus philosophical or sociological critique of religion will never sap its foundations nor will theology or even ecclesiastical authority be able to supersede the concurrent interpretations. The quest for truth, should it still exist, or at least the quest for reasonable consensus with respect to contested issues is now bound to specific conditions of interdisciplinary communication, and it is in this connection that the subject of „Normativity and Context“ is systematically embedded.

Words have no unequivocal meaning, and perhaps we all associate different meanings with these key words of our conference. Therefore I will try as a first step to develop a sociological interpretation of the two concepts which is complex enough that you may recognize your own problems in that context. In a second step I refer to a basic problem of established contemporary religion, i.e. the endangered continuity of Christian tradition in the context of modern society. Here the framework of normativity and context proves to be helpful to structure the problem. And finally I will suggest *some consequences* following from the contemplation of historical and social contexts within practical theology.

1. Conceptual issues

'Normativity' is a term for which in many dictionaries of common and professional language I have searched in vain. It is a very abstract idea, even more abstract than that indicated by the term 'norm' which today is used as a basic concept in sociology. The author of the respective article in the 1968 edition of the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences points out that the 1930 edition did not include the term 'norm'. This documents its recent usage. 'Norm', especially in the sense of social norms has become a generalized and inclusive term

for the more specific terms of 'custom', 'folkways', 'mores' and 'law'. The term 'normativity' then designates the specific property of norms, i.e. that which makes patterns, rules and standards valid or obligatory. The mode of existence of norms may be called validity (*Geltung*). A norm is valid inasmuch as it displays an obligatory character at least in a specific context and under specific conditions. A norm is a generalized standard or rule, a social norm a generalized standard or rule for social conduct.

My screening of dictionaries showed a characteristic difference in the interpretation of norms between the German and the Anglo-Saxon culture. Whereas in the German (and I assume also in other continental) traditions the specific mode of validity, the *sense of obligation*, is emphasized, the behavioristic and utilitarian tradition of especially the American culture uses the term mainly in a *descriptive sense* to describe for instance patterns of behavior. One distinguishes there sharply between norms and values, whereas the continental European tradition tends to see their difference only in the level of generality. The normativity of norms is thus interpreted in the American context as stemming from somewhat outside the norms, e.g. strong feelings of a group or a belief-system, whereas the European tradition is emphasizing more the coherence of norms, groups and values as a systemic property of obligation. I think that this difference has to do with the stronger impact of longstanding traditions in European culture and the reminiscence of coherent cultural and social perspectives which could never develop in the individualistic and voluntaristic American culture.

Disregarding these differences of emphasis we should keep in mind the following distinction: *The normativity of a norm or of a system of norms concerns the character of its sense of obligation and has to be distinguished from its context of validity.* The sense of obligation is always rooted in a kind of belief. This belief can refer, e.g. to tradition, to expediency, to authority, to the legitimacy of a political order, or to specific values. All these reflect common understandings. One has, however, to add a specific modern pattern: the sense of obligation may stem from the mere fact that an individual has given his or her assent to obey a certain norm. The basic belief concerns here the identity of the self. One should not underestimate the binding character of this self-obligation in a highly individualized culture. The identity of the self has become for many a kind of ultimate value in guiding their life. This shall be elaborated later.

Not even in traditional societies did all norms apply to everybody. It was the status of a person who determined which norms he or she

had to follow. And of course there was a high variability of norms between different cultural settings. In modern societies the context of validity normally refers to certain realms of functional differentiation: one has to obey his parents, but only in the realm of family, not in that of business or politics. There remain, of course, some rather general norms of personal conduct which apply to different functional contexts (e.g. „you shall not steal“), but *the bulk of norms refer and get their sense only in a specified functional context.*

This statement may sound provocative for propagators of ethics and morals. There has indeed been a strong movement during the last centuries to establish the universal validity of certain norms, either by reference to the commandments of God, to the teachings of a church, to natural law, or to human rights. But it seems that it is precisely this universal validity which is actually questioned not only with reference to specific norms but with reference to the validity of norms themselves. *Universal validity means that a norm is considered to be an obligatory standard with respect to every context, that it obliges without qualification. This presumption has been meeting growing criticisms from different points of view.*

The first concerns the cultural clash which results from the growing mobility of people and information throughout the world, or more generally from the growing interdependence of an emerging international society. Western culture which is imbued by the values of Mediterranean antiquity, the Christian creed and the ideas of the enlightenment is confronted by limits— or borders so to speak— of acceptance. Thus it has proven itself to be less universal than its claim. Take the claim for human rights: is it an expression of Western imperialism or the normative basis of world integration? I shall not pursue this issue here though it will be of paramount importance in the century to come.

Rather I shall focus on another aspect of the problem which is intimately linked to post-modernity, the point of departure to this inquiry.

A constituent trait of post-modern consciousness is a sense of the overcomplexity of the world. Whereas the modern consciousness shared the hopes of enlightenment that human reason would eventually be able to understand and manipulate the world in the interest of humanity, post-modern thinkers like Jean François Lyotard, denounce „la fin des grands récits“. Here Lyotard is referring to the end of the great interpretations which aimed at an integrated view of the world and the self, which gave sense to history and offered moral justification to social movements. The unexpected consequences of technical progress and the perverse effects of well-meant political actions have shaped the sense for the limitations of our knowledge and for restric-

tions in righteous actions. Although our knowledge is growing at an even faster pace we become aware that this does not converge into a coherent frame of reference but diverges into a multiplicity of differentiated frames of reference of high but limited and sometimes ambivalent plausibility. The multidimensionality of our knowledge, as it is represented e.g. in the multiple perspectives of the different sciences, transforms deeply our cognition of reality and of normativity as well. *Basic to common understanding is not that things are as they are but that they change under the different light of various perspectives in which one can consider them.* This is of course a strong challenge to every form of tradition and our intellectual orientations toward the world. But it is difficult to contest the fact that we have lost a common understanding of what are the basic things in life. There is no more a common certainty in what we take for granted.

To be sure, if one wants to take action one has to ignore this diversity of meaning and choose a single frame of reference. An action frame of reference is, however, normally not congruent with a unique scientific perspective. It refers rather to experience with specific situations which are defined as similar to the situation at hand. *Actions are bound to space and time, they are local and particular, not universal. Their success depends upon synthetic not upon analytic judgments.* Any definition of a situation and any action frame of reference are a blend of cognitive and normative judgments. Especially decisions with far-reaching consequences need a complex definition of the situation. They exhibit a high cognitive complexity which also refers to various normative standards.²

Turning to our second basic term *context*, one has first to acknowledge that it is a very general and elusive term. Its original meaning denotes the connections among the different elements of a written text. The context is what needs to be taken into account for the interpretation of a specific part of text. But the term has now been generalized for any hermeneutical problem, too. From the perspective I have taken here, context may refer either to the frames of reference to different functional areas or to the frames of localised action.

The problem of normativity and context thus refers to the issue of the validity of norms. Is there a general validity which stems from their normativity alone? Or do norms prove to be valid only in specific contexts, and how then can we identify those contexts? *From a sociological point of view there are strong arguments that the obligatory cha-*

² For an exploration of these issues see F.-X. Kaufmann: *Der Ruf nach Verantwortung - Risiko und Ethik in einer unüberschaubaren Welt.* Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1992.

racter of norms is always conditional and that these conditions form the context of their validity.

This position clashes with the traditional conception of religion and religious norms. There may be in this respect some differences of emphasis between Catholicism and different streams of Protestant thought, but basically there is a strong sense of historical identity of the Christian Gospel which – from a theological point of view – forms the essence of Christianity. To develop our problem further I shall move now to the second part which is concerned with the endangered tradition of Christianity in present Western culture and thus with a problem that concerns most of us not only in an intellectual but also in an existential way.

2. The endangered tradition of Christianity in post-modern culture

The practical context of our debate is – I assume – the dominant impression of the declining influence of Christianity in the process of modernization. At least in Western Europe – conditions may differ somewhat in other regions of the world – one can observe a significant loss of plausibility for Christian teachings, especially in the form they are presented by representatives of the churches. Insofar as the churches insist on specific commands and prohibitions they meet with growing indifference and a lack of insight. This seems particularly true with respect to issues of individual morality, not as much with issues of collective concern. Here the churches are expected „to speak truth to power“, i.e. to admonish politicians and statesmen to care for the public good. To put it more sharply: the moral discourse of the churches is considered to be good for others, but not for oneself. There is an indifferent acceptance of religion which is deemed useful for society but not binding for one's own conscience. And this tendency is not restricted to people with only loose connections to their church but is also found among strong believers.³ *There is evidence that the traditional homogeneity of religious orientations within certain denominations is waning and makes room for a plurality of highly in-*

³ Evidence of these tendencies can be found in many opinion polls in the last decades. E.g., in the inquiry among all Catholics preceding the German synod of 1971/75, 61% deemed „most important“ that „The church shall urge politicians and statesmen of the world to care for justice and peace“, whereas only 20% deemed that „the church should care about their personal salvation“. See also F.-X. Kaufmann/ W. Kerber/ P.M. Zulehner: *Ethos und Religion bei Führungskräften*. München: Kindt-Verlag, 1986, pp. 132ss.

dividualized patterns of religiosity. At the same time the public consensus about religion is breaking up. Whereas it seemed taken for granted throughout Europe that religion was represented by the established Christian churches, there is now a growing awareness of the difference between ecclesiastical Christendom and religion. The public debate is more about 'civil religion' or 'new religious movements' and about the functions of religion than about the content the churches stand for.

We observe similar developments in the public discourse about the family: new forms of gender relations and households receive much more attention than the traditional family which is deemed to be decreasing in number or even on the way to extinction. To be sure, traditional forms of the family and also of church-related religiosity include still the large majority of the population, at least in most European countries. But they are spoken of as if they had no future, as if they were a passing form of social life. As a matter of fact there is an obvious decrease in the strong links among family and church in large parts of the younger generations.⁴ These links still seem to be strong in most American denominations and were also of paramount importance for the religious socialisation in Europe. There is now a rather strong correlation between the waning of the traditional family pattern and the decline of religious orientation. At the same time we observe new forms of flexible or patchwork identities without strong convictions and with more opportunistic attitudes concerning moral issues.⁵

There is, in sum, a growing diffuseness about issues of religion and a loss of influence of the churches on the religious and moral orientations of individuals. Without going into further details I consider this situation to be characteristic of the current relationship between religion and modern society.⁶ And I suggest that the topic of our conference focus on and be inspired by this challenging situation.

What I have sketched is an obvious change of the social context for religious socialisation, and it would be easy to add a list of other social changes during the last decades which are intertwined with it: e.g. the growing importance of television, the changing status of women, the spreading of birth control and the establishment of the welfare state.

⁴ For the Catholic case in Germany see H. Tyrell: *Katholizismus und Familie: Institutionalisierung und Deinstitutionalisierung. Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 33: Religion und Kultur.* Opladen 1993, 126-149.

⁵ Cf. R.N. Bellah et al.: *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985.

⁶ Cf. F.-X. Kaufmann: *Religion und Modernität.* Tübingen 1989.

One could show that these and other factors did affect the position of churches also in other respects. Social services, for instance, which are run by churches are coming more and more under the pressures of public guidance and are dependent upon public funds. As a consequence they are losing much of their former religious characteristics. The free accessibility to television programs allows new information and values to easily permeate traditional contexts. Parents feel helpless against the impact of mass media, school teachers and friends on their children. Moreover, the emancipation of women forms a challenge to traditional clericalism. With these and other changes in the social context religious traditions seem to lose their normativity in society at large, and their validity is restricted more and more to specific, and especially elder, groups of the population.

This is a sociological perspective. The question is open as to what it means for theology, especially for practical theology. At first glance there only seems to be hard choices: adaptation or resistance, liberalism or fundamentalism, fidelity to tradition or modernization of faith. But at the same time we know *that theological and religious practice is far from these hard choices*. It seeks compromises and solutions in ambivalent situations. Let me try to put these multifarious thoughts and experiences into the framework of normativity and context.

I do not dare to define what religious normativity precisely means and leave it open to later debate. But the hard choices I have just mentioned fit easily into the framework. The traditional positions maintain the independence of normativity and social context and are therefore concerned only with the norms and values of Christianity in their traditional form. Positions which are more open to the actual situation maintain that there is an essential relationship between normativity and social context. Therefore in order to maintain the relevance and plausibility of Christian values and norms one has to adapt them in the light of changing situations. Whereas the first position maintains an unchanging, 'eternal' validity of the Christian Gospel, the second sees the creative fruitfulness of the gospel precisely in its possibilities to be read from different perspectives in different social contexts. What is relevant in the Gospel and how it becomes operative for the betterment or salvation of men can therefore change and is changing today. We can term this position as 'modern' with good reason, because the legitimacy of change is an essential feature of modern culture.⁷

⁷ The French *Encyclopédia Universalis* (Paris 1973) defines modernity as „morale canonique du changement“. See also Kaufmann, *Religion und Modernität*, l.c. 35ff.

There are, of course, points for criticism in both positions. Against the traditional position one can show that there has indeed been substantial change in the interpretation of the Gospel during history and that the normative core of Christianity has not always been defined in the same way. Against the modern position one can argue that it lacks the criterium of identity if it wholly depends on the acceptability within a social context. Or to put it more pointedly: Does the normativity of the Gospel remain independent of its actual relevance or does actual relevance determine what is normative in it? I think that none of these

From a sociological point of view the Christian Gospel has never been two positions reflects what the history of Christianity does teach us. There is for example, evidence that the specific hierarchical elements of the Catholic tradition do not stem from its Jewish origins but from the Roman element in Hellenism.⁸ What we call Christianity is thus a variety of different inculturations of the Christian Gospel. The so-called history of Christianity refers to the sequence of inculturations in a specific regional context, especially in the realm of the Roman patriarchate.⁹ The fascinating point is that the commitment to the Christian Gospel never ended with the end of a specific constellation of its social and cultural forms but always found new expressions and followers in a new context. And despite substantial changes in teaching and practice there is an obvious tradition of identical elements as the codified bible and some sacraments. Christianity has its own identity throughout the changes of its inculturation in different social contexts.

There is therefore good reason to postulate that both, the idea of transcendent normativity and of social context, is needed to understand what has happened to Christianity in its tradition through history. And in the same sense it seems promising for our actual situation to reflect on both – normativity and context – if we wish to find ways of locating the Christian Gospel in the context of modernity.

At first glance one could assume that in the division of labour among practical theology and sociology for the interpretation of normativity one would refer to practical theology and for the interpretation of context to sociology. With respect to the relationship of Christianity and modernization the normative interpretation of Christianity seems to be

⁸ Cf. R. Rillinger: Zum kaiserzeitlichen Leistungs- und Rangdenken in Staat und Kirche. In: *Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Costantiniana*, X Convegno Internazionale 1991: Ed. Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli, 1994, 223-264.

⁹ For an overview see F.-X. Kaufmann, Christentum und Christenheit. In: P. Gordan (Ed.), *Evangelium und Inkulturation* (1492 - 1992). Salzburger Hochschulwochen 1992. Graz: Styria, 1993, 101-128.

the job of theologians, and the interpretation of the context of modernization that of sociologists. But what about the relationships between both? The real problem is indicated to by the insignificant word and in the title of our conference. Although theologians may be more competent with respect to Christianity and sociologists with respect to modernization, the debate concerns precisely the relationship of both. And, *neither theologians nor sociologists will be able to speak about it without referring to both sides of the relationship*. Thus we need a debate on two levels: on the more elementary level sociologists have to understand Christianity, and theologians modernization; and everyone must try to understand the meaning which the other is attributing to both terms. Building on this we can then move to a more advanced level of debate by exploring the relationship of both.

If we speak about *modernization* as a specific process in Western civilization it is still a debated question where to begin: For a long time the threshold of the 1780ies with its cumulation of cultural, technical, political and economic changes was considered as paramount. Some historians go back to the 16th and the 17th century as the end of the Middle Ages. If one considers the *structural differentiation* of various functions as the core process of modernization one can draw its origins back to the conflicts between the German Emperor and the Roman Pope about the investment of bishops and abbots in the XI. century. It was by the concordat of Worms in 1122 that the difference of the spiritual and the secular became for the first time firmly established and led to the secularisation of the hitherto sacramental character of imperial and monarchical rule.¹⁰

The papal revolution, as Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy has termed the 'Investiture Struggle', began shortly after the great schism of 1054 which completed the cleavage between East and West. From this time a clear difference of structure in the relationship between spiritual and secular leaders in both parts of Christianity became apparent.

Another trait of modernization, i.e. *individualization*, goes also back to the XI. century. Then the hitherto apocalyptic vision of the Last Judgment „acquired a new significance in the West through the parallel belief in an intermediate judgment upon individual souls at the moment

¹⁰ The importance of the Investiture Struggle for the development of the Western legal tradition has been emphasized by H. Berman, *Law and Revolution*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr. 1983. T. Parsons as well as M. Weber overlooked the threshold of the XI. and XII. century, whose importance is also emphasized by B. Nelson, *Civilizational Complexes and Intercivilizational Encounters*. *Sociological Analysis* 34 (1973) 79-105.

of their death". The vision of purgatory „as a temporal condition of punishment of individual Christian souls“ fostered the concern about individual salvation.¹¹ The developing practice of private confessions became an institutionalized vehicle for self-consciousness. The claim for freedom of conscience then became later in the epoch of religious cleavages the vanguard for human rights and for the separation of church and state in the emerging American states.¹²

Functional differentiation of society and individualization of the conditions of life are mutually reinforcing processes which took place first in the realm of those medieval cities which became connected by extensive trade— from England to Northern Italy. From there the pattern of mercantiled production spread and with it the *importance of money* which is a basic condition for individualized life.¹³ Eventually the restrictions to political rule by the constitutional movement and the establishment of civil society brought about those conditions which we consider today as characteristic for modern individualism.

There have been, however, *counteracting processes* which were strongly linked to religious developments. The Lutheran reformation as well as the Catholic counter-reformation reenforced the union of political and spiritual powers and formed the base for civic and industrial discipline. And with the merging of different confessions in the national states of the 19th century, confessional orientations and institutions became paramount for the structures of private life. The resulting tensions among the confessions have stabilised the religious and social orientations of all Christian denominations, especially in countries with a mixed population. It is only after World War II and especially since the 1960ies that traditional forms of religious life seem to break down more and more. The proportion of nonaffiliated people grows in most parts of Europe and there is a strong decline of religious knowledge and orientation among the younger generations as well.

In my view it is less the quantitative decline of church affiliation which signalizes a deep crisis of religious tradition but the observation that the remaining church members mostly belong to the traditional strata of the population. Forms of religious life which could be qualified as specific to the modern conditions of life are rare and scattered. *Chri-*

¹¹ Berman, l.c. 169.

¹² Cf. E.S. *Morgan*, *Inventing the People. The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York, London: Norton 1988, 295ss.

¹³ Cf. G. *Simmel*, *Philosophie des Geldes*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 1968.

stianity still has to prove that it is able to inculturate also under modern conditions and in a post-modern culture.

3. Consequences for practical theology

Is there anybody within the churches to be concerned with this issue? I think that it is the specific task of practical theology to deal with the issue of mediation between Christian tradition and the social contexts of modernity. But how can this take place?

The Second Vatican Council has been an impressive attempt to the 'aggiornamento' of the Catholic tradition. Although there is no explicit reference to modernity in its texts, there are obvious references which relate to the modern context, e.g. the acknowledgement of the principle of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*, or the concern with the relationship of church and the world of today in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.¹⁴ Moreover the basic tenets of Catholic thought have been adapted to the challenges of modern ecumenical theology, e.g. the relationship of the written bible to tradition in the constitution about revelation *Dei Verbum* and the concept of the church itself in *Lumen Gentium*. It was the explicit program of the council to develop a double interpretation of the self-understanding of the Catholic church, i.e. *ad intra* (as to the Catholic church itself) and *ad extra* (as to other churches and the world society at large). *This clear distinction of the church as a system within a wider social context marked a new epoche and reflects the sociological interpretation of modern society in terms of functional differentiation.*¹⁵

The switch from anti-modern normativism to a contextual attitude is particularly marked in the case of the Vatican Council, but it has also provoked strong reactions. However *the contextual method does not necessarily mean that normative commitments have to be abandoned or openly adapted to the expectations of an external context*. There may be also a critical approach to the secular context from the Christian perspective. An important example for this seems to be the book by John Milbank: *Theology and Social Theory - Beyond Secular*

¹⁴ Cf. J.A. Komonchak: *Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism*. In: *Catholicism and Liberalism - Contributions to American Public Philosophy*. Ed. by R.B. Douglass and D. Hollenbach. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1994, 76-99. (German translation in: Kaufmann/Zingerle, see next footnote).

¹⁵ For an assessment of Vatican II in the perspective of modernization see F.-X. Kaufmann/A. Zingerle (Eds.), *Vatikan II und Modernisierung*. Historische, theologische und soziologische Perspektiven. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996.

Reason.¹⁶ This study is a erudition of a theological dispute with the main intellectual trends of modernity and develops a Christian Social Theory in the context of post-modern thought. Milbank objects to any mediation between theological and modern secular thought, including empirical sociology, and presents instead a proper Christian vision of society in the tradition of Augustines 'City of God'. I was impressed by the consistent argumentation of the author which is on the post-modern level of meta-narratives. Modern meta-narratives are, he asserts, a perversion of theology. If for example, the scientific explanation of nature and history binds the divine operation to this level one ends up holding God responsible for all the evils of this world. Milbank shows in a convincing way that the meta-narrative of science, technology, and the state, is the *will to power*, and that there is only a little step from the struggle for power to *violence*. He then asks the question: What is the better meta-narrative, the individualistic or collectivistic will to power or the the belief that men have been created by a loving God and are invited to search together for the perfection of being? He offers a strong argument in his work. And although I am a sociologist its relevance to my field remains, despite the fact that it constitutes a theological debate. *For the ideal of the city of God remains utopian if it is not interpreted in the context of an actual society.*

Coming back again to the issue of normativity one has to acknowledge that an important source to the validity of norms within the secularized individualistic culture of post-modernity is *self-commitment*. This does not mean that the norms the individual commits to validate are invented by him. Quite to the contrary the individual is normally unable to create the norms he or she needs to live with.¹⁷ Instead *the individual selects the norms he will comply with from the cultural stock of his social context*. Seen at the level of the whole society this stock is much too complex and the respective norms are often contradictory so that it would be impossible to commit to them all. This is the reason why the commitment to certain norms is often restricted to particular contexts. This is the case on the level of culture which organises around characteristic functions as I have mentioned earlier. But it operates also on the level of decisions where

¹⁶ J. Milbank: *Theology and Social Theory - Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

¹⁷ To a certain extent the artist seems to be an exception as the quality of its art depends precisely on its capacity to create a new set of rules of expression. Perhaps this is the reason why the artist seems to become (after the entrepreneur and the bureaucrat) the paradigmatic figure in late modernity. Cf. Kaufmann, *Religion und Modernität*, l.c. 191ff.

an action frame of reference always implies the selection of specific norms.

The relationship of normativity and context has reached a new quality in the process of modernization. In traditional societies there was a clear cut social context which was so evident to contemporaries that it represented reality per se. Also the Christian Gospel operated with evident normativity in christianized societies as part of this social and cultural context. People also stood in an immediate and similar relationship to their common context. Although there were strong differences of rank and status it was precisely by rank and status that traditional society was segregated into various contexts of life. Modernization is a process in which these homogeneous forms of context break up and become substituted by the already mentioned functional contexts of the economy, the polity, the family, etc. We live in a functionally differentiated universe whose unifying sense consists precisely in the plurality of perspectives. The 'whole' or 'the world' has become overcomplex and heterogeneous, and the so-called post-modern consciousness is an expression of this situation for the first time. In the perspective of individuals this condition is often experienced as ambiguity.¹⁸

From a sociological perspective there is, however, an additional point to make. The transformation from a ranked society to a functionally differentiated network of national societies means also a *growing organizational complexity*. In traditional societies a person normally belonged to a unique group, to a village, for instance, or in cities to a corporation. *Modern organizations do not embrace the whole context of individual life but the specific form of inclusion is membership.* That means that specific rights and duties are bound to the status of membership which is normally not an inherited but an achieved status of civil law which is ended by retirement, exit or dismissal. In a modern society the social status of a person consists in the set of its various memberships. Each organization has its own norms the member has to comply with. This evidence of organizational norms which are of an obvious particular character and by the way normally legitimated by the overarching ideology of a functional subsystem is engraved in our habits and in the dominant concept of normativity. *There is so to say a broken and altogether mediated relationship between individuals and the 'prominent ideas' of our culture. What seems normative in Christi-*

¹⁸ Cf. K. Lüscher/ A. Lange: Nach der „postmodernen“ Familie. In: H.P. Buba, N.F. Schneider (Eds.), *Familie: Zwischen gesellschaftlicher Prägung und individuellem Design*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996 (in print).

an tradition is no longer self-evident but reaches the individual by different and heterogeneous channels. One channel is the teaching of a religious community to which a person belongs in the form of membership, and this is just one membership among others. Another channel is the immediate context of relevant persons— parents, teachers and friends. A third one is the Christian tradition implicit in our constitutions and general culture, both mediated by schools books and mass media. *This heterogeneity of experiences is the basic fact of socialization in modernized societies, and it has far-reaching consequences for the impact of ecclesiastical actions.* The ecclesiastical frame of reference has become a particular one which is more or less isolated from other frames of reference. This is the main reason of its reduced impact.

I have to stop here for reasons of time. I will try to summarize my argument. The conditions in which we live today in Western societies exhibit a high degree of security and predictability never attained before in history of mankind. This is the result of our specialising and lengthening of chains of action, a concomitant of functional differentiation of our systems of meaning and of the emergence of the organized forms of a division of labour. The result is an ongoing growth of complexity in human societies which forces persons to become *individuals*, i.e. to organize their own life by developing their own standards of selectivity and rules of action. This happens generally not by invention but by a more or less conscious selection among existing standards and rules in the institutional and cultural stock of a society. *Christian traditions belong to this stock in a much broader sense than they can be presented within religious communication.* And religious communication itself has become bound to the narrow realm of denominational or ecclesiastical opportunities. The social context of the tradition of the Christian creed as well as of Christian values and norms has become more fragmented than ever before. To become a believer is therefore more difficult than in traditional societies and needs a complex process of 'polythetic learning' (A. Schutz).¹⁹ To become a believer and to be a faithful follower of the church means to develop within ones consciousness a cognitive and emotional orientation which organizes experience under the auspices of central elements of the Christian creed. Traditions, obedience and habits are no longer enough, they tend to lose significance and relevance. *The self-commitment to the normativity of the Christian Gospel is therefore a*

¹⁹ Cf. F.-X. Kaufmann, Glaube und Kommunikation: eine soziologische Perspektive. In: D. Wiederkehr (Ed.), *Der Glaubenssinn des Gottesvolkes - Konkurrent oder Partner des Lehramts?* Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1994, 132-160.

necessary condition for its validity. The claim of ecclesiastical authorities to be the moral authority will under the condition of modernity gradually become void.

All this has to do with the changing social context of Christianisation. The tradition of the Gospel has always also been a social process, but this could remain unconscious as far as it has been self-evident. But today these social processes have become so complex that they need to be taken into account by theologians, too. Theology is the reflexive power of religion. In a world whose sense is no longer given but has to be found again and again within different frames of reference through reflection, the sense of religion needs a to increase reflection as well as. Even if the basic messages of the Gospel are simple, and religious experience in its core is something which transcends the intricacies of all our inquiries, one may safely predict that the task of theology will become even more important. *And the quality of the deliberation by practical theology will depend upon the capacity to link normativity and context.* The inculturation of the Christian creed in the structures of modernity is still an unsolved challenge for all religious communities.

And was it different in Europe? I think not. Departments of religious education were strong because of the obligation to prepare teachers of religion for the schools in your countries. Occasionally there would be departments of social sciences and theology, under the guise of the theological interpretation of culture and society. But most often the actual work of preparation of pastors and priests for ecclesial leadership was completed in more practically oriented Preacher Seminars or their equivalents. The university study of theological disciplines had little place for practical theology.

That older arrangement of the division of labor in theological education rested upon an unfortunate understanding of the relation between theory and practice. The description of practical theology as applied theology indicates the problem: We were working with a „trickle-down“ understanding of applied theology. The assumption was that the creative work in theology went on in the fields of Biblical Studies, Historical Studies, and most especially, Systematic Theology, Ethics, because it touched on the practical and political, had a somewhat ambiguous position. Unconsciously, theological faculties accepted the positivist bias toward what could be called pure reason, scholarship that pro-

James W. Fowler

The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology New Life for Practical Theology

For the last two decades we have been involved in a quiet but deep-going revolution in the self-understanding and work of practical theology. This is leading to changes in theological education and in the role of theology in the churches and societies from which the members of this conference come. This revolution centers in the recovery and re-emergence of practical theology as a discipline. In the United States, it has not been too long since practical theology was regarded as a basement operation in most divinity schools and theological seminaries. I mean this literally: departments of pastoral care, Christian education, church administration, homiletics and liturgics, and evangelization were actually located in basements or attics, added as though they were afterthoughts – which in fact they often were. You could almost count on it: the more academically prestigious the school of theology, the greater the status difference between the so-called *classical* disciplines of biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and ethics, on the one hand, and the so-called *applied* disciplines, on the other.

And was it different in Europe? I think not. Departments of religious education were strong because of the obligation to prepare teachers of religion for the schools in your countries. Occasionally there would be departments of social sciences and theology, under the guise of the theological interpretation of culture and society. But most often the actual work of preparation of pastors and priests for ecclesial leadership was completed in more practically oriented Prediger Seminars or their equivalents. The university study of theological disciplines had little place for practical theology.

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ceeded in accordance with the canons of *pure research* in the sciences. In theological education the results of scholarly inquiry and constructive interpretation in the so-called *classical* disciplines of theology would be appropriated and *applied* in the work of church leadership and pastoral practices. That is what I mean when I say that practical theology constituted a kind of step-child discipline in theological studies. We viewed its work as derivative and second-hand. In this perspective pastors and educators were encouraged to think of themselves as *consumers* and *transmitters* of theology, but not as producers. And the laity were viewed as passive receivers of this second-hand theology transmitted by pastors and educators.

By the early 1980s, however, some new perspectives on the nature and work of theology began to take form. Edward Farley, a systematic theologian, formulated these new understandings in a way that had broad influence.¹ He identified four major phases in the evolution of theology as a central activity and concern of the church, and later, the university. His analysis had the impact of shaking up our routinized assumptions about „pure“ and „applied“ theology. Let me briefly sketch the four phases in theology's evolution that Farley identifies:

The first phase began with the New Testament church and continued until the early Middle Ages. In this era, theology involved personal and existential inquiry into the mysteries of divine revelation, undertaken for the sake of helping the Christian community live toward truth. Farley calls this approach theology habitus – theology as knowledge of God pursued through the disciplines of prayer, study, liturgical participation, and the practices of discipleship. *Theology habitus* aimed toward the formation of persons and communities in accordance with the revealed knowledge of God.

A splendid example of the nurture of *theology habitus* can be found in the Rites of Christian Initiation which emerged in the second through the fifth centuries of the church's life. In a situation not unlike our own, the church found adults drawn to it who had no Christian memory or formation. They may have been adherents of other cults, gnostic sects, or adherents of the civic religion of the Roman Empire. Over a period of one to three years they worked with persons in a compre-

¹ A brief statement of this account is in Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in Don S. Browning, Ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983, pp. 21-41. The longer statement of Farley's position is in Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. See also Farley's more recent book, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

hensive process of formation in Christian faith that focused not just on the teaching of the Bible or of Christian doctrine, but upon involving them in the community's practices of worship, sacrament, prayer, study, and service. Through a rigorous process of such preparation and examination, the church brought catechumens to the point of readiness for baptism and admission to the sacrament of holy communion. After their baptism on Easter Sunday, they underwent a final period of formation and nurture toward their forms of service in the church between Easter and Pentecost (Mystagogy).

The second phase in theology's evolution began to emerge in the second through the fourth centuries in the intellectual responses of the church to the challenges of heresies within and of competitive intellectual ideologies from without. The joining of Christian doctrine with the philosophical perspectives of neo-Platonism in the work of Augustine provides a powerful example. Farley calls this phase Theology Science. He sees it at its height in the great *Summas* of Thomas Aquinas, with their rational reconciliation of the recovered philosophy of Aristotle with Augustinian theology. In this era theology emerged as the dominant ordering framework for grounding all human knowledge in the west. Theology was, indeed, the „queen of the sciences“ *Theology science* provided the intellectual energy and thrust for the founding of the great medieval universities. It persisted – at least in Roman Catholicism – until well beyond the Counter-Reformation.

The next great wave of change in theology, Farley suggests, came with the impacts of the Renaissance and the Reformation, with their respective returns to classical and biblical antiquity. The fresh retrieval of humanistic traditions, unshackled from theological control, gave fresh impetus to scholarly study. The translations of the Latin and Greek texts of the New Testament into vernacular languages opened the way for the fresh illuminations and intense controversies of the Reformation. Coupled with the dawning age of scientific inquiry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these movements gave rise to the modern research university, with its beginning of the transformation of education for the classical professions into the work of specialized disciplines of research. No longer „queen of the sciences“ theology had to struggle to maintain a presence in the new universities. By forming alliances with the emerging „scientific“ disciplines of history, philosophy, philology, and rationally grounded ethics, various departments of specialized theological study began to form. *Theology Science* became *theological sciences*. A unity and working relation between these disciplinary specialties in theology was maintained by their contributions to the professional grounding of university-educated

pastors and priests. Schleiermacher's famous proposal for the role of practical theology as the place where the theological disciplines meet to inform the work of ecclesial science provided one such influential rationale for the continuing presence of theological faculties in the now secularizing universities. As specialization has continued, professional guilds of scholars in the various theological disciplines have generated both confidence and ever increasing rigor in their work. This has inevitably led to diminished conversation and collaboration *between* the disciplines, and often to a growing distancing of their work from that of the ministries of the churches.

The fourth phase in the evolution of the work of theology Farley identifies as *systematic* or *dogmatic theology*. Now separated from History of Christian Thought, from Ethics, and often from Biblical Studies, systematic theology itself becomes a specialized discipline. In academic circles it has increasingly given attention to issues of methodology and concerns about the legitimation of its work as a discipline. In the latter third of this century academic systematic theology has, on the whole, become increasingly remote from the practices of Christian faith in the churches and in our societies.

The emerging new field of practical theology has directly challenged this state of affairs. It has forcefully reasserted that theology, in any „classical“ era, was an eminently *practical* theology. From this standpoint the letters of Paul need to be seen afresh as inventive, inspired practical theology. There we see Paul initiating and responding with his writings to the challenges of the first Christian communities as they tried to give body and flesh to the new reality that had apprehended them in the risen Christ. We need to see Augustine not so much as laying down timeless dogmatic principles to be universally preserved in the churches, but as a highly gifted ecclesial leader writing to help make sense and shape responses to a time of great threat and transformation in the Roman Empire and in the Church. Similarly, we need to see the theologians of the reformation and counter-reformation as practical theologians, trying to re-shape the practices and teachings of the churches in their eras, in light of new historic circumstances and challenges. Theology in any of these now „classical“ eras had more the character of *theology habitus* than of the theological sciences. It was concerned with the shaping or re-shaping of the practices of the church so that they reflected faithfulness to Christ and formed congregations of folk through whom Christ could make his appeal in the world. In this sense, they were „local“ theologies, addressing the concreteness and specific challenges of particular times and places. Under the impact of these challenges they shaped powerful interpretations of experiences of revelation and of the documents of

scripture and tradition. Practical theology says, however, that we should be more concerned to imitate their faithfulness and creativity, in response to divine inspiration, than to slavishly trying to systematize and apply *their* practical theological solutions to our challenges in the present.

At the heart of practical theology's self understanding and effort to communicate its work we find the retrieval in theology and philosophy of the ancient concept of *praxis*.

Praxis, Phronesis, and Pragmatism

In the Greek city-state of which Aristotle wrote, the kind of knowing and ability required for the highest of Greek vocations – good political leadership – was that of *phronesis*, which we translate as „practical wisdom.“ *Phronesis* could be developed through education and through participation in *praxis*. By *praxis* Aristotle referred to a pattern in which action and ongoing reflection continually interpenetrate.²

Two other forms of knowing and action can be contrasted with *praxis* in Aristotle's writing. First there is *theoria*, from which our term *theory* comes. It refers to knowledge born of analytic distance and objectivity. In detached observation and analysis of the action in the Olympic games, „theorists“ advised participants on how best to train and develop strategies for competition. At another level, *theoria* was the fruit of philosophical reflection, resulting from the intellect's inspired contemplation on metaphysical reality. It is important to see that *theoria* and *praxis* are not opposites. Nor is one derivative of the other. They are richly complementary but distinct forms of knowing and action, animated by different interests and contexts, and employing different methods.

Poiesis is the third way of relating knowing to action that Aristotle identified. It can be characterized as *creative skill*. When a potter mixes clay to the right consistency, centers it on the wheel, and then gradually forms and lifts it into a graceful vase, she employs *poiesis*. The process of learning to ski or to swim involves the kind of knowing and acting that is *poiesis*. In *poiesis* we feel with our bodies the coordination of limbs and sensory signals that make these kinds of com-

² On the concept of *praxis* and its history, see Nicholas Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice: The History of a Marxist Concept, from Aristotle to Marx*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, and Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

plex patterns of action possible and habitual. As we consider the role of „bodiliness“ in practical theology, we will have reason to recognize *poesis* as an important aspect of the formation of faith in a *theology habitus*.

Let's return to our focus on *praxis* for a moment. Capacity for leadership in the political *praxis* of the city-state required at least three elements: First, it requires a grounding in the myths and history of the polis and in its evolved purposes and ideals – a grounding in the city-state's story and vision. Second, *praxis* requires a wise knowledge of human nature and of the arts of organization and persuasion involved in leadership. And third, it requires a capacity for analyzing and understanding the factors shaping the present moment and their challenges to the welfare of the people. These are the ingredients of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. We need to recognize that these qualities are not the acquisitions or possessions of singular individuals alone, but rather, they arise out of the discourse and reflection-on-action that constitute the political process.³

Let me make two final points that undergird our understanding of the work of practical theology: First, *praxis* is not identical with *practice*. A practice or practices represent patterns of action by which a person or a community carries out the activities necessary to their life and flourishing. Practices are shared patterns of interaction that have evolved to meet the needs and serve the recurring interests of people in relation with each other. Institutions are made up of systems of practices, some that are formally established, many others that have evolved informally.

Secondly, *praxis* has two connotations that derive, respectively, from its Aristotelian heritage, on the one hand, and its Marxist heritage, on the other. For Aristotle, *praxis* was the ongoing integration of action and reflection through which the political process maintained and adapted the practices of the city state necessary for its flourishing and maintenance. For Marx, on the other hand *praxis* came to connote intentional action strategically aimed at the overthrow of the present patterns of economic and political domination and their replacement by the classless society. Practical theology has been influenced by the Marxist understanding of *praxis* through liberation and political theologies. It has been influenced by Aristotelian traditions through the impact of political philosophies from Europe. It has been shaped by

³ For a helpful description of these three orientations of knowing in Aristotle, see Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: A Shared Praxis Approach*. New York: Harper and Row, 1980, pp.. 153-157.

American pragmatist philosophies which have informed the influential work of a number of twentieth century American theologians. (The term Pragmatism has *praxis* as its root).

This dual heritage of the term *praxis* points to the claim that practical theology has a stake in maintaining the viability of the practices of the churches and their missions. At the same time, it engages in ongoing critical and constructive efforts at transformation toward the greater faithfulness and effectiveness of the churches in the societies in which they offer their witness.

The Hermeneutical and Correlational Dynamics of Practical Theology

Now let us consider a characterization of practical theology. Practical theology, we may say, is:

**Critical and constructive reflection by communities of faith
Carried on consistently in the contexts of their *praxis*,
Drawing on their *interpretations* of normative sources from
Scripture and tradition**

In response to their *interpretations* of the emergent challenges and situations they face, and

Leading to ongoing modifications and transformations of their *practices*

In order to be more adequately responsive

To their *interpretations* of the shape of *God's call to partnership*.

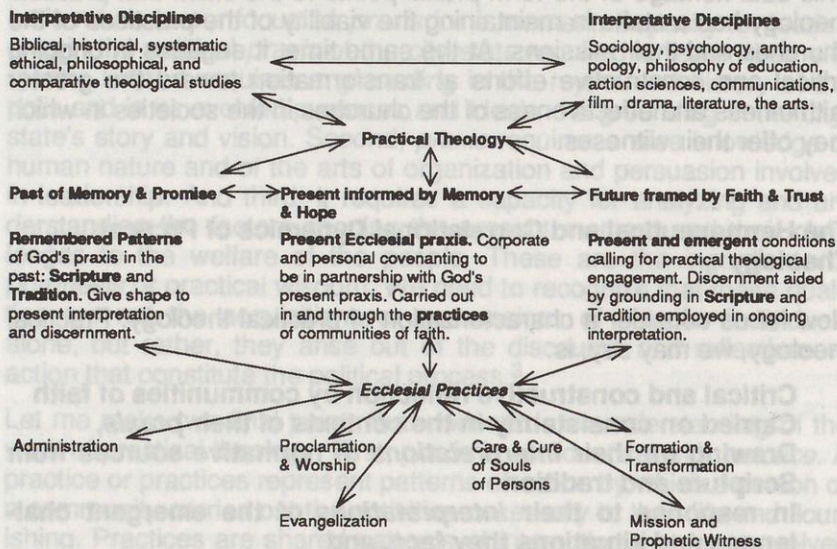
The following chart may be of help in visualizing the flow of inquiry and dialogue that communities of faith carry on in practical theological reflection. The examination of scripture and tradition is stimulated by the emergent situations and challenges they face, which call for the modification or transformation of their ways of living their missions and offering their witness. Let's attend to the diagram (next page) and see if we can illumine its dynamics.

Please look with me at the model I have offered (cf. p. 212). By reflection on this two-dimensional medium, we will try to bring into focus the multidimensional moments and movements of practical theological engagement.

First, let me call attention to the presence, in a number of places, of the words *interpretation* or *interpretative*. This term signals that we

understand practical theological thinking to be, at heart, a *hermeneutical* activity. The community of faith is a *community of interpretation*.

The Interpretative and Correlational Dynamics of Practical Theology



As a community of interpretation, the church finds its unifying and focal identity through its ongoing engagement with and interpretations of what I identified on the model as a „Past of Memory and Promise“. In scripture and tradition the church lives in relation to ongoing interpretations of the „Remembered Patterns of God's Praxis“ in the past. Scripture and tradition, engaged in ongoing interpretation, provide the lenses maps by which we try to discern the patterns of God's involvement in the in-breaking present. The „Ecclesial Practices“ identified below represent the ways the „Past of Memory and Promise“ forms and takes root in the soul and minds and practices of members of the community. This includes their grounding in Scripture and Tradition. It includes the emotional dispositions formed in their hearts and ethical sensibilities through the prayers, music, sacraments, the examples of others, as well as the proclamation and teaching of Bible and tradition. All of this sedimented complex of knowing, attitudes, and patterns of behavior shape the interpretations the community makes of the present challenges and emergent conditions they face. So their personal and corporate live are shaped by a „Present informed by Memory and Hope“.

At the same time, through these ecclesial practices, and their rooting in scripture and traditions, they also look toward the future, a „Future framed by Faith and Trust“. Through these practices they engage the society that surrounds them in mission and evangelization, in social witness and political *praxis*. As they make their interpretations of the challenges presented by the unfolding future, they do so with instincts and imaginations shaped by their personal and ecclesial memories of God's patterns of faithfulness in the past, and their experiences of God's faithfulness in the present.

The patterning of time we are working with here is reminiscent of that which Augustine offered in the eleventh chapter of *The Confessions*. In Section xxviii he writes, „But how does this future, which does not yet exist, diminish or become consumed? Or how does the past, which now has no being, grow, unless there are three processes in the mind which in this is the active agent? For the mind *expects* and *attends* and *remembers*, so that what it expects passes through what has its attention to what it remembers“⁴ The community of faith, in its interpretations of present and future, *expects*, *attends*, and *remembers*, with minds and hearts shaped and furnished by „Memory and Hope“

How does a church or ecclesial community awaken to the realization of a need for change in its *praxis*? How does a community of faith recognize that it must engage in fresh ways in fundamental practical theological re-working of its practices, its ways of being and mission? One could hope that as part of the *habitus* of their ways of being the church, they would be continually alert to the internal nudges of the Spirit of God. One could also hope that, like soldiers engaged in a field of battle, the church would have sentinels and systems of observation to detect a shift in the fields of their service, or identify new sources of danger and challenge. When a community of faith begins to recognize that new challenges and conditions call for new patterns of response and *praxis*, a process of intentional practical theological engagement can be the result.

When this need is recognized and embraced, a community of faith begins a practical theological process that is both hermeneutical and correlational. That is, it begins an intentional process of inquiry and reflection that engages in focused analysis and interpretation of the situation and emergent challenges that call for its attention and address. The community must ask, „What is going on? What are the

⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions*. (Tr. by Henry Chadwick) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 243.

threats we face? What are the dangers and challenges we must address? What goods are at stake in this situation?" Their attending and beginning analysis will be informed by their reading of scripture and tradition, and by the ethics and value system to which they hold. But they will also turn to other „Interpretative Systems“ – Those of the social sciences and other perspectives suggested in the upper right hand corner of our model. They will consult with members of the communities affected by the threat. They will converse with various „experts“ in such interpretation. From these resources they will identify the elements of particular strategies they might employ. They will identify various potential allies with whom they might join to meet the challenges.

At the same time, however, they will turn to other „Interpretative Disciplines“ and „experts“ – those that focus on the Scriptures and traditions of the community of faith (see the upper left-hand corner). There they will ask for help in finding norms and models for guiding the responses and initiatives they may shape in relation to the current challenges. They may discover that from their normative traditions they will find resources and precedents that will provide alternative and fresh perspectives they can offer to the coalitions with whom they work. They may also find moral and spiritual dimensions in the crisis that they had not previously recognized. They may also find constraints regarding some strategies or approaches they might have considered. What I am describing here has been called a process of „mutually critical correlation“.⁵ At the heart of intentional practical theological engagement we find this dynamic dialectic: *Interpretations of the situations of present challenges and their contexts are brought into mutually critical correlation with interpretations of the normative sources of Christian tradition and practices.*

Some practical theologians, following the influential work of Hans Georg Gadamer, (*Truth and Method*) refer to this process as a creative „fusion of the horizons“ of interpreted social reality with those of interpreted Christian normative sources.⁶ This image of the fusion of

⁵ See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975, Chs. 2 and 3. See also D. Tracy, „The Foundations of Practical Theology“ in Don S. Browning, Ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983, pp. 61-82.

⁶ Gadamer's book is *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975. On „fusion of horizons_ see pp. 273f, 337f, 358. Among practical theologians making use of Gadamer's hermeneutical theory see: Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984, Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society*.

horizons is important. It suggests the creativity and imaginative newness that can result from such a process. It does not go too far to suggest that when such a process is thoroughly and faithfully carried out, the results have the potential of producing new vision and commitment of a sort we associate with experience of revelation.

One can see from this description why I have characterized the work of practical theology as both *interpretative* (hermeneutical) and *correlational*. Perhaps you can also see in fresh ways how practical theology provides the means by which ongoing interpretation of Scripture and tradition, in correlation with present situations and challenges, can fuel processes of change in the practices of our churches, while honoring continuity and keeping faith with our scriptures and traditions.

Some Common Characteristics of Practical Theological Approaches

Perhaps it will be helpful if we summarize some of the marks that distinguish the emerging new directions in practical theology from other approaches. I will use as examples of these characteristics some aspects of the approaches employed by participants in this conference or those that have influenced them.

1. ***Praxis-Theory-Praxis***. Practical theological method claims as its starting place some context or contexts of praxis. That is to say, it arises in reflection out of the context of ongoing practices in which communities of faith engage. It arises out of practices and returns to practices. Its goal is not the formulation of abstract understandings or principles. Rather, it aims at the modification toward greater faithfulness and adequacy of the practices with which it begins.

One of the sources from which the re-emergence of practical theology had taken its direction is the focus in the United States on „congregational studies.“ This work, which began with sociological and anthropological studies of religious communities in the late 1970's, initially aimed at trying to serve theological educators and pastoral strategists in finding more effective ways to impact congregations with new

Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986 and Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Gadamer has had a great deal of influence on and through the work of David Tracy, *op.cit.* and *The Analogical Imagination*. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

theological teachings.⁷ This involved a prior theological commitment and intent which gave rise to the study of congregations for purposes of bringing about change, the directions of which were determined in advance by persons and groups from beyond the congregations. This could be called a classic *theory-praxis-theory* approach. In the course of a few years, however, practitioners of congregational studies began to recognize the richly layered complexity of the practices of congregations. They began to come to understand that the formative power of congregational practices goes a great deal deeper than what a mere change in the articulation of their theology can affect. With these insights there began to appear books like Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies*⁸ and James Hopewell's *Congregation*.⁹ They have challenged and helped practical theologians recognize that change in the practices of religious communities must begin with helping congregations face and name the points at which their practices are inadequate, unfaithful, or both. Matthew Lamb, influenced by his teacher Johannes Metz, wrote a benchmark book, *Solidarity with Victims*, in which he showed decisively how the most influential theologies of the twentieth century virtually always approached the churches from the standpoint of the priority of theory.¹⁰

2. Practical theological approaches *are contextual, local, and stay close to experience*. In contrast to the aspirations of some philosophical or systematic theologies, practical theology does not aim at timeless, universal or comprehensive interpretations of Christian tradition. In many ways, practical theology is „problem-posing“ theology. In its ongoing monitoring of the horizon of challenges and issues the church faces it responds to crisis events or emergent issues by initiating practical theological discussion and inquiry. This is not to say that its work is merely piecemeal or fragmentary. In many ways the church's self-understanding and comprehensive interpretation of the meaning of the Gospel are brought into question by the practical challenges and issues it faces. However, instead of approaching scripture and tradition with the intent to make systematic and comprehensive interpretations, it approaches them with the focus of the par-

⁷ For representative writings of this position see Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, Eds., *Handbook for Congregational Studies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986 and Carl Dudley, Ed., *Building Effective Ministry*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.

⁸ Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1985.

⁹ Hopewell's book is *Congregation: Stories and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

¹⁰ New York: Crossroad, 1982.

ticular and local issues it confronts. The Dutch practical theologian, Johannes van der Ven, and the group he works with at Nijmegen University call their approach to practical theology „Empirical Theology.“ In doing so they pay particular attention to the analysis of social and cultural problematics that challenge the church to fresh theological thinking. At the same time they concern themselves to understand the ways contemporary people frame these issues so that theology may address them in intelligible and credible ways.¹¹

3. Practical theology reclaims the approaches of *a theology habitus*. The apostle Paul referred to the *ekklesia* – the community of persons called together in a new covenant in Christ – as „the Body of Christ.“ He spoke of the uniqueness of the gifts of those who make up the body in terms of the parts of our bodies – the ears, the eyes, the hands, the feet of the community. We are a creedal community who take seriously the witness to a bodily resurrection of the Jesus whose body was whipped, hung on a cross, and pierced with a spear. *Theology habitus* takes into account our „bodiliness“ as my colleague Rebecca Chopp puts it.¹² Our conscious cognitive functioning constitutes a relatively limited part of our modes of knowing and relating to the physical world and to each other. We are our bodies. We have powerful emotional experiences and patterns that shape the frameworks in which we construct and interpret our experiences. The levels of our energy and spirit in important ways depend upon our bodies. Likewise, our bodily health can be deeply affected by the frames of meaning or meaninglessness that characterize the societies and sub-communities with which we identify. Theologian Sallie McFague has boldly brought our experiences of bodiliness into her rigorously creative work on the theology of the Body of God.¹³ Bodiliness in theology means taking our natural and human environments seriously. It means taking seriously the substances we and others ingest into our bodies for nourishment, for healing and for the alteration of our moods and subjectivity. Bodiliness means taking the architecture and physical features of cities and constructed environments seriously. And bodiliness means profound care about what happens to the bodies of

¹¹ Johannes van der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach*. Kampen, The Netherlands: Pharos Publishing, 1993.

¹² Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. She credits David Kelsey with the term „bodiliness“ in his book *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School?* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, p. 119.

¹³ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, and McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

persons – especially children – in the economic and social fragmentations associated with the advances of market capitalism and the global spread of cultural values of North America and Europe. Practical theology cannot do its work with the tacit assumption that people's bodies begin with their neck and extend only upward. This means, further, that practical theology opposes docetic theologies that compartmentalize the spiritual and the physical, and that shrink the concerns of the church to the private and spiritual needs of its members.

4. Practical theology includes, **but is not limited to reflective work in the functional areas of ecclesial practices**. In the older world of so-called „classical“ and „applied“ theology, the disciplines that worked with the functional specialties of applied theology could be taught and written about separately. There were professors of homiletics, who worked particularly on exegesis, sermon construction, rhetorical styles, and effectiveness in communication. Likewise, religious educators found their principal academic colleagues among secular educators. The often shared the assumptions and standards of education shaped by the „schooling“ models, carrying on their work without particular attention to its theological or ecclesial foundations. Professors of pastoral care, seeking to legitimate their teaching and research, often grounded themselves in the theories and clinical practices of secular psychological traditions. Frequently this meant incorporating practices and approaches that isolated individuals from their communities of faith and did little to address the spiritual crises and hungers they carried.

In the work of contemporary practical theologians we still see focal research and writing on pastoral theology, homiletics and religious education. But there are some remarkable new patterns emerging. Work in pastoral care by Pam Couture, just to offer one example, focuses on the experience of women and children in the context of the worldwide phenomenon of the „feminization of poverty.“ She addresses churches and society regarding the need to recognize and alleviate the crises of women's and children's lives in our contemporary societies. In doing so she draws with power on the ethical and biblical resources of the Christian tradition, offering them in ways that engage patterns of public debate in our societies.¹⁴ Work by Karl Ernst Nipkow and Friedrich Schweitzer on education in Germany has exhibited these same kinds of commitments and methods.

¹⁴ Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed Are the Poor? Women's Poverty, Family Policy, and Practical Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.

5. Practical theology works in two languages: *the „language behind the wall“ and the „language on the wall.“* In II Kings 18 and 19 we read the story of the time when Jerusalem, under the reign of Hezekiah, is surrounded by a huge host of Assyrian troops, sent there by King Sennacherib. The Assyrian forces have been plundering and sacking the cities of Judah. Jerusalem, the final prize, is now to be plucked. Hezekiah, 39 years old, and in the fourteenth year of his reign, is a pious and faithful king facing a terrible situation. He has already stripped the gold and silver off the altar and appointments of the temple and from the doors of the palace. His treasury is empty. There are no more material objects with which buy time against the Assyrians.

The Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's haughty ambassador, comes with his entourage to stand on the top of the wall that surrounds the beleaguered city. He is met by representatives of Hezekiah, who asked him politely to converse with them in Aramaic, which is the language of international diplomacy. „Do not speak to us in Hebrew, within the hearing of those of our people who are on the wall.“ The Rabshakeh responded with insult and threat: „Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?“ Then, in a loud voice and in bad Hebrew, he shouts his demands, laced with seductive promises and dire threat: „Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from you own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from you own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die'.“ (II Kings, 18:26-27)

Hezekiah and his advisors gather in the palace. The king sends one of his officials to consult with the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah, a man of prayer, recalls God's faithfulness in the past and places his desperate situation before the Lord. The message from Isaiah comes: He has heard a Word from the Lord. He tells Hezekiah to hold firm and to lay his case and the arrogant threats of Sennacherib before God. Hezekiah is given assurance that a rumor will cause the Assyrian general to return to his own land, and that Sennacherib will die at the hand of one of his own sons. And as though miraculously, the Assyrian army is removed as a threat. The faith and righteousness of Hezekiah are vindicated.

Old Testament theologian, Walter Brueggemann has made this story the basis for offering a powerful set of observations about the kind of formation in faith that is required „behind the wall“ for people of faith to offer their witness and to challenge the values and assumptions of secular societies „on the wall.“¹⁵

Practical theology that aims to guide churches in the shaping and re-shaping of their public witness in secular societies must be rooted in a vigorous life of worship, prayer, proclamation and study of scripture and tradition. If practical theology is to help churches unmask the pretenses of secular value structures and the seductive injustices of capitalist and market economies, communities of faith have to be grounded deeply in an alternate set of stories, and be equipped with an alternate set of virtues. Brueggemann says that if the churches are going to offer their witness and guidance „beyond“ the wall in credible and relevant ways, they must be capable of relating Christian normative judgments and visions in language that is intelligible and that has bite for those who have no Christian memory or commitments. Practical theology of this sort works in two languages: the language „behind the wall“ and the language for use „on the wall.“

The Need for Shared Visions of the *Praxis* of God and of Human Vocation

In trying to characterize the new shape of practical theological work I have emphasized its rootedness in *praxis*. I have stressed that it is **contextual** and **local**, and that it stays **close to experience**. The new practical theology seeks to reclaim and reshape a ***theology habitus*** for our time and for our societies. The new practical theology links the study and strengthening of the **practices** of ministry to the larger tasks of forming and guiding the faithfulness of communities of faith. In my final point, I stressed the need for practical theology to do its work in two languages: the languages of prayer, praise and proclamation „behind the wall,“ and the languages of public discourse „on the wall.“

As we come to our conclusion I must point to a dimension of theological work that has become particularly problematic for today's approaches to practical theology. I speak of the challenge and the need

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, „The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic“ in Mary C. Boys, Ed., *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1989, pp. 1-34.

to offer intelligible and convictional metaphors to depict what I will call the *praxis of God* in our time, and to offer equally compelling and correlated metaphors for patterns of **human partnership with God's praxis**.

In university based systematic theology of the last fifty years there has been a notable neglect of what historically was called the „Providence of God.“ In a book in press I have tried to address some of the reasons for our turning away from this kind of focus in theological work. Here, I will only point out that the new practical theology's commitments to working contextually and locally, and to root its work in *praxis* have made it suspicious of speculative systematic theologies, especially those dealing with the providence or *praxis* of God. Liberation theologies have not been so reticent in speaking about God's *praxis*. But they have often been criticized for subtly or blatantly shaping the *praxis* of God to fit the contours of the ideological commitments they bring to the Bible. Similarly, middle class academics have been accused of bringing our class biased and patriarchal ideologies to our efforts to construe God's *praxis* in society and history. And there are millions of people in this century who, in looking upon the mass slaughters, the holocausts, and the terrorist wars carried out, too often, in the name of our gods, simply have concluded that God helps those who „help themselves“ – but here not in Benjamin Franklin's sense of the phrase, but rather in the sense of the lords of international capitalism and their smaller scale imitators everywhere who are „helping themselves“ at the expense of the poor and of nature, and the futures of all our children.

I acknowledge the weight of these factors in making us extremely cautious as we try to find and formulate ways of offering the witness of Biblical faith as regards God's involvement in the processes of nature and history. But I submit to this gathering that we cannot afford to build theological approaches around a commitment to *praxis* without finding ways theologically to help communities of faith correlate their own efforts at faithfulness with the ways God's spirit is present and active in our world.

Don Browning has faced and named this need in his book *A Fundamental Practical Theology*.¹⁶ He argues forcefully that there must be a visional component linking God to our contexts of action in our theologies that can ground the normative guidelines of love and justice. I have named and worked with this issue as part of my approach in

¹⁶ Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

*Faith Development and Pastoral Care*¹⁷ and in a new manuscript that will appear in the coming year.¹⁸ Browning and I have, in somewhat different ways, both drawn on the metaphorical theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, in this regard, and have written about God's **Creating, Governing and Liberating/Redeeming praxis**.¹⁹ Browning has drawn the implications of these metaphors for norms in theological ethics. I have followed Niebuhr in developing co-related metaphors for the patterns of humans' partnership with God **in co-Creation, co-Governance, co-Liberation and Redemption**.

In addition to the kinds of objections to these approaches I mentioned earlier, there is a widespread sense that the connecting of practical theology to biblically derived metaphors that depict the **praxis of God** apriori disqualifies our work from any consideration in our broader secular and religiously pluralistic societies. Is it possible to speak of the praxis of God in a theology that could address a broader pluralistic or secular society? Let me share with you the kernel of a couple of convictions I am forming on this issue:

1. In the religiously pluralistic (and the militantly secular) contexts in which we work people exhibit high levels of spiritual hunger and ethical anomie. This condition makes it essential that we find intelligible and imaginative ways to offer access to the visions, practices and truths of our faith traditions. We are called to develop new forms of apologetic theological communication and formation addressed to those who are drawn to spirituality and to ethical awakening. We need to knit together cosmology and compelling metaphors for God's creating, judging, liberating and redeeming influences in human society. We need to provide contexts of community and care where people can experience and regain the liberating disciplines of prayer and praise.

2. Equally important, but even more urgent, I believe, is that we provide intelligible metaphoric and convictional images of God's **praxis** for the members of our Christian communities of faith. Members of Christian communities must have support and metaphorical clarity for

¹⁷ Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

¹⁸ James W. Fowler, *Faithfulness and Change: Human Development, Shame and the Ethics of Vocation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, (In Press).

¹⁹ For an in-depth account of Niebuhr's use of these metaphors see Fowler, *To See The Kingdom: The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974 and Lanham, Maryland: Universities Press of America, 1985. For an effort at fresh practical theological construction building from this Niebuhrian tradition see Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

understanding how their vocations and faithfulness can be part of the work and will of God. We will not get far with the serious renewal of practical theological engagement in our congregations if we fail at this fundamental task.

Ironically, I end these reflections on the new shape of practical theology with a challenge to my colleagues that we build deeply into our agenda attention to re-funding the visional level of our work. I am calling for us to invest our efforts in what might give rise to a provisional, revisable, but quite serious and daring Systematic Practical Theology. I am calling for a theology which arises out of and returns to the local, the concrete and the contextual situations in which we work. It should make a serious effort, through intercourse with the Bible and with the works of others from different contexts and settings, to avoid ideological captivity and entrapment in abstractions. At the same time, it should endeavor to offer a relevant and powerful depiction that will enable us to see the subtle depths and awesome patterns of God's suffering presence and providential power in preserving, healing and redeeming God's beloved creation. Through such a practical theological witness we and those whom we teach, may be moved, empowered and guided in making ourselves more fully a part of God's work in our time and in our places.

Jürgen Henkys

Normativität und Kontext Zu Erfahrungen aus dem geteilten Deutschland¹

In Nachkriegsdeutschland des Jahres 1949 entstanden zwei Staaten, zuerst die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den drei westlichen Zonen, wenig später die Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) in der östlichen Zone. In beiden Staaten verlief die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen Staatsmacht und Parteien, politischer Ideologie und allgemeinem Bewußtsein, Gesellschaft und Kirche, Universität und Theologie völlig verschieden. So wurde 40 Jahre später die Vereinigung der beiden Teile Deutschlands durch den 1990 erfolgten Beitritt der im Osten gelegenen Länder zum Geltungsbereich des Grundgesetzes der Bundesrepublik zum Ausgangspunkt für einen äußerst komplizierten Prozeß des wirklichen Zueinanderkommens und der wechselseitigen Teilnahme an einer Geschichte, die hier wie dort trotz aller Gemeinsamkeiten und Vergleichbarkeiten ganz unterschiedliche Erfahrungen hervorbrachte.

B.

The Tension between Normativity and Context in Different Locations

Um zunächst persönlich zu beginnen: Ich wurde 1956 in Ost-Berlin zum Pfarrer meiner Kirche ordiniert und lehrte ebendort von 1965 bis zum Ende der DDR Praktische Theologie. In diesen 25 Jahren war ich Kollegiumsmitglied nicht in der Theologischen Fakultät der Ost-Berliner staatlichen Humboldt-Universität, sondern in einem ziemlich versteckten und auch nur halblegalen Theologischen Seminar, das durch meine Kirche getragen wurde („Sprachenkonvikt der Evangelischen Kirche in Berlin-Brandenburg“). Tatsächlich war niemand in unserem Kollegium wirklich davon überzeugt, daß es eine Möglichkeit oder gar eine Verpflichtung gäbe, so etwas wie eine durchgängig DDR-spezifische Theologie zu entwickeln. Aber andererseits versuchte doch jeder von uns auf die eigene Weise und in unterschiedlichem Maße, die Herausforderungen der marxistischen Ideologie und der unter ihrem moralischen und administrativen Einfluß extrem säkularisierten Gesellschaft anzunehmen und ihnen konstruktiv zu begegnen. Wir läßtten den „Kontext“ ins Auge, aber wir pflegten ihn kaum so zu nennen.

¹ Kurzfassung vor der *International Academy of Practical Theology* am 8. Juni 1996 in Bern, hier rübergetragen aus dem Englischen. Das Thema habe ich inzwischen weiter ausgearbeitet in der demnächst in einem Sammelband erscheinenden Arbeit „Kontext, Konflikt, Konsens. Zur Deutung und Bewertung politisch-theologischer, insbesondere katholischer Ansätze aus der Zeit des Bestehens der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR“.

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Um zunächst persönlich zu sprechen: Ich wurde 1956 in Ost-Berlin zum Pfarrer meiner Kirche ordiniert und lehrte ebendort von 1965 bis zum Ende der DDR Praktische Theologie. In diesen 25 Jahren war ich Kollegiumsmitglied nicht in der Theologischen Fakultät der Ost-Berliner staatlichen Humboldt-Universität, sondern in einem ziemlich versteckten und auch nur halblegalen Theologischen Seminar, das durch meine Kirche getragen wurde („Sprachenkonvikt der Evangelischen Kirche in Berlin-Brandenburg“). Tatsächlich war niemand in unserem Kollegium wirklich davon überzeugt, daß es eine Möglichkeit oder gar eine Verpflichtung gäbe, so etwas wie eine durchgängig DDR-spezifische Theologie zu entwickeln. Aber andererseits versuchte doch jeder von uns auf die eigene Weise und in unterschiedlichem Maße, die Herausforderungen der marxistischen Ideologie und der unter ihrem mentalen und administrativen Einfluß extrem säkularisierten Gesellschaft anzunehmen und ihnen konstruktiv zu begegnen. Wir faßten den „Kontext“ ins Auge, aber wir pflegten ihn kaum so zu nennen.

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Mit dem Thema unseres ersten Kongreßtages beschäftige ich mich also in der Weise, daß ich auf einen vergangenen Kontext zurückgreife. In meiner Skizze geht es zunächst um einen Sachverhalt, der die akademische Lehre betraf (I.), danach um ein Problem des katechetischen Curriculums, das im Zwischenbereich von Theorie und Praxis angesiedelt war (II.). Es handelt sich lediglich um zwei Mikro-Einheiten aus unserem Gesamtkomplex. Ich habe sie in der Hoffnung ausgewählt, daß sich daraus ein Aspekt auf unsere Thematik insgesamt ergibt.

I.

Zwischen 1974 und 1978 erschien in der Ost-Berliner Evangelischen Verlagsanstalt ein „Handbuch der Praktischen Theologie“, das mit seinen drei Bänden alle traditionellen Hauptgegenstände unserer Disziplin abdecken sollte. Verfaßt wurde es von zwölf Autoren. Acht von ihnen lehrten in staatlichen Universitäten, zwei in einem kirchlich getragenen theologischen Seminar mit Hochschulcharakter, und zwei hatten leitende Positionen in einer Provinzialkirche inne. In diesem gemischten Kreis waren die theologischen und politischen Orientierungen natürlich keineswegs einheitlich. Aber alle Autoren stimmten auf ihre Weise mit dem Selbstverständnis des kürzlich gegründeten 'Bundes der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR' überein, der in der gegebenen sozialistischen Gesellschaft im Sinne einer christlichen 'Zeugnis- und Dienstgemeinschaft' wirken wollte.

Wenige Jahre später veröffentlichte Peter C. Bloth, Professor für Praktische Theologie in West-Berlin, in der „Theologischen Rundschau“ eine außerordentlich ausführliche und gründliche Besprechung dieses Werkes. Überraschenderweise stellte er dort heraus: Das „Handbuch“ versucht, den Studenten eine Praktische Theologie zu geben, die wirklich kontext-bezogen ist. (Tatsächlich verzeichnet das Register für alle drei Bände nur eine einzige Stelle mit dem Begriff „Kontext“, und dort handelt es sich um den Kontext im philologisch-exegetischen Sinn!) Bloth behauptet: Gerade dieses Ziel, Praktische Theologie in Beziehung auf den Kontext zu lehren, führe auf den speziellen Aufbau des Werkes, der darin von üblichen Ordnungen abweicht, daß die ekklesiologischen Kapitel (Kirche als Sozialgestalt, Dienstgestalt, Rechtsgestalt) den Arbeitsfeldkapiteln (Liturgik, Homiletik, Katechetik, Poimenik Diakonik) wie ein Querbau vorgeordnet sind. Allerdings, so legt er weiter dar, obwohl in der Kontextbeziehung der große Fortschritt des Buches liegt, ist gerade dieser Kontext zugleich auch dessen ungelöstes Problem. Denn die ideologischen Ziele und

Einflußnahmen, durch die die sozialistische Politik des Staates auch im Blick auf die Kirche bestimmt ist, werden in dieser Praktischen Theologie nicht als solche angesprochen und problematisiert. Und tatsächlich seien die Autoren auch gar nicht imstande gewesen, das zu tun, selbst wenn sie (oder wenigstens einige von ihnen) eine solche kritische Erörterung bevorzugt hätten. Denn sie wurden durch das System der staatlichen Bücherzensur daran gehindert! (Vgl. jetzt Bräuer/Vollnhals 1995.) In seiner Analyse unseres Werkes hat Peter C. Bloth denn auch scharfsichtig gerade solche Stellen namhaft gemacht, an denen die Spuren staatlicher Zensur noch ablesbar waren. Bloth sagte also Ja und Nein. *Ja*: „Dies Handbuch [...] muß als das derzeit überzeugendste Beispiel einer kontext-bezogenen Praktischen Theologie gewertet werden. Hier nämlich sind 'Kirche' und 'Gesellschaft' als *Kontext* zur Aufgabe und Chance des Faches in seiner Situation geworden.“ (Bloth 1983, 492; vgl. Bloth 1994, 34). *Nein*: Diese Praktische Theologie ist weniger kritisch und weniger konstruktiv, als sie zu sein behauptet, weil sie nicht genügend Abstand hält gegenüber der gesellschaftlichen Realität, die durch das Sozialismusprogramm regiert wird, und gegenüber den Kirchen, die sich zu sehr an eine bestimmte Theologie halten und in der Gefahr stehen, in die sozialistischen Ziele des Staates eingebunden zu werden (vgl. Bloth 1981, 368f).

Als einer der damals beteiligten Autoren hätte ich wohl diesen und jenen Einwand gegen Bloths Analyse vorzubringen. Aber indem ich auf meine Erfahrungen mit dem Lehren und Schreiben in jener Zeit zurückblicke, finde ich auch wichtige Punkte, die mich zugeben lassen: Mein damaliger westlicher Kollege mag Recht gehabt haben! Nichtsdestoweniger glaube ich, daß durch ihn eine Konstellation angesprochen worden ist, die sich *generalisieren* läßt. Unser Problem aus der früheren DDR ist unter den neuen Bedingungen ja nicht einfach gegenstandslos geworden. Zwei Dinge möchte ich hervorheben:

1. Es gibt immer unterschiedliche theologische Wege zum Urteil darüber, welche Bedeutung einem jeweiligen Kontext für das christliche Leben, für Zeugnis und Dienst der Kirche zukommt. Der konkrete Kontext scheint in theologischer Hinsicht grundsätzlich kontrovers bleiben zu müssen. Natürlich ist er dem theologischen Urteil nicht entzogen. Aber eindeutig ist er nur als ideologisch überhöhter oder als prophetisch entlarvter.

2. Nie darf die Frage der Macht vergessen werden. Dabei mag die Macht als offene oder verborgene, persönliche oder anonyme, institutionelle, finanzielle oder ideelle erfahren werden: Die Praktische Theologie ist mit ihren Aufstellungen zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der

Kirche wohl immer und überall in der Gefahr, gegebene Bedingungen durch Interpretation zu affirmieren, statt sie mit dem zeitgenössisch gefaßten Credo zu unterlaufen. Gerade in dieser Hinsicht gab es gleich nach der 'Wende' bei ostdeutschen Theologen zahlreiche Rückfragen an westdeutsche Meinungsführer.

II.

Das zweite Beispiel stammt aus der Diskussion über den Lehrplan für die christliche Unterweisung außerhalb der Schule. Zuerst muß ich daran erinnern, daß in den Schulen der früheren DDR jede Art der religiösen Erziehung und Bildung verboten war. Andererseits wußten sich die Kirchen als ganze und die Gemeinden am Ort verantwortlich, alle Heranwachsenden, die dazu bereit waren, Getaufte und Ungetaufte, zu sammeln, zu unterrichten und auf dem strittigen Weg des Glaubens zu begleiten. Das geschah nicht nur im Konfirmandenunterricht, sondern zuvor schon in der Christenlehre. Diese Kindergruppen wurden durch Katechetinnen (es gab nur wenige männliche Katecheten) oder durch Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer geleitet.

1977 erschien der „Rahmenplan für die kirchliche Arbeit mit Kindern und Jugendlichen (Konfirmanden)“. Ein Teil des Plans wurde auch ins Englische übersetzt (Curriculum Project). Dieser Plan war das Ergebnis einer zehnjährigen Kommissionsarbeit. Er betraf alle Altersgruppen vom 6. bis zum 15. Lebensjahr. Im Vorwort findet man einige Sätze, die mit „Gesamtziel“ überschrieben sind: „In der Begleitung der Gemeinde sollen Kinder und Jugendliche das Evangelium als befreiendes und damit orientierendes Angebot erfahren. Damit soll ihnen geholfen werden, die Welt zu verstehen, Lebenssituationen zu bestehen und mit der Gemeinde zu leben. *So sollen sie erfahren, wie Christen in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft verantwortlich vor Gott leben können.*“ (Hervorhebung von mir.) Wir haben uns jetzt vor allem mit dem letzten Satz zu befassen. Wo kommt er her?

Schon 1973 gab es eine ähnliche Formulierung, damals mit Bezug auf den Konfirmandenunterricht: Dem Jugendlichen „soll die Einsicht vermittelt werden, wie er als Glied der christlichen Gemeinde in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft verantwortlich vor Gott leben kann“ (Modell [...], Kurs V, 1973, 359). Vielleicht schockiert es, heute in einem christlichen Lehrplan die Wendung 'sozialistische Gesellschaft' zu lesen. Es scheint viel besser zu klingen, wenn der westdeutsche religionspädagogische Autor W. Flemmig im gleichen Jahr schreibt, das Globalziel für den Konfirmandenunterricht solle lauten: „Lernen, was es heißt, als Christ in unserer Zeit zu leben“ (Flemmig 1973, 29).

Diese Bestimmung wurde in Westdeutschland während der siebziger Jahre zu einer Art Konsensformel. Die Vertreter aller maßgeblichen theologischen Konzepte des Konfirmandenunterrichts bejahten Flemmigs Globalziel. (Flemmig 1984, 279) Keine Spannung zwischen Normativität und Kontext! Denn der Kontext 'unsere Zeit' war für die Interpretation aller Beteiligten offen. Im Gegensatz zu dieser breiten, aber gleichsam leeren Übereinstimmung war die ostdeutsche Formulierung zusammen mit den Dokumenten, in denen sie auftauchte, kontrovers. (Näheres dazu bei Schwerin 1989 und in den dort beigegebenen Dokumenten.) Einer der Gründe dafür ist, daß die Mitglieder der Lehrplankommission die Erziehungsaufgabe der Kirche gerade angesichts des ideologischen Konflikts und der fast völlig säkularisierten Umgebung der jungen Leute herausstellen wollten.

Der Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR war 1969 gegründet worden, um der Tatsache zu begegnen, daß die neue DDR-Verfassung von 1968 die seit 1949 verfassungsmäßig festgeschriebenen Rechte der Kirche aufgehoben hatte. Im gleichen Jahr 1969 erschien ein 'Modell-Plan' für alle Stufen gemeindepädagogischer Verantwortung. Die gemeinsame theologische Grundlage aller fraglichen Aktivitäten vom Vorschulkreis der Christenlehre bis hin zur kirchlichen Jugendarbeit sollte der Bekenntnissatz „Herr ist Gott in Jesus Christus“ sein. Er stammt aus 1 Kor 8,4-6, wo Paulus sich auf die Wirklichkeit der vielen 'Götter und Herren' bezieht, aber dabei einschärft, sie hätten keinen Anspruch darauf, entscheidende Instanz der Verantwortlichkeit von Christen für ihre Lebensführung zu sein. Die Autoren des Modell-Plans haben also— implicite— die ideologischen Attacken der marxistischen Staatsführung ins Auge gefaßt, und sie folgerten aus dem zitierten Bekenntnissatz: „Das Herr-Sein Jesu Christis hat [...] eine kritische Funktion. [...] Sie macht die Christen zu Fragenden und Befragten in dieser Welt. Dieses Herr-Sein Jesu Christi ist also auch heute deutlich zu machen.“ (Modell 1970, 2)

Das Bekenntnis des Paulus aus 1 Kor 8 blieb erklärtermaßen die Basisorientierung für alle folgenden Stufen der Weiterentwicklung des Planes bis hin zum kompletten „Rahmenplan“ von 1977. Und auf einer dieser Stufen, in einem Text von 1973, finden wir dann auch den Begriff „Kontext“: Die kirchliche Arbeit mit Kindern und Jugendlichen „geschieht in einem bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Kontext: sozialistische Gesellschaft; Schule, Beruf, [Jugend-] Organisation; Familie, Gemeinde, Freizeit, Massenmedien u.a.m. [...] Die spezifischen Gegebenheiten und Herausforderungen machen eine ständige seelsorgerliche Begleitung und Beratung notwendig. Sie soll auf Grund der befreienden Kraft des Evangeliums jungen Menschen helfen, in Gemeinde und Gesellschaft verantwortlich zu handeln und in den damit

verbundenen Konflikten sich selbst zu finden.“ (Schwerin 1989, Dokument K, 155f; Reiher 1992, 154f.) Wiederum sieht man, daß die westdeutsche Konsensformel nicht die Mutter der im Osten diskutierten Formulierungen war. Die Ursache für die Formeldifferenz war die Differenz zwischen den beiden Kontexten, von denen nur der eine, nämlich der östliche, die christliche Unterweisung, Erziehung, Bildung mit einer scharfen Herausforderung in Atem hielt.

Allerdings betrafen die Diskussionen über den „Rahmenplan“ von 1977, wie sie in den ostdeutschen Kirchen stattfanden, nicht in erster Linie die Formulierung des Gesamtzieles, auch nicht den im Gefolge des Gesamtzieles besonders im Konfirmandenunterricht durchschlagenden Versuch, die Jungen und Mädchen zu gesellschaftskritischen Urteilen anzuleiten. Vielmehr problematisierte man den *Rang* der gegebenen Situation, in die die Kinder und Jugendlichen verwickelt waren, im Vergleich mit dem *Rang* der normativen Inhalte aus Bibel und Katechismus. Darf die Bibel in einem bloß funktionalen Sinne eingesetzt werden? Dürfen wir die 'originale Begegnung' mit den Dokumenten der Botschaft der Heiligen Schrift aufgeben? Das kritische Gutachten aus dem Kollegium des Katechetischen Oberseminars Naumburg zum „Rahmenplan“ zeigt die Gefahren eines katechetischen Weges auf, der die persönliche und gesellschaftliche Situation der Jugendlichen zum Ausgangspunkt hat.

Es ist jetzt weder möglich noch notwendig, jene Diskussion nachzuzeichnen. Vielmehr möchte ich abschließend hervorheben, welches in meiner heutigen Sicht damals die Hauptprobleme waren.

1. Zweifellos inkludierten die Kontextgrößen 'sozialistische Gesellschaft' und 'marxistische Ideologie' einen normativen Anspruch, den die christliche Unterweisung in ihren unterschiedlichen Formen nicht anerkennen konnte. Aber man wußte: Um mit einer solchen Normativität fertigzuwerden, ist es nicht genug, die eigene normative Lehre der Anmaßung einer jeweils säkularen bzw. ideologisch-politischen Norm entgegenzusetzen. Die Katechetinnen und Katecheten mußten diejenigen Punkte herausfinden und thematisieren, an denen christliche Tradition und Botschaft inmitten gegenläufiger, ja feindseliger Bedingungen eine überraschende Selbstevidenz gewannen. Das waren sehr oft Sachverhalte des Lebensstils und der Gemeinschaftserfahrung in ortsgemeindlichen Kinder- und Jugendgruppen.

2. Darum war es ein richtiger Weg, als wesentlichen Kontext nicht nur den allgemein gesellschaftlichen, sondern auch den gemeindlichen zu veranschlagen. Erst aus der Berücksichtigung beider ergab sich der Grundsatz der 'Begleitung' – Begleitung auf dem konfliktreichen Weg zu eigener Verantwortung „vor Gott“ gerade dort, wo von Gott gar

nicht mehr die Rede sein soll. In dieser Hinsicht halte ich das im Vorwort des „Rahmenplans“ niedergelegte Leitbild für die damalige kirchliche Arbeit mit Heranwachsenden für durchaus stark.

3. Die gemeindliche Selbstunterscheidung von der umgebenden Welt theologisch infrage zu stellen mag nötig sein, und es ist oft geschehen, besonders in westlichen Publikationen zur Gemeindepädagogik. Doch diese Kritik ist keinesfalls am Platze, bevor die Theologie ihren eigenen „Text“ ernstgenommen hat. Gerade er bewegt ja christliche Gemeinden in vielen Teilen der Erde, in einer Welt der Herrschaft von verborgenen oder öffentlich installierten Göttern zu versuchen, so etwas wie ein kritischer „Kontext“ zu werden. Dieser Text aber ist nicht eine abseits und über jeder Zeit stehende Norm, sondern der neu verstandene Ruf Jesu: „Folge mir nach!“

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Abraham A. Berinyuu

Normativity and Context in Practical Theology with a View to the Conditions in Africa

In this paper I shall try to enrich this academy by describing my social context from which we do Practical theology. My task is to provide an experience of context in a different location. Your task is to provide the philosophical, psychological, theological and intellectual engagement all of you bring from academics in Practical theology in the Universities. The result I hope will be a much richer intercultural practical theological engagement.

In order to address the task of the social context for a Practical theologian, I will like to ask the following questions. (1) What is practical theology? (2) Who is a Practical theologian? Before, I attempt a definition for you, I must acknowledge that I am aware of the many excellent definitions some of you sitting here have offered. My own definition is informed by and based upon a critical reflection on your definitions and my social context.

In my view practical theology is an academic theological discipline which critically reflects on the human encounter with the divine, and the impact on such an experience on the totality of daily human lives and their communities. In this definition the human encounter is holistic. By holistic I mean that human life consists of the social, the cultural, economical, political, psychological, and the spiritual.

When the experience of the encounter between the divine is brought to bear on all these dimensions of human life, there arises issues of continuity and discontinuity between those who have this experience on their personal life styles, and those who do not.

There are also issues of continuity and discontinuity between this particular experience and the traditions or belief systems through which this experience is interpreted or expressed in a particular socio-cultural and politico-economic milieu. A practical theologian by this definition is a theologian who can critically reflect on the interplay between religious experience, the tradition or belief systems through which that experience is interpreted or expressed and the cultural, spiritual, and psycho-social context and the economic and political status of that person or group of persons.

A practical theologian inevitably does her/his critical reflection utilizing insights from the social sciences, the human sciences, the physical and medical sciences. Furthermore, a practical theologian by this definition may or may not share the tradition or belief systems, and social context of the believer. It therefore, means that a Christian practical theologian can critically reflect on the religious experience of Africans and African Traditional religion, and their social context as well as Hindus and Hinduism and their social context. This is where the unique task of the practical theologian especially the Christian practical theologian comes in. The unique task of a Christian practical theologian is best expressed by Tracy thus:

„The Christian theologian stands in service both of that community of inquiry exemplified but surely not exhausted by the contemporary academy and to that community of religious and moral discourse exemplified but not surely exhausted by his own Church tradition. If that same theologian as herein understood, is to fulfill his service of critical reflection, he must start the inquiry without an assumption either for or against the meaning, meaningfulness, and truth of the symbol or doctrine under analysis“ (Tracy 1975:239).

By the very nature of the unique task of a Christian practical theologian, she/he must by necessity also utilize insights from the social, and human sciences, physical and medical sciences to critically reflect theologically without losing or selling out his/her Christian perspectives. One must do so with such honesty and integrity that allow for clear areas of differences in areas that may exist between the belief systems and social contexts of the believers in question and those of the practical theologian.

Hence the ability of a Practical theologian to engage the social context demands a willingness and commitment to deal with multiple complex problems unique to the task of the practical theologian. Yet, as all of you know too well, the social context provides the ground to a practical theologian to be declared a saint or a heretic. Because the boundary between the two for a practical theologian is often very blurred. For, it is a tall order for a Practical theologian to critically reflect on an experience of the encounter with the divine which is expressed or interpreted through a particular belief system utilising perspectives from the social, human, and medical sciences without becoming either a sociologist, an economist, a political scientist, a phenomenologist of religion, or a cultural anthropologist. The task of the practical theologian is further compounded by the complex problems of the experiences of context in different locations. The varied contexts inevitably create varied contents of practical theologies. Such varied contexts

and contents raise some fundamental questions for all practical theologians. I shall cite one or two of them here.

It is a truism that communication affords us the possibility of sharing stories of human encounter with the divine. More importantly, without communication, the very existence and commitment to the unique task of practical theology is impossible. However, the question is how do we communicate? Whose language, signs, and symbols of culture, socio-economic context, precepts, and concepts do we use as normative? Even though most of us, if not, all of us here are Christian Practical theologians, the fact still remains that our experiences and our interpretations of these encounters are largely coloured by our socio-economic contexts and stations. As such I am tempted to agree with Karl Marx that there is hardly any decision of even Practical theologians that is totally free from the conscious or unconscious influence of our own economic interest. And I will add other cultural and philosophical entrapments.

Furthermore, our experiences and interpretations are also coloured directly or indirectly by the value systems of the larger communities we are part of beside our membership in the Christian community called the Church. Therefore, the experiences of the Context in different locations present the practical theologian with an enormous task.

This task becomes almost impossible, if we define different locations to include the cultural, social, economic, political, the racial, sex, the first world, and the two thirds world. All these complex multiple unique tasks of the practical theologian intend raise complex multiple methodological questions for the practical theologian. These methodological questions are not only conceivable, but necessary in order that the practical theologian will find a place among the theological disciplines, the human, social, physical and medical sciences. Therefore it is not sufficient for the practical theologian to merely state that he or she has adopted one method or another simply because he or she believes them to be true or convenient. The fact that in studying the issues of faith, a practical theologian starts from one perspective rather than from another is not only an individual accident but vitally necessary in order to make clear the methodological questions needed to critically reflect, explicate and articulate the nature and the value of the principles underlying his/her systems of practical theology.

I shall now share with you some examples of experiences of context in different location. As I stated at the beginning of this presentation, my objective in this paper is to enrich this academy by describing my social context from which we do Practical theology. My task is to provide an experience of context in a different location. Your task is to

provide the philosophical, psychological, theological and intellectual engagement all of you bring from academics in Practical theology in the Universities.

I shall now present the general African context and that of Ghana in particular. I must admit that most of my observations of the African context are informed by the situation and my experiences in Ghana. I will also like to acknowledge with gratitude that these experiences in Ghana that I share with you came out of a workshop jointly organised by the Development Office of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Environment Department of the Christian Council of Ghana held at the Presbyterian Women's Centre, Abokobi, from 18-21 April, 1995. The theme was „The Economic realities and the Family in Ghana“. The participants included youth and youth workers, staffs from different types of NGOs, house wives, single parents, lawyers, teachers, hospital administrators, professors in sociology, Economics, and theologians.

If we are to believe the Western press on the so called economic recovery in Africa, Ghana is projected by the IMF, the World Bank, and some Western governments as a model of economic recovery, stability, and political stability. No doubt, there is relative peace in Ghana as compared to Somalia, Liberia, Nigeria to name but a few. The government has also done some good things. At least, it has made a u-turn from its authoritarian and oppressive policies as a military government. Notwithstanding some of these good changes, a critical examination of the daily lives of Ghanaians reveal a picture of an economic recovery and political stability contrary to what opinion posters of the Western presses say. I hope some of you may know or even have lived in similar experiences to this case so that you can draw from your experiences to empathetically understand our context and the enormous task of a Practical theologian in such a context.

The Ghana case I present has raised some fundamental questions about the task of a practical theologian in Ghana. We are all struggling in Ghana to deal with these problems and I am humbly presenting them for your critical reflection and responses as Practical theologians in different locations, yet who stand in solidarity with all of God's people especially those of the household of Christ. I also cite the Ghana case because it raises afresh for us in Ghana how one applies the issues of justice, liberation, and peace in the Gospel of Jesus Christ who has come „that they may have life and have it more abundantly.“ (John 10:10b).

The ethos of traditional Ghanaian religion is to acquire power for protection, mediate, or transfer power to fight against all evil powers, de-

viant behaviours, and other powers that diminish peoples' quality of life. The process of acquiring or transferring power was through rituals. However, this traditional ethos is undergoing irreversible changes through the introduction of Western education, Christianity, economic and political systems, secularity, and military skills.

Nowadays, people know that when you obtain good Western education, you get a good job, and you are paid with lots of money. You use your money to build house(s). When you are also sick, you can get the best medical services that money can buy, even if the sickness is neither curable nor even treatable. Some of those who do not have good Western education know they can do business. Doing business in some cases means one over invoices in order to give some officials some percentages of the money obtained from such practices. In this case power is acquired through corruption and not through rituals.

One can also acquire power by denouncing the traditional religion and replace it with a „Do it yourself“ religion that meets the demands of the traditional religion with Western commercial overtones which meets the needs of people living under the yoke of structural economic adjustment programme managed by a military government that magically transforms itself into a civilian government. Such a „do it yourself“ religion has the characteristic of Freudian type of religion in which such a religion serves as a powerful deflection (Freud 1961). One can also get power by gathering and mobilizing some soldiers and civilians who are power hungry, to overthrow a legitimate government, impose fear, and oppression in order to remain in power and become powerful.

Others also get power by being part of a government not by merit but through some connections. In this case such an official goes to a Western government asks for some inappropriate aid. Sometimes this aid may be guns to silence their own people or an aid that involves some technologies that are far expensive to buy and even far more expensive to maintain in preference to those that are affordable and less expensive to maintain. The purpose of contracting such an aid is to get a huge percentage „kickbacks“ in foreign money on the part of the officials of the receive country. One of the purposes of the officials of the giving countries seems to be their need to temporarily lower (be it temporarily) the giver country's unemployment rate for short term political gain in the polls.

A couple of years ago, the government of Ghana was so eager to become a friend of the West. So, in the name of Economic structural Adjustment, the IMF and the world bank devised an aid package for Ghana with the condition that all services previously paid for by the

government be privatized. It seems for some reason the IMF and the World Bank did not see it fit to make Justice, Liberation of the poor, and political freedom, and accountability as a necessary condition for their aid.

The sad fact is that as a result of accepting this aid package, all health services are outside the reach of most of the people especially those in the rural areas. Basic primary education is also becoming so expensive for the rural folk cannot afford to send their children to school. The net result here is a nation of mostly unhealthy people and increasing numbers in illiteracy.

I shall like to draw on Boff's three mediations as conceptual tools of communication to enable me articulate for myself the Ghanaian experience firstly. As you are all aware, in therapy begins with the ability to name one's experience. Secondly, Once I can get a language in which I can use to do critical reflection our experience then I can also share with you that experience. I am doing both here. In my view a practical theologian in my context needs the analytical tools referred to by Leonardo Boff as the three "mediations" of liberation theology. By mediations, Boff defines as "... a means with which [liberation theology] is endowed for bringing to realization what it proposes to itself as an end." (Boff & Boff 1984 :5). The three mediations are the socio-analytical, the hermeneutic, and pastoral practice.

The socio-analytical are the necessary instruments we use to look at the perceptions of our social contexts. The instruments necessary to „improve our perception of 'contradictory reality,' so as to overcome the ingenuousness, the empiricism, and the moralism that prevent us from acquiring a critical knowledge of..." our social context or what Boff calls „the socio-analytical mediation". (Boff & Boff 1984 :5).

Firstly, with the help of the socio-analytical, we can see the contradictory reality. We see reality, the empirical facts of the contrast between the rich and poor. We can see the facts of unemployment, of few rich people at the expense of more poor people, of luxury houses built at the expense of the disappearance of affordable houses, the importation of more expensive foreign foods at the expense of cheaper home grown foods.

Secondly, we move from seeing the facts of the socio-economic reality to an awareness of the interrelatedness of these facts, which inevitably invoke our critical Christian consciousness. For the practical theologian, there is a direct relationship between the diminishing quality of life of the individual, the unjust socio-economic structures imposed in society by the privileged few and the proclamation of Christ

that „the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight too the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord“. (Luke 4:18-19).

The application of such a socio-analytical on the Ghana situation reveals the following: The long term ability of Ghana to compete in both human and material resources in highly technological twenty-first and twenty-second centuries are being sacrificed for short term political gains. I must also add that the governments that urge the IMF and World bank to force third world countries to implement such structural economic adjustment policies are on the contrary doing all possible to create jobs for their people as well as build various social assistance for the less fortunate in their countries. Are we to assume that in these policies presuppose a notion of a superior human in the West and an inferior human being in the third world? The basic fact is that implementing these policies do not produce better economic recovery. If such a recovery exists, then it is beyond the recognition of most Ghanaians. Rather, the obvious results that Ghanaians can see and feel is that life in Ghana is clearly divided between „the few have and the large have not“. The implementation of the policies have also given rise to a context through which the definition of power, and means of acquiring, and mediating such power is clearly different from the ethos of traditional notion and means of acquiring power. The meaning of power simply but no means simplistic the means to threaten or intimate others, rub them off their livelihood by denying them jobs, education, good health facilities, and create economic insecurity and iniquity, yet be able to speak and convince the Western World that all is well. The only ethic at work is survival, and staying in power at all cost.

As practical theologians we can all agree that social analysis alone is not unique task of a practical theologian as well articulated by Forrester (1985), Browning (1998), and Tracy (1975:3-13, 64ff), to name but a few. Social analysis should a practical theologian to calls „hermeneutic mediations“. The hermeneutic mediation is the special privilege task of the practical theology in which we allow the liberating love of God to confront the contradictory social reality. We ask such fundamental questions as where is God in this contradictory reality? What does the word of God say? What is a Christian response? How have Christian other previous Christian interpretation of the kingdom of God, Justice, love, sin, forgiveness, grace, Church, humanity, prevented appropriate Christian responses and in some cases have resulted in producing this contradictory reality? But we must avoid what

Boff calls „bilingualism“ (Boff & Boff 1984:10)). In other words we should avoid a theological engagement which produces a theological parallel of the contradictory reality.

In the case of Ghana, the hermeneutic mediation of Justice, liberation, and peace have not produced their desired results not so much of any bilingualism. Rather, it is because we have failed to see the relatedness between individual sin and structural systems that produce injustice, oppression and chaos. In other words individual salvation is stressed while the need just socio-economic and political systems are neglected. The individual and collective prayers of intercession are also stressed, while collective political actions should aim at addressing injustice and political oppression are neglected. Most Ghanaian Christians take seriously daily Bible reading their devotional lives. However, there is less critical dialectical engagement of the Scripture, personal lives, the oppressive sociopolitical and exploitative socio-economic systems imposed from within and without. The application of hermeneutic mediation in the Ghana social context is compounded by the fact that there constant paradigm changes. Even, among Christians, there are such fast paradigm changes between the conservative and liberal groups of the mainline Churches. There are also the Independent African Churches, and the mainline Churches. Among these two groups are the traditionalists and the progressives.

In such a fast changing context paradigms of yesterday may become meaningless today, and paradigms of yesterday may also appear irrelevant on the surface. However, a critical look seems to suggest that symbols of yesterday and today are revisited to help them deal with the new contradictory social realities.

Therefore there is an urgent need for a critical theological pastoral hermeneutic mediation has to come out from this fast changing situation on the one hand and yet taking seriously the old symbols with which they bring to the new contradictory social realities on the other. Such an approach if Ghanaian practical theologians are to influence the mediation of pastoral practice, which in my view is the goal of the practical theologian of any context. Hence it only logical that we shall thirdly and lastly look the mediation of the pastoral practice or what Browning calls strategic fundamental practical theology.

The socio-analytical and hermeneutic mediations should enable practical theologians to propose a „mediation of the pastoral practice“. The mediation of the pastoral practice by definition is the strategic pastoral agenda we shall enable God's people to experience Justice, liberation and peace. In the words of Boff it is a „search out for the viable, sensible avenues down which the liberation of the poor can travel, within

the framework of religious, political, military, ideological, and economic forces..." (Boff 1984:5) At the beginning of this presentation I mention that the Ghana context has offered a challenge to practical theologians in Ghana on how we deal with the issues of Justice, liberation and peace. In my opinion the Ghana context demands one must pursue the issues of Justice, liberation, and peace simultaneously. However, there are some paradoxes in Ghana which makes pursuing Justice and liberation almost improbably for peace to exist. I shall now point out these paradoxes in the following paragraphs. *It is obvious that there is enough frustration, disappointment, feeling of anger and rage because of in justice, oppression, and chaos among the masses of people to mobilize for pastoral action. The easiest thing to appeal to their feelings and mobilize them into action to address the injustice, oppression and chaos. However, Such approach will inevitably lead to catastrophic massive chaos and violence beyond the management of anyone. One cannot also guarantee that such a pastoral mediation will get nationwide cooperation between the city dwellers and the rural dwellers. That is why I suggested that the means of achieving justice and liberation almost makes the existence of peace impossible on the one hand. On the other hand the present state of affairs is only an alibi for injustice and oppression.*

Another insurmountable problem in the Ghana context is how to locate the centre of the concentric relationships. For example, there is the circle of poor. Among other circles of the poor are ethnic, religious, political kinship, and sex. Therefore it is difficult, if not impossible to determine whether one can succeed to mobilise people on the basis of injustice, oppression, and peace rather than their ethnicity, religion, or kinship. The recent problems in Somalia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Angola, the Middle east, and Northern Ireland point to the complexities of such a pastoral mediation.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that the complexities of the consequences have led to some of the pastoral mediations earlier pointed, by some the mainline Churches in Ghana. In that respect their efforts are better appreciated than other situations where are seemingly pastoral paralysis. The lesson we draw from all these as Christian pastoral theologians is that our discipline is by its very nature not only interdisciplinary, but also holistic. It is also contextual as well as intercultural. Therefore, we need each other, yet each one of us must exercise integrity in maintaining the standards of the discipline while at the same exercising responsibility to be creative. For me, it is such a challenge of practical theology that inspires all my efforts in the discipline, and my hope to grope with all the complexities.

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Joon Kwan Un

Doing Theology in the Context of Korea

Aart van Beek succinctly lists what he calls „seven Asian critical principles“ as follows: 1. Challenge of development and modernization, 2. the legacy of colonialism, 3. cultural and religious pluralism, 4. struggle for authentic identity, 5. the presence of the world's major religions, 6. the search for a type of sozial order in the face of poverty and 7. the challenge of being a minority. Yeow Choo Lak, another Asian theologian, „interprets these principles as a single, multi-situational, hermeneutical, missiological and educational principle and calls Asian theologians to put this principle into practice.“ Undoubtedly, the seven Asian principles point to a common tragedy and destiny shared by all the Asian nations except Japan as they have struggled for survival in the midst of the terrifying de-construction and the uncertain re-construction process of their national destinies.

In essence, Korea is not exempt from the Asian principles but its unique geo-political environment has long shaped its destiny. The two major threats which constituted the geopolitical environment of Korea have come from China and Japan and have placed Korea's existence and survival constantly at risk for more than 2000 years. There is a saying that in dealing with China Koreans tended to be more 'continental and in dealing with Japan they tended to behave more like 'islanders' in their bifurcated character building.

The political infra-structure of Korean society has long been based on three main ideologies stemming from three major factions in Korean society. The first stems from the 'Soo Gu Pa', a radically conservative group whose political ideology has been shaped by 'Sung Lee Hak', Confucian philosophy and practice. Historically, for example, 'Soo Gu Pa' placed the Roman Catholic mission under severe persecution and jeopardy 200 years ago. The second group is called Kae Hyuk Pa', meaning reform group. Their ideology is derived from 'Sil Hak', or pragmatism. Historically, Kae Hyuk Pa accepted Protestant Christianity and boldly assimilated Christian teaching as their political ideology for the reformation of Korean society 100 years ago. The third is called 'Hyuk Myung Pa', a radically revolutionary group shaped by 'Dong Hak' philosophy. Dong Hak became a point of reference for 'Minjung Theology' a later theological development in the Korean context.

According to Koo Jong-Suh, a Korean soziologist, a lack of cohesiveness among these three ideologies pushed Korean society into internal conflicts, antagonism and hostility. The divisiveness became an unfortunate reality and experience not only for Korean society but also for the Korean churches as well. This is the initial background to which theology must speak.

I The Experience and context of Korea and Theological Contextualization

The last 100 years of Korean history has compacted the total 4000 years of Korea's existence in terms of qualitative transformation and its impact upon the Korean political scene. This 100 year period, synonymous with the history of Protestant Christianity in Korea, has demythologized the long standing cosmological and mythical world views created by Buddhism and Confucianism. It has also 'secularized' the absolute political power of an autocratic king and state. Positively, it 'historicized' the destiny of Korea by awakening the nation and pointing it to a new future.

To understand the last 100 years is to know the quality of change and the depth of experience Koreans encountered. Rhim Hee-sup, another Korean sociologist defines five stages, distinct yet sequential within the last 10 decades.

The first stage (1850-1910) saw national independence and even racial survival threatened by an intensified power struggle on the Korean peninsula between China, Japan and Russia. The long standing homogeneity of cultural and political identity was at stake. For the first time, a critical awareness of national crisis prevailed in the minds of the Korean people but it was too late to build a foundation from which to counter-challenge international pressure. This stage marked the beginning of Korean suffering and awakening.

Soo Gu Pa, the conservative group, tried to save the nation by strengthening the king's rule. Kae Hyuk Pa, the reform group, attempted to redeem the nation by accepting Western technology and political systems. Hyuk Myung Pa, the revolutionary group, sought salvation of the nation through physical force. But none of these attempts succeeded. Ultimately, Japan, victorious in both the 'China-Japan War' and the 'Russia-Japan War' brutally invaded Korea and unilaterally announced its merger with Japan in 1910. It seemed to be the end of the line for Korea.

During this time of crisis, the international community completely ignored Korea's strong cry for help and this, in turn, served to legitimize Japan's aggression. The arrival of two American missionaries in 1885 opened the first encounter between Christianity (or, for that matter, Western civilization) and Korea. At the time, no one realized this encounter was to ignite a rapid cultural transformation that became historical reality in a torn apart land like Korea.

The second stage (1910-1945) was characterized by an intense awakening zeal and spirit for national independence. It can be called the period of resistance. Japan's ultimate goal was to build a great Asian Kingdom by invading Korea, Manchuria, China and all the rest of Asia. The modest land reform, monetary reform and industrialization that Japan initiated in Korea were strategic steps to further exploit and oppress the nation. This form of colonization came to be called 'starvation export'.

As the exploitation heightened, the Korean people became encompassed by a strong anti-Japanese spirit which immediately gave birth to a strong anti-colonial nationalism. The uprising of March 1, 1919, was an outburst of the nation's anger and hatred against Japan. The Christian faith of this period has often been identified with anti-colonial nationalism. Korea is still characterized by prevailing anti-Japanese sentiments and Christians are not exempt from this.

Significantly, Korean Christianity has found its theological context in this tragic existence. Theological contextualization branched out into three paths in this period providing sources for three distinct theologies. The first path saw Christianity as providing an ideological basis for resistance against such evil powers as Japan through non-violence. This ultimately formed the basis for Minjung Theology. The second path of theological contextualization understood Christianity as providing spiritual comfort to the politically disillusioned through revivalistic gatherings and emotional stimulation. Interestingly, this is the source of main-stream Korean spirituality today and has revealed itself in the 'Church Growth' movement.

The third path of theological contextualization, which I value highly, was a serious attempt to cultivate a strong ability to discern the meaning of history and God's providence through Sunday Schools, Christian schools, adult Bible studies and even house churches. This was the path taken by church leaders and theologians from mainly Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Korea. It may be called 'historical conscientization', differing somewhat from Paulo Freire's political and cultural praxis. These three paths constituted the nexus of contemporary Korean theological streams.

The third stage (1945-1960) is marked by the paradoxical experience of both heaven and hell. Independence from Japan brought the promise of great hope for the future but this quickly gave way to disillusionment because of the failure to develop democracy. A great opportunity to build democracy in Korea for the first time in its 4000 year history failed. This failure was a precursor for the forthcoming political chaos and struggle. Before any other issues could be settled, political or otherwise, an international conspiracy pressured Korea increasingly into two hostile camps. Finally, north Korea's invasion of the south, assisted by The Soviet and Red China, devastated the nation and the land. The Christian Church was challenged to address this experience of nothingness but instead of developing an affirmative theology the church developed a stance that was essentially pessimistic, other worldly and militant toward history, society and mankind. Only fundamentalism gained strong support from the people. The failures in both the political and ecclesiastical realms, invited the student revolution of 1960 which brought down both the regime of Syngman Rhee and the church's influence in society. The Constantinian era faded away even before it blossomed.

The fourth stage, according to my own interpretation, runs rather long; from 1960 to 1990. Military rule and rapid economic growth were the dominating ideologies of this stage. A political vacuum, created by ineffective leadership following the student revolution, immediately became the target of a military junta in 1962. The military leaders quickly abandoned democratic possibilities in favor of dictatorial rule and adopted a new ideological instrument, namely economic growth. This eventuated rapid industrialization and urbanization. Economic growth promised utopia for the Korean people who had suffered poverty for so long. Ironically this economic growth syndrome became synonymous with the church growth syndrome which evolved in this period.

The formation of Korean theologies in this context of dictatorial rule and economic growth have again followed three distinct streams. The first stream, advocated by the radically conservative camp and focusing heavily on 'revival', 'conversion', 'blessing' and 'church growth' has been labeled 'evangelization'. This theology always tends to be non-historical if not antihistorical. The majority of Christians in Korea have been greatly influenced by this theology so that they are inclined to be non-contextual in their faith.

The second stream of Korean theology emerging from this period can be called 'indigenization'. It seeks a point of contact between the Christian Gospel and such cultural legacies as the Dan Gun Myth (the

founding of the nation) and Poong Ryu. Indigenization theology evoked strong academic interest as well as controversy during the late 60's and 70's, the active period of urbanization and industrialization under Western influence. Unfortunately, this theology has been confined to classroom debate by a few scholars in spite of its serious mindedness.

A third stream, a theology of contextualization', was influenced by the Roman Catholic Church's Vatican Council II in 1963, 'Missio Dei' theology proclaimed at Uppsala in 1968. Liberation Theology from Latin America and the Theology of Hope of Jurgen Moltmann of Germany. Contextualization theology is represented mainly by the so called liberal and progressive theologians who were trained either in the United States or Germany. The most outspoken form of contextualization theology is known as 'Minjung theology'. It stands radically against the dictatorial rule of the military government and appeals strongly for democratization. Minjung theology has received strong support from radical students and young people although it is not a majority.

II The Rise of New Era since 1990 – New Context for New Paradigm

In 1990, the tide of Korea's historical movement turned around both symbolically and realistically. An entirely new era of Korean history in general began to emerge in the form of an irresistible stream of democratization, especially highlighted by the election of a civilian president in 1993. The political proclamation of a so called 'New Korea', not only terminated 20 years of military rule, but also promised new political agendas such as political freedom, human rights and social welfare. A new breath, new hope and new social climate swept the nation.

In addition dramas being played out on the international stage escalated the movement of Korea from its long period of introversion and self sustained consciousness to a stance which is more open and sensitive to the radical changes of world history. 'Perestroika' in the Soviet Union not only contributed significantly to the coming of post-ideological world order but also helped Korea significantly in minimizing the hostile tensions between south and north, in principle if not yet in reality. Korea, like other nations is now sharply challenged by the speedy process of globalization which demands drastic change of Korean society in the areas of language, education and production, to name only a few.

At this point of change, Koreans experience two major problems. The first has to do with the shift of international order from South Korea-United States-Japan versus North Korea-Soviet Union-Red China during the cold war to United States-Japan-Russia-China-Korea in the post cold war era. This means that, in a geo-political sense, Korea is surrounded by the four major international super powers. Once again, Korea has to fight for its destiny and even survival in this new competitive situation. Another problem is related to ever increasing pollution and crime rates in this particular area of the world where literally a billion and a half people reside (China alone has a population of 1.2 billion) and high speed industrialization and urbanization are occurring. For that matter, Korea's problems are increasingly the human and global problems of survival as a whole. This current global and communal context is the new challenge to the Christian Church in Korea.

As the historical process has evolved in Korea during the past ten years, especially in the political arena. Korean Christianity has had to face a shocking reality. The myth of 'church growth' slowly crumbled, the ideological basis of 'minjung theology' disappeared and 'indigenization theology' appeared increasingly invalid. Existing forms of Korean theologies are rapidly losing their basis for further articulation. The shock has not yet proved fatal but the growth of the GNP seems to have lured many Christians away from the church. The improvement of human rights has also taken many people away from the church where they once found political refuge and a community of solidarity. The Korean Church is no longer a Mecca for church growth pilgrims.

It seems to me that these forces of social change challenge the Korean Church to shift its theological paradigms away from emphases on church growth, the minjung or indigenization to something radically new. In spite of its substantial contributions to the formation of Korean spirituality, the evangelical-conservative theology which currently prevails seems to be losing its battle field because its strict 'textualism' leaves it ill equipped to challenge the radical social change which is occurring.

In spite of indigenization theology's creative effort to develop a point of contact between the Christian Gospel and traditional religions and cultures (Confucian, Buddhistic and Shammanistic legacies), its weakness lies in its method of accepting culture 'apriori' as a pre-determining norm for the Christian Gospel. According to Professor Kwang Sik Kim, a leading theologian, indigenization theology minimizes Christology, substitutes cultural activity for the Holy Spirit and confuses the relationship between mission and indigenization. It is

generally agreed that indigenization theology is also incapable of dealing with the socio-political realities of contemporary Korea.

Minjung theology, a dynamic and creative form of Korean theology, deserves a high appraisal. It provided a strong ideological basis for the human rights struggle, the labor movement student power and the fight for democratization that took place against the oppressive regimes of the 70's and 80's. But the weakness of Minjung theology lies in its mistake in identifying Jesus as purely a revolutionary figure whose ministry was nothing but a revolutionary program. It understands the minjung rather than God's rule as the subject of the messianic coming kingdom. In contrast to the 'textualism' of evangelical-conservative theology, minjung theology falls into 'contextualism' by absolutizing the context. Minjung theology seems to have lost the concept of transcendental ontology and even Christian eschatology altogether.

A final question needs to be raised here. Is it possible to develop a new theological paradigm relevant to this new context of Korea? One thing seems to be clear to me. Any new paradigm cannot properly result from a synthesis of or dialectic among the three existing evangelical, indigenization and minjung theologies.

A hermeneutical clue and suggestion made by Peter C. Hodgson of Vanderbilt seems to throw some light on finding a new theological paradigm. Hodgson refers to 'Basileia Tou Theou', God's reign. The experience and discernment of the presence of God's reign in history is called a 'pre-text', or root experience. 'Text', that is the Bible, is the expression of the pre-text. Con-text is the existential and immediate experience.

While we engage in our debate, we seem to employ only two dimensions, 'text and context' in a rather dichotomous way so that we often have overlooked 'pre-text', the root experience in our theologizing. If we focus on the experience and discernment of Basileia Tou Theou, the pre-text process, the text becomes the living witness. The ecclesiastical community, the church, becomes the community of those who discerned and experienced the presence of God's reign (pre-text) in history (con-text) through the witness of the Bible (text). Hodgson suggests that the discernment and the experience of God's reign in history can be termed 'emancipatory', 'reconciliatory', 'ecological', and 'dialogical'.

In conclusion, a new theological paradigm in the Korean context must relate to the discernment of God's reign in Jesus Christ, the witness of the divine gestalt, the ecclesiastical community, and the foretaste and

witness of God's reign in history as the historical-eschatological community.

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Paul Ballard

From faith to faith: faith and context in Practical Theology

The question of faith and context is at the heart of Practical Theology. By its very name, Practical Theology asks how Christian believing is related to our concrete existence in the world. The role, it is the believer, or at least the enquirer, who asks these questions: How does what I am told about God in Christ merge in my day to day living? How can the Gospel be heard in today's world of oppression and violence? How do I „live responsibly as a Christian“ in my particular life situation? But once asked, it takes it all. It quickly becomes apparent that these are complex issues that are part of a continuing dialect. They then become theological. It is these issues that we have to struggle with as theologians. In these words, then, it is to respond to the questions posed by faith in service of faith, for this is at the heart of whether faith is possible at all.

C.

Comparative and Fundamental Perspectives

As in the case of the other articles, I will run through the debate and, in response, to my own, to see whether as to how we may further explore the issues.

We have been given a glimpse of three specific contexts: West Ghana, Korea and Germany. This in itself is important for I believe that it is through listening to others' stories that the Gospel comes alive. In any case we can only speak out of our own experience; though, by speaking, we expose ourselves to the other and become part of the hermeneutic process of interpretation and understanding. I, too, have my historical reality: an Englishman, with at least means for my generation in terms of education and social experience, living and working in Wales for over twenty-five years, a stranger in a different, but related, culture. So, as we say, „I don't only speak *ya* I find.“

1. Contextual Panic

I want to start from a remark by Joon Kwang Oh, as he responds to the changing situation in Korea which he detects as bringing in a new, more defensive era for the Churches. It seems to me, however, that all these forces of social change challenge the churches and call for new theology to shift their theological position. „It is absolutely necessary new.“ This may, indeed, be right. We do have to ask how

Paul Ballard

From faith to faith: norm and context in Practical Theology

The question of norms and context is at the heart of Practical Theology. By its very nature, Practical Theology asks how Christian believing is related to our concrete existence in the world. But note, it is the believer, or at least the enquirer, who asks these questions: How does what I am told about God in Christ impinge on my day to day living? How can the Gospel be heard in today's world of oppression and violence? How do I „live responsibly as a Christian“ in my particular life situation? But once asked, if asked at all, it quickly becomes apparent that these are complex issues that are part of a continuing debate. They then become theological. It is these issues that we have to struggle with as theologians, as those whose task it is to respond to the questions posed by faith in the service of faith; for this is at the heart of whether faith is plausible at all.

All that can be done here, however, is to pick out a few themes that run through the debate and, in response, to lay down a few pointers as to how we may further explore the issues.

We have been given a glimpse of three specific contexts: from Ghana, Korea and Germany. This in itself is important for I believe that it is through listening to others' stories that the Gospel comes alive. In any case we can only speak out of our own experience; though, by speaking, we expose ourselves to the other and become part of the hermeneutic process of interpretation and understanding. I, too, have my historical reality: an Englishman, with all that means for my generation in terms of education and social existence, living and working in Wales for over twenty-five years, a stranger in a different, but related, culture. So, as we say, „I can only speak as I find.“

I. Contextual Panic

I want to start from a remark by Joon Kwan Un, as he responds to the changing situation in Korea which he detects as bringing in a new, more defensive era for the Churches. „It seems to me,“ he says, „that all these forces of social change challenge the Korean church and Korean theology to shift their theological paradigm ... to something radically new.“ This may, indeed, be right. We do have to examine how

our theological models relate to contextual reality. But ought there not also to be a warning here? Does the context dictate the theological modelling? Is it proper for the contextual tail to wag the theological dog?

Perhaps, in a world that appears to be radically uncertain and undergoing so much rapid change, where many ideological, political, economic and technological landmarks have been overturned, it is inevitable that we should scout around for new theological shibboleths by which to measure the new situation. Look at what is happening in central Europe after the collapse of the Iron Curtain; or in Britain and the USA as the hard-right, economically and morally, seems to carry all before it; or the undermining of Liberation and political theology with the eclipse of Marxist socialism.

But surely faith, and theology, are called to offer a word of hope within the surge of events. Christian believing must not be so locked into a particular cultural pattern or historical movement that the one drags the other down. The Gospel stands on its own foundations as a criterion of judgement within history. The legitimate task to explore forms of faith in the reality of the historical context is always a risky enterprise. Reinhold Niebuhr, long ago, pointed to the necessary dialectic between faith and human action.

II. Concreteness and Conflict

Yet there is a paradox here; for it appears that it is only in radical particularity that the Gospel becomes a driving force. Jürgen Henkys draws this out in his comparison between the way the aim of a youth training programme was presented in the then DDR and West Germany. The East German document specified the aim as „to enable young people to live responsibly as Christians in a socialist society“; whereas the western parallel only talked about „in our time“.

The former, in its greater particularity, immediately raised practical issues about how Christian faith and practice is possible in a society dominated by Marxist-Leninism at personal, community and citizenship levels. The use of I.Cor.8.4-6 (food offered to idols) in this context is fascinating and instructive. But there is also inevitable conflict among those who have to discover faith's path of obedience. There is no immediate and clear Christian response. There is only the need to live in and through the situation with as much integrity as possible. We live, Bonhoeffer insists, in the concrete present in and with „the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord.“ By contrast, the phrase „in our time“ is

anodyne, not forcing any decision because there is no attempt to define the nature of the times. Try inserting such a phrase as „a capitalist society“ or „Muslim society“.

Faith can only exist in and through the particularity of our historical reality. There is no other way for creatures of time and space to have faith or for being faithful. The Gospel is tied to history. It is mediated historically, proclaimed historically, lived out in a particular place. Grace is offered here and now. The particularity of faith has to be taken with utmost seriousness; only thus can we be met in our own uniqueness. This is the strength and weakness of the Gospel, that it is exposed to the vagaries of history.

III. The Hermeneutic of Midrash

What I hope is emerging is a theological method that is consonant both with the human reality and the Gospel to which it bears witness. The central Christian affirmation is a doctrine of radical incarnation. The first two points come together here: the beyond is always and only found in the midst. (Bonhoeffer) There is a point of reference outside the limitations of our existence but it is always understood and lived with from inside and as part of history.

Perhaps one way to relate to this in our present enquiry is to pick up another point made by Henkys. He suggests that alongside the social context and the Bible and tradition there is a third party to the discussion: the Church. I agree that this is an important dimension, often forgotten; but I, however, want to take this somewhat more radically than I think was intended.

The impression is sometimes given, often in the context of describing the „critical correlation“ model of Practical Theology that there are two almost distinct partners in the dialogue: the context and „the Tradition“ (including the Bible). To use hermeneutic language drawn from Gadamer, there are „two horizons“ that have to be fused— the text and the context. But Ricoeur lays stress on a further dimension. The text is indeed "fixed": in this case the Bible as the witness to the interpretive moment concerning Jesus. But the text itself also has a history. We stand „in front“ of the text. How the text has come down to us and the mode of its reception is as much part of the context as the rest of our historical situation. In other words 'church' stands for the story of Christian believing, faithful and unfaithful, that is the cradle for the Word of God. There is, therefore, no given, in the sense of an objective theological reality whether it be „what the Bible says“ or „the

teaching of the Church", with which we enter into dialogue. There is only a stream of interpretation that has many channels down the centuries and across the world.

Yet there is, within that stream, a primary witness—the Scriptures that enfold the faith act of those who claimed to have found the Messiah, the definitive disclosure and act of God: Jesus the Christ. The process of interpretation is forever dialectical for the Bible (and tradition) are given to each generation out of the faith of the previous generation and yet holds within itself that transcendent point of reference that asks the transmission of faith to be a rediscovery and reappropriation and not merely a passing of a baton or the preservation of a heritage.

This is in line with the Judeo-Christian notion of Scripture. The Bible itself arose from the interpretive history of the events of faith: Exodus, settlement, prophetic indictment, Exile, restoration; expressed in Torah, poetry, wisdom and history. Each generation recalled and reformulated the tradition. This is the Rabbinic tradition of Midrash which continues as the Scriptures live at the heart of Judaism. The same, modified by the place given to the Rabbi Jesus, is true in the Church where the Scriptures find their proper place at the heart of liturgy—the continuous retelling and interpreting of the story, in sermon, commentary, art and lived out in witness and service.

This interpretive history also relates to the eschatological tradition. There is a sense of pilgrimage, of a journey not yet completed. Each moment is, therefore, not self contained but a stage on the journey, partial and temporal, though really part of the story. The eschatological dimension of expectancy and hope suggests that the scattered and broken realities of faith can be brought together in ways as yet hidden, into a fulness not yet anticipated. As the English Puritan, John Robinson, said in bidding farewell to the Pilgrim Fathers: „There is still yet more light and truth to break forth from God's word.“

IV. Limitations

I want, here, to introduce a fourth point. Practical Theologians naturally wish to be wanted, to earn their keep by providing the Church with useful insights and methodologies. Indeed, it is our task to help the community of faith to live out its obedience more relevantly and effectively. We, therefore, find ourselves engaged in leading conferences, sitting on working parties, writing books or producing study guides. And yet it is frustrating when it seems to make very little dif-

ference. The Church goes rolling on blindly, challenges are ignored, opportunities missed. But is there not, perhaps, a little bit of the hubris of the expert, the assurance of the technologist? It is one of the sins of our age to put trust in methodology. If only we can get the system right then all will be resolved. Perhaps the theologians are slightly tainted by this.

We must not forget that the Gospel is lived by faith. There, however, is that simple yet necessary act of commitment between what we can see in hope and vision and the situation as it is. Kants' axiom remains: there is no necessary connection between an indicative and an imperative, or an imperative and action. Of course, what 'is' affects what can happen and, also, what ought to happen. But there is always, between an 'is' and an 'ought', an act of will. It does not have to happen; and it certainly does not have to happen the way I expect it to happen. Perhaps we should not look for too much 'success'. Rather the task of theology is other. It is to work, in a critical, reflective and challenging way at the hermeneutic tradition.

So the debate about method and methodological theory must be kept in proportion. Of course it is necessary to take up the issues of epistemology and methodology because it is necessary to understand what is at stake and to sort the inadequate from the adequate. But any such discussion inevitably deals with abstractions and approximations. It also clarifies issues and possibilities. What it cannot do is to provide a gateway into the Kingdom, a step that has to be taken in faith.

V. Living Theologically

What then is the task of theology? Edward Farley has argued for the recovery of 'habitus' as a theological task. The same emphasis is being placed in much contemporary ethical discussion (McIntyne, Byrne). That is, theology's aim is to open the mind and heart so that the Gospel reality begins to become part of one's core of being. Theology, as an intellectual enquiry, whether specifically within an ecclesial context or, academically in the market place of ideas, is at the service of the formation of the Christian community and faithful individuals. The Christian character only grows out of a long and continuous process of living with and working at the truth of the Gospel at every level of our existence. To echo the aim of the German youth programme: 'to be able to live responsibly as Christians' in the time and place in which God has set us. This is more than knowledge or method, but of insight and integrity. If I am asked what I think my task

as a theological teacher is, over and above the important business of providing theological knowledge, tools and skills, it is to quicken the imagination, to open up connections and to envision the possibilities of faith. It is always a joy, therefore, when students, sometimes at the end of the second year or in their postgraduate work, suddenly come alive. Doing theology becomes more than a technical process or the acquisition of knowledge. Rather it is about insights, about living in the world „*coram deo*“. Only then are they theologians.

Perhaps this is classically a peculiarly British, or even English, tradition. I want, tentatively, to suggest that, alongside the other models, each with their own understanding of the relation between context and norm, found in Practical Theology (theory-practice, liberationist, critical correlation) there can be a fourth model.

This has two parts which may or may not be found together. The British civil service has traditionally, in modern times, been based on a classical education (Latin, Greek, philosophy). The idea is that a mind highly trained in critical reflection can be turned to any problem from solving the Times crossword to running the affairs of state. English theology has the same tradition. It consists in studying the Christian classics in order to inform the Christian mind. Theology as an academic discipline is but one way to live in and explore the tradition, including testing its truth claims. The growing secularity of the university may have tended to put a wedge between the supposedly confessional and the academic, but most departments of Theology are staffed by those for whom the subject is as much a vocation as a purely academic interest.

The other dimension is expressed in a model for ministerial training, especially in the Church of England. The ideal is the apprenticeship, the indentured student, living and working with the master, learning a craft and a wisdom, on the job and under supervision, being socialised into a way of life. Even the seminary has been seen as a small household of those who live, work and worship together under the guidance of experienced practitioners.

With typical British (English?) pragmatic amateurism, distinctions are blurred. There is no real line between the academic and spirituality. There is little anxiety about principles and methodologies. Rather there is an interweaving of different levels of reflection. Perhaps this is the distinctive flavour of much British Practical Theology: less formal, more anecdotal, closer to writing on spirituality than in some other traditions.

Coda

Underlying these remarks, as has already been indicated, is the principle that theology should imitate faith. The reference in the title is to Rom. 1.17: „the righteousness of God is from faith to faith.“ This, first of all, suggests that faith depends on the faithfulness of God. This is found in the historical reality of Jesus (Rom.3) and in the interpretive activity of the Holy Spirit (Rom.8): so that God is his own witness yet in and through the contingencies of history. But, secondly, we live out of faith as we move into faith. Theology, as an intellectual and structured activity, is but a servant of that task. What is sought is faithfulness. That, however, is predated on the prior faithfulness of God who lives with us and for us in the history that is Jesus Christ mediated in the Spirit.

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Marcel Viau

What does „practical“ mean?

It seems nearly impossible to speak about the word „practical“ as it appears in the expression „practical theology“, apart from a discussion of the epistemological problems intrinsic to any discourse and its object. Practical theology claims to construct its discourse from practice. This project involves two inter-related concepts: discourse and its object. One can briefly define the word „discourse“ as a body of utterances, and the „object“ as that to which that body of utterances is linked. The word „object“ here entails two different meanings. On the one hand, it means the idea of distance between an utterance and that which is denoted by that utterance (if one can speak of something being denoted). On the other hand, it refers to the goal of utterances when they are employed by a speaker or a group of speakers. Here, one catches a glimpse of the nature of the problems encountered when trying to construct a theology on practice.

At the root of these problems stands a peculiar challenge which can be summed up in the following manner:

- 1) The primary use of practical theology is to build up discourse on Christian faith practices.
- 2) To build up that discourse, it is necessary to have an adequate theory.
- 3) Nowadays, it is generally agreed that practice and theory are by nature dichotomic, a conclusion which would seem to doom the whole project to failure .
- 4) A way out of this dilemma is to claim that practice is an entity which can only be understood in conjunction with theory.
- 5) But this solution forces one to carry out basic research into the criteria for a theological theory which would claim to embody practice.

One can describe this basic research as the critical study of the conditions which allow the production of multiple discourses in practical theology. Its goal is to provide practical theology with those elementary instruments and rules requisite to a true discipline. It is for this reason that basic research does not focus on Christian faith practice itself, but *rather on the way practical theology operates when it tries to understand and account for these practices; in other words, when it attempts to produce a discourse.*

To accomplish this task, research aims to understand one particular aspect of practical theological discourse, that is its *linguistic apparatus*. Is this apparatus consistent and coherent? Is it capable of producing rigorous and relevant discourses? What philosophical and scientific trends does it involve?

A discussion of the problematic relationship between theological discourse and its object hangs upon epistemology, understood as the study of the nature, scope, and mechanism of general knowledge. This discussion touches upon three issues. 1) The first issue deals with the *material* out of which theological discourse and its object are constructed. The concept of *experience* provides the basis for this discussion. 2) A second issue involves the *fit* between a discourse and its object. At this point, the discussion revolves around the concept of *language*. 3) The third issue is the *adjustment* of the theological discourse to its object. Here, the concept of *belief* is central.

1 The issue of experience

It is useful to adopt a special definition for the word experience when one discusses the material from which the theological discourse and its object are made. One can consider experience, not exclusively as subjective, but as a plural and partially undetermined entity. Consequently, experience is a series of natural events in which one finds human beings, their thoughts, and their language. This notion of experience is a common sense one, wherein knowings and feelings are link. „Concept“ within this notion of experience operates less dogmatically and hence more modestly. Concept and percept can only be understood when considered together, in other words from the moment in which they are in accord with reality. Concept within this notion of experience operates less dogmatically and hence more modestly. Concept and percept can only be understood when considered together, in other words from the moment in which they are in accord with reality. Concept is a „thought at work“ and it can be justified only by the practical results of its work.

Hence, experience is necessary to gain knowledge. When the continuity of experience is broken by an event, the reflective process gets under way and is ready to work its effect. This process is called *inquiry*. Inquiry is a logical operation which uses ideas solely as suggestions for the empirical method, or as a tool which one uses to repair the broken experience. In this way, the experience of a human being forms a whole, and includes scientific, religious and common

sense knowledge. That being the case, it is only by means of experience that human beings approach God.

What forces are at work in experience? Organisms exist which are in interaction with their environment. These organisms adopt behaviors which are the result of natural interaction both on a biological and cultural level. Christian behavior is of this nature. And the fact that an organism wishes to express its faith is only one element of its behavior. Theological discourse takes into account the interaction of this organism engaged in a survival process of image-making which renders these interactions visible through a web of signs.

The sign is the main tool used to set the discourse in motion. By means of the sign, the organism reacts to other organisms in the context of its environment; the Christian establishes the same type of relationship with the signs of theological discourse. The discourse produced by the Christian takes its meaning from its relationship to the behavior of that Christian. Theological discourse is thus engaged in a semiotic process which itself depends upon natural interaction.

This concept of sign is connected to a wider behaviorist perspective which is not without its difficulties. If one is to avoid forcing theological discourse into a straight jacket, one must examine the way which this discourse fits its object; a point which leads us to examine other epistemological elements, this time in relation to language.

2 The issue of language

Fitting theological discourse to its object needs to be considered from the angle of language. To reflect upon the notion of language is to examine the means by which knowledge is acquired. From one point of view, knowledge is neither objective nor subjective. It is above all an experiential process which calls upon the gamut of natural interaction. Given this point, knowledge of a reality implies an involvement in an experience which represents this reality to the mind at the end of a series of intermediate experiences. This leads us to recognize the merits of a theology which tries to attain a certain spiritual reality; on the condition that one accepts that it is not a state of pure knowledge of an object, but only a process which „points to“ that object.

Language is that which allows knowledge to come into existence. Without language, our knowledge of the world is reduced to animal instinct. Words exercise the function of making the act of knowledge effective. The only way it would appear for an organism to know God

is to envisage the word God within a linguistic interaction in a given context. Here, theology is centered on the description on the way in which organisms produce discourse about God. In order to do this, one needs to adopt a non-foundational perspective of language and of knowledge. There are no stable foundations for our words and as a consequence, no permanent truths. One might say that stability relies upon our linguistic behaviors rather than upon our ways of thinking.

In light of this fact, it becomes essential to investigate our linguistic structures. As there exists no common category in language which allows us to identify objects, how can we translate our states of mind or even spiritual states to one another? In order to do this, one needs to give up the idea of the clarity of pure reference in favour of a more vague notion of the object; one which in practice understands the object as „inscrutable“. Theological discourse only understands itself in a „form of life“, in the midst of experience. Theological discourse makes sense from the moment it is integrated into a given language game, which itself is integrated in a given language community. In short, with respect to its use of language, theological discourse may be understood as contextualist, instrumentalist, and pragmatist.

The consequences of this view of language forces us to add precision to our notion of the meaning of words. Theological discourse calls upon a body of utterances expressed by a group of speakers, its object being subject to the hazards of experience. The meanings which emerge are instances of speaker behavior. Language is a learning affair with respect to the behavior of speakers, and meanings are acquired in the same fashion, in other words, in reaction to stimuli. But are we not here confronted with the question of the reference of words?

Reference must always be considered in relation to a word, which inevitably stands within a conceptual scheme. For this reason, coherence between words seems fundamental to understanding reference. Words are not anchored in a hypothetical substance; they are rooted in a „way of speaking“. To know the meaning of a word is not to know the object denoted by that word; it is to be able to use that word in sentences and in discourse. But does this imply that meaning is entirely relative? In relation to language at least, this forces a retreat into a universe wherein the role of reference is recognized. But which kind of reference is being spoken of here? In order to examine this difficult question, one must call the notion of *belief* into play.

3 The issue of belief

Belief is at the heart of experience and of language, and may be understood as the state of an organism which has ceased to doubt. Acting as a rule of action and even engendering it, belief is central to all human interaction. Christian religious belief participates in the same movement. Christian religious belief, which forms the hard core of theology, has as its task the production of discourse comprized of instances of Christian belief which are embodied in experience.

Before being an internal state, belief is an attitude towards a sentence. The two elements of this attitude are entertainment and assent. Entertainment relates to the attitude of the listener when she is considering a speaker's sentence, while assent refers to the decision to be made with respect to this sentence. This decision is more than an act of will, it implies being disposed to take action. In this sense, there can be no difference between Christian religious belief and any other kind of belief, be it scientific or philosophic in nature. Belief is a state in which organisms find themselves and in which certain information is conveyed. Here, belief is connected to the environment which caused it and allows it to function.

Religious belief belongs to a web of beliefs which dispose the organism to act. In this sense, the organism may be seen as an intentional system whose behavior may be theoretically predicted, on the condition that one attributes to the system a certain form of rationality. However, the belief as such remains forever indeterminate for the listener who seeks to localize it. All the listener knows about the speaker are the utterances which the latter emits and it is thus only via these utterances that he may know anything of the speaker's beliefs. This phenomenon may explain the interaction of the organism with its environment. But what of the linguistic interaction *between* organisms in this regard?

The linguistic interaction between interlocutors takes place in large measure thanks to belief. The process begins with the presumption of the verisimilitude of the sentences pronounced by the speaker: this is the principle of charity. Linguistic interaction can only be established if a listener presumes that the sentences held as true by a speaker are generally true. Thus the sentence of any speaker which has the character of a religious utterance can only be understood on the condition of invoking the principle of charity, otherwise the linguistic interaction risks serious disturbance. Since the speaker who states the sentences inevitably positions herself in the linguistic interaction, the listener presumes the sentence to be held as true by the speaker. It is

on the basis of that presumption that interaction is established. For this to be possible, the listener must impute a rational character to the speaker and assume, in a general way, the same web of beliefs.

The first stage in this process is that of entertaining the sentence with help of a theory of entertainment. The principle of charity being preserve, a sentence becomes an entertained utterance for an interlocutor when she is able to identify the cause of this belief. These causes are the events situated in the interaction between the organisms and their environment. The interlocutor can not do this, however, by relying on the so-called empirical evidence or on sensations heard as objects of belief, since the object of belief is not a content but the utterance which stands to the right of the epistemological function: „I believe...“. The belief is transferred from the speaker to the listener when the latter assumes the utterance of the former, that is when she is in a position to assert it sincerely or, in other words, to appropriate the speaker's utterance as her own.

The assent to an utterance by an interlocutor is the second stage of the process of adjustment of a discourse to its object. It is governed by a theory of the assent wherein the listener carries the burden of analysis of the causal and linguistic interactions. She establishes the relationship between the events which cause the belief in the speaker with the events which cause her own belief. Next, the listener integrates the whole into her web of belief. The process is accomplished with the help of a deductive inquiry made up of two moments: an integration of the information conveyed by the utterances and a decision whether or not to act.

In conclusion, practical theology now possesses all the epistemological elements necessary to undertake the production of theological discourse appropriate to its object: adjusted and fitting materials. The key notions of these elements are experience, language and belief. Discourse produced in this way becomes a body of utterances governed by the rules of semiotic process which uses signs as instances of belief embodied in experience.

Who could imagine that the word „practical“ employed in relation to „theology“ would challenge so much of theology as a whole?

Riet Bons-Storm

A Feminist Approach

1. The special context of the feminist approach to theology

The book *With Passion and Compassion. Third World Women Doing Theology*¹ shows us how the feminist approach to theology grew among ordinary church-women of all kinds of churches in the Third World. Likewise in the Netherlands the feminist approach to theology grew out of the grassroots, giving birth to the Woman and Faith-movement. The Woman and Faith-movement started in the seventies, when on several places in the Netherlands women of various churches turned towards each other to talk about their frustrations concerning the theology and the practice of the church. Women recognized in each other their pain and concern: how can it become possible to put faith into words and actions, grounded in our particular experience as women in this society? How can our faith become really redeeming and liberating? How can we live our lives, diverse as they may be? Several women saw a gap between the promise of redemption and liberation on the one hand, and the actual situation of marginalization and exploitation of women, going on inside and outside the churches on the other, the multiple marginalization of women of color, the feminization of poverty, sexual violence inside and outside the home, the barring from ministry and priesthood. These groups heard about each other, and found each other: the Woman and Faith-movement was born. The Bible was read together with women's eyes: the eyes of women in various situations. New vistas unfolded, new anger had to be worked through, new ways of believing found².

D.

Different Models of Analysis

The context of the feminist approach in theology is everyday-life, where women, living their lives under various conditions, many of them not officially trained in theology, experience their lack of libera-

¹ *With Passion and Compassion. Third world Women Doing Theology*, Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye eds., Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1989.

² Cf. Uliva Tooh, "The Feminist Movement in and on the Edge of the Churches in the Netherlands: from Consciousness-raising to Womenchurch" in the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, vol. 5, nr 2, 1989: 113 - 129. Fols Brouwer: Een Dóórl' van een Beweging. Onderzoek naar de organisatie van de Vrouwen-Gelovingsgroep in Nederland, Dienstencentra, Leiden, 1991. Riet Bons-Storm en Diane Vermeij: Beweging in macht. Vrouwenwerk in Nederland?, Kok, Kampen, 1991.

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tion, ask questions based on faith as it is lived from day to day, and articulate theology in their own voices, longing for life abundant, as promised by the Divine.

This context presents the question of normativity. Many a member of the Woman and Faith-movement was looked sternly in the eyes when she told her minister about her new insights in faith and theology. „But you are not allowed to think in this way“, she was told³.

So how did she have to think? What is the norm for theological thinking and who has the power to determine the norm?

2. The feminist approach

A feminist is somebody who is aware of the critical hiatus between 'Woman' – that is 'the female other' as institution and representation, mirroring men's fears and desires – and real-life women⁴. Real-life women are a multiplicity of differences: race, class, age, sexual orientation, etc. Real-life women experience their sexual embodiment and their 'normal' roles in everyday-life and have – connected to that – situated and women-based knowledge, which has the possibility to empower them, if they take the courage to raise their voice. This knowledge inspires them to practice a politics of resistance. They start to speak in their own voice, constructing a new idea of normativity. This brings them in conflict with the assumptions of the patriarchal belief-system. The conflict is usually fought on the rational level. It is so fierce however because a deep seated longing in men for women to be 'Woman', and the fear to lose control about the definition of Truth and Normativity covertly fuel the discussions.

The feminist perspective opens our eyes for the basic structures of the belief-systems that guide our quest for knowledge, practical-

³ Riet Bons-Storm: „Maar zo mag je niet denken! Over ruimte en richting in een feministische benadering van theologie en geloven“ („But you are not allowed to think that way! About room and direction in a feminist approach to theology and faith“) in Riet Bons-Storm, Corrie Dijksterhuis, Martha Kroes en Eva Ouwehand: *Ruimte en Richting. Vrouwen op zoek naar veel betekend geloof*, Boekencentrum, 's-Gravenhage, 1990: 31 - 55.

⁴ Rosi Braidotti: „Sexual difference as a nomadic political project“ in *Voicing Identity. Women and Religious Traditions in Europe*, Records of the Fifth Bi-annual Conference of the European Society of Women in Theological Research, Louvain, Belgium, 1993.

theological knowledge included. The feminist perspective is part of an epistemological analysis, arguing that sociological and ideological analysis of our ways of knowing is necessary. An intrinsic part of every scholarly endeavour is to try to understand the relationships between ideas and structures of thought on the one hand, and social contexts on the other⁵.

Rhoda Linton sums up some characteristics of the feminist approach:

1. women are the *active central focus/ subject* (italics by Linton);
2. cooperative group activity is the predominant modus operandi;
3. there is a recognized need for liberation from the oppression of the status quo⁶.

Feminism is a movement with a political agenda; it fuels and inspires a politics of resistance to oppression and a practice of analysis of power and the concrete liberation of marginalized and oppressed persons.

I argue that the feminist approach mirrors the assumptions of post-modernity, but in a critical way. There is a crack in the mirror. This crack concerns the awareness of the danger of total relativity.

On the one hand feminism can be understood as a side effect of modernity: modernity gave women – i.e. those, who would be willing to identify with reasonable men – the space to think of themselves as subjects. Feminists aspire however to be subjects in their own right, trying to build arguments based in their own contexts. The feminist approach assumes that our ways of thinking and knowing are *gendered*. „Gender' in feminist theory fulfils primarily the function of challenging the universalistic tendency of language and of the systems of knowledge and scientific discourse at large"⁷. As Adrienne Rich argued: a central notion of the feminist stance is that knowledge is marked by a specific location in space and time. The primary location is the body, i.e. the morphological and political space of the embodied

⁵ cf Robert J. Schreier: *Bouwen aan een eigen theologie. Geloofsverstaan binnen de plaatselijke culturele context* (Dutch translation of *Constructing local theologies*), H. Nelliissen, Baarn, 1984: 101 ff.

⁶ Rhoda Linton: „Toward a Feminist Research Method" in *Gender/ Body/ Knowledge. Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo eds., Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1992: 276.

⁷ Rosi Braidotti: „What's wrong with gender?" in *Reflections on Theology and Gender*, Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes and Atalya Brenner, eds., Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1994: 52.

subject⁸. Another feature of the feminist approach is the acknowledgement that the question of Truth and the Right Normativity is always also a question of power: who has authority to define the perimeters of Truth and Normativity, and who has not? On this point Michel Foucault destroyed our innocence⁹: the quest for Truth is a battle between the dominant discourse of reasonable men, that is: *predominantly white, rather affluent, and highly educated men*, and the marginal discourses of all those, who miss those features of reasonableness.

On the other hand, feminism, child of modernity, can only grow up in a climate of postmodernity. When hitherto marginalized discourses – like the feminist discourse – raise their own voices and claim credibility, and when one realizes that the urge for *power and security* is an important factor when settling the dispute between the discourses, then suddenly or gradually one's eyes are opened for the shattering knowledge that there can never be One knowable Truth, who gives the universal norm, not even for Christianity or Practical Theology.

Feminist women, who long to stay christian – be they in the church or in the university – can only be heard if their marginal discourse becomes a partner-in-equality of the discourse, that up till recently could assume it was dominant.

Feminists are aware however of the utmost relativity that features in postmodernity. If there are many equal discourses, each with their own truth, what does one have to live by, what is there to aspire?

3. The search for a concept of truth that honours diversity in equality

We need a concept of truth, that is based in women's own discourses and contexts, but that also gives us a basis for dialogue with other discourses. Women's particular 'truth' comes into being when women analyse their marginalization. A 'truth' can be understood as the ultimate value, becoming the point of orientation of one's meaning-giving to all one's experiences. Therefore truth is contextual. Taking over a truth from another context/ another discourse means: to live in conflict and pain in the battle between one's own truth and the imposed truth of a dominant discourse. This painful conflict is confusing and very

⁸ Adrienne Rich: *Blood, Bread, and Poetry. Selected Prose 1979 - 1985*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/ London, 1986: 212 ff.

⁹ Cf Michel Foucault: *L'ordre du discours*, Paris, 1971.

tiring. One needs allies to really find out where one's own truth lies, and to analyse the relationship of this truth to the imposed truth of dominant discourse.

Together with Susan Thistlethwaite I opt for the truth-concept of Sojourner Truth, an African American woman, who as a slave fought for the liberation of slaves, especially for the women. Nobody has privileged access 'the way things really are', to ontological reality¹⁰. Sojourner-truth could be: the truth of the road towards liberation from oppression and alienation, through changing landscapes, changing contexts. It is an avowed truth, where one stands for, but 'for the time being'. But this 'being' has to be taken in its fullest meaning. For me it means realizing who one is and where one is, what the ultimate value is one lives by, and how the conditions in this place affect one's experience of life abundant in God/dess' name. One is never alone in a place. There are other dwellers. An awareness of where one is includes also an awareness of relations with others in that place, and the relations of power that exist in that place. 'Truth for the time being' means awareness of the values at stake in a certain time and place, knowing where one's own ultimate commitment lies, and also practicing these commitments. With Adrienne Rich I think truth depends on the decision:

*With whom do you believe your lot is cast?
From where does your strength come?*¹¹

Truth has to do with survival of oneself, tested against the survival of the other. This particular, situated truth has to be brought into dialogue with other truths from other discourses, forming an ongoing dialogue about what could be a shared truth, and thus a shared normativity. This dialogue is not an intellectual exercise, but a matter of survival in solidarity. It is a matter of ethical decisions, a matter of learning to live with difference-in-equality.

4. God/dess and normativity

But where is God/dess in this normativity?
Who is God/dess?

¹⁰ Susan Thistlethwaite: *Sex, race, and God. Christian Feminism in Black and White*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1990: 12 ff.

¹¹ Adrienne Rich: *Sources*. The Heyeck Press, California, 1983: 12.

We do not really know. We have only very biased, androcentric accounts of what people experienced as God's voice, God's word in their contexts. We have to use a hermeneutic of suspicion on all canonized texts, because the people who made the canons were all human, and all men. The life-experience of women in their various conditions did not have a voice in this process. Under and between the androcentric patriarchal texts of bible and tradition we have only the whisperings of genuine longings for liberation, for healing of brokenness, for directions in a life full of choices and contingencies. We listen to those voices critically and try to learn from them where we can. We can learn from the texts if we, women in our various conditions, are addressed as who we are in an inspiring way, acknowledging our particular contexts and its hazards that threaten our survival-with-dignity. My canon, my 'measuring rod', for the texts of truth and life, in or outside the tradition, is: can they be heard as liberating, challenging, and inspiring for women also, in their varied circumstances? Or are women absent, only negatively represented or violently destroyed?

This means also that I do theology primarily with those with whom I share the need for a specific liberation. „The theologian must be“ (here is normativity, R.B-S) „engaged in 'a dialogue of life', not only with the poor, who are mostly women, but also with other religious and cultural traditions“, writes Virginia Fabella, a feminist theologian from the Philippines. This means that the longing for full and just humanity, by means of liberation, and associated since time immemorial with the Godhead of Jewish and Christian traditions, can be recognized in longings and their articulations in creeds and rites of other religious and cultural traditions¹². Behind this lies the assumption, an assumption of faith and longing, that for the Divine of the Bible women and men are of the same importance, have the same subject-quality and responsibility, and are called to articulate their longings and ideas about the Divine in theology and liturgy, just as men are used to do.

The leading image is a society, where men and women of different color, ethnicity, class, age and sexual orientation can live together without oppression and marginalization: a healed society, celebrating difference-in-equality. Everything I say or do, in my personal and in my academic life, has to be weighed in the light of this leading image:

¹² Virginia Fabella: „A Common Methodology for Diverse Christologies?“ in *With Passion and Compassion. Third World Women Doing Theology*, Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye eds., Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1989: 115.

a community of difference in equality. Then I serve the truth; God/dess' truth, I say in faith.

5. A feminist approach to practical theology

This normativity gives us the parameters of the normativity in practice, as understood from a feminist perspective. Practical theology for me is the quest for theories answering the question: how can persons in their specific situations (being male, female, of a certain ethnicity, color, class, etc. etc.) live their lives as faithful persons in this world, experiencing the liberation God/dess promises and the challenge S/He offers to live according to Her/His longings, in critical orientation to the christian tradition, developing this tradition further?

The basis of every theology, practical theology included, is solidarity with persons who live in a particular context of lack of liberation. If I do practical theology in the Netherlands, I have to start with *listening*. I argue that there is much wishful thinking about listening and empathy among practical theologians. Transcultural and transsexual empathy is very hard to obtain. The other will always be the other, even if we share a culture and a sex. Differences, also amongst women and amongst men, have to be acknowledged. In our patriarchal culture many persons who feel subordinated, among them many women, live in a culture of being silenced. Their experiences cannot be recorded by the usual empirical methods. Careful listening has to have the notion of *earned solidarity*. On the basis of this careful and open listening the various practices will be changed, as new data emerge from women's life-experience, hitherto not processed as a part of dominant practical theological thinking. Preaching will change, pastoral care, christian education, liturgy, because, first of all, the language used will change. New questions are asked, new answers have to be found.

The focus of practical theology is 'faith lived in context'. This 'faith lived in context' is a mixture of at least two things:

- the impact of 'faith thought through', i.e. theologies, as heard in christian education, Sunday school, sermons, etc. Many women hear these theologies as if they are articulated in foreign languages. This gives many of them a feeling of alienation and despair.
- the touch of the Holy Spirit, the Divine-in-action-and-communion, who opens women's heart for the longing for liberation of the particular oppressing forces that destroy their experience of

Gerben Heitink

An Empirically Oriented Approach

Basic assumption

My definition of practical theology runs as follows: *Practical theology is the empirically orientated theological theory of mediating the christi-an tradition in the praxis of modern society.*

This definition makes clear that the tension between normativity and context belongs to the key-questions of practical theology. Mediating between the Christian tradition and modern society is the core of practical theology – which thus affects the individual, the church and society. Such mediation requires an ongoing critical interrelation between theological theory on the one hand, and the context of modern society on the other.

Text and context

An important question is how theological theory (taken as text) and modern society (taken as context) relate to each other. It is incorrect to characterize this relationship in terms of norm versus description. The relationship between 'text' and 'context' is extremely complicated. What I have called 'text' has been determined to a high degree by the context of the past, by cultural developments and historical events. This of course also applies to the text of the Bible itself, that has to be interpreted in the cultural and historical context of its authors. Furthermore, what I have called 'context' has been influenced by an authentic long-term experience of Christian faith and exemplary Christian life. This being so, the context in turn has gained a normative sense. Thus context becomes text.

There is no reason to characterize this, my approach in terms of 'natural theology'. The theological background of this position is the thesis that divine proclamation and action always have to be mediated; and come to us in the way of human speech and action. Revelation always will be mediated by religious experience. Here I refer to the Biblical concept of Covenant and to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Covenant means a way of partnership between God and man, in which God is the initiator but man plays an important role as a respon-

sible partner. Similarly, Christian pneumatology clearly states that the work of the Holy Spirit never takes place at the expense of our essential humanity. On the contrary, it finds its central focus in restoring the human person to freedom and responsibility. The relationship between God and human beings can be characterized as cooperation and partnership.

From the above I conclude that the deductive approach (starting from the text) and the inductive approach (starting from the cultural context) are complementary to each other. In practical theology we presuppose a correlation in which text and context permanently evoke each other. The structure of practical theology indeed is a bi-polar one. Research of the context leads to a new interpretation of the text. And this reinterpretation of the text, in turn, sheds a new light on the actual situation.

Empirical orientation

In this vision, the empirical approach gets a theological importance. I have defined practical theological research as 'empirically orientated'. The notion 'empirical' is not the opposite of the notion 'hermeneutic'. Rather, they are in line with each other. Practical-theological research of the relationship between text and context is hermeneutical by nature, but empirical by design.

It is hermeneutical by nature because the research is directed to a process of understanding: i.e. the understanding of the meaning of the Christian tradition in the context of modern society. It requires an empirical design, because practical theological research chooses its starting point in the actual situation of church and society. This situation has to be understood as a situation of action, that has to be explained by empirical research but interpreted by theological theories. By relating one to the other we discover the innovative possibilities: as to how the mediation of the Christian tradition can be subservient to the renewal of the praxis of faith.

A relevant practical-theological question arises here, that has to be elaborated in a research design. „Under which conditions and how can concrete religious actions be influenced in such a manner that they better represent God's work of liberating human being and the world in which we live?“

With the last phrase, 'better represent God's work ...etc', a normative hermeneutical concept has been introduced. This concept is not

Scriptural as such. But it arises from the explanation of the Scriptures in our historical and cultural context. It has been mediated by experience and thus is open to improvement.

In our twentieth century setting, we have learned to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in terms of hope: the hope of the Kingdom of God liberating the people who are being violated and oppressed. This is our critical hermeneutical frame of reference. Thus our confrontation with the reality of oppression and hostility has led to an interpretation of the gospel in terms of liberation – which, in turn, gained normative meaning in re-reading the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. We know: 'God is love' (1 John 4,16) and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor. 3,17). Along this line then I will define in our context the core of the Gospel, the salvation of Christ.

Theory and praxis

The approach, introduced above, presupposes a hermeneutical concept of theology as a whole. And a circular understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis. Let me elaborate.

Theology in the context of modernity since Schleiermacher, takes as its object of reflection not God but the Christian tradition of faith. This tradition must be understood as one that connects *Fides Quae* and *Fides Qua*: the content of belief and the experience of faith. Theology shows a fourfold pattern as it refers to the Christian faith. We know Christian faith from its sources (biblical theology), by its tradition (systematic theology), in its former (church history) and contemporary shapes (practical theology). These various perspectives are segments of an hermeneutical circle of understanding, making understandable and coming to understand. Practical theology chooses its starting-point in the way people will come to understanding. From this point of view practical theology asks its own questions about the both of the other two hermeneutical perspectives.

I can also elaborate the above point by referring to the interaction of theory and praxis. Theological theory always has an historical, i.e. provisional character. It shapes the methodological outcome of the mode in which people in their own context – and with their particular frame of reference have come to understanding. A dogma is congealed experience and must be made liquid again. Then it regains its original character of 'doxa'. A confession of faith is the fruit of the religious experience of a qualified group of people in a given cultural and social context.

For example, the formulation of 'Providence' arrived at by believers in the time of the Reformation – a time in which people felt very much dependent on forces of nature – cannot be normative for Christians today. The relationship between the image of God, the portrayal of human beings and their world view in the traditional understanding of Providence, indeed presupposes a different perception of the 'environment' than that generally held today. The modern perception is deeply influenced by concepts as human autonomy and responsibility. Thusly oriented, the empirically orientated research questions run as follows:

- Who were those people and what were the circumstances under which they have formulated the confession of God's providence in the way they did?
- Which Scriptural and (church)Traditional normative ideas do we discover in this formulation?
- Who are the people we meet today and how can we arrive to a modern understanding of Providence relevant to our perception of environment?
- How can we express today the experience of Providence in a liberating praxis?

To summarize: All theological theory is historically mediated and determined by social and political influences. Every praxis contains an implicit theory. And every theory presupposes a concrete praxis. The inductive method of practical theology starts with empirical research of the actual experience of people inside the context of modern society.

A theory of action

How do we envisage such a theory of action? Assuming a close connection between its empirical and hermeneutical perspectives, I take as my starting point the theory of Ricoeur. Ricoeur asserts that the paradigm of text interpretation can also be applied to the interpretation of action situations. In linguistics we can differentiate between spoken and written language. Likewise we can distinguish action as deed from action as a social phenomenon that is the result of many human deeds. In the latter case, a situation of action can be read as a text. Because of the symbolic character of human action, all such action contains the dialectics of event and meaning.

An action is characterized by a structure that can be analyzed in the same way as a sentence. We can analyze an action with the help of

the following questions or steps: *Who does what* (in relation to whom), *where, when, why and how?*

The above interrogative sentence indicates to (1) the actor – who did something?, (2) the kind of action – what did he do?, (3) the mode – how did he do it?, (4) the context – where, when and under which circumstances he did it; and (5) the motive of the action – why did he do it?

During the preparation of this presentation I was not able to make use of the description of the different contexts, which would be presented in this conference. For this reason I will use an example which I have elaborated in my recent book 'Praktische theologie' (1993).

On Eastern Sunday 1993, a minister of a Methodist community in one of the black townships near Johannesburg (S.A.) preaches about the hope for a peaceful living together for people of different races. This message is based on the proclamation of the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God – and it invokes people to abandon violent action. Here we deal with a complicated action situation. Following Ricoeur, we can differentiate three dimensions in this case.

- *A state of affairs:* The case refers to a context (place and time) and a situation (the increasing tension between black and white). Here, a religious service takes place. This action has a structure (who, what, where, when and how), that we can describe. We call this the locutionary level of action. In the connection between event and meaning the noematic structure of the action becomes visible.
An activity: we mean a religious service and, more precisely, a sermon about a text from the Scriptures. The typical quality of theological action finds its expression in the reference to the written tradition that has to be interpreted. The contemporary historical situation can be interpreted in a symbolic way: from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. The story of the resurrection has been connected, in a narrative way, with the actual situation of insurrection. The connection of event and meaning gives the action impressive strength. It implies a promise for the future. We call it the illocutionary level of action.
- *A realization:* we mean the result of the action of the preacher in this liturgical context. In this case, we point to the appeal for non-violence. Those present were motivated to work out a way of living together peacefully. Such can evoke anxiety, but also can have the effect hope. That is the perlocutionary level of the action.

A critical perspective may not be forgotten here. It can be expressed in the question: 'Cui bono'? Is this minister a representative of the establishment? Or can his appeal for reconciliation be interpreted as an attempt to realize a new order?

Model of analysis

We elaborate this example with a model of analysis. The central question is the following: Who does what (against whom)? Implied here are three different perspectives:

- Who does what: *why/about what?* (1)
- Who does what: *where/when?* (2)
- Who does what: *how/what for?* (3)

(1) The first perspective indicates the intentional or referential aspect of an action: the theological motives related to the Christian tradition. We call this the hermeneutic perspective of action.

(2) The second perspective refers to the context, the situational aspect of action. In this example we have to do with structures of action. And with several variables: preacher, hearers, the worship service etc. This is the empirical perspective of action.

(3) The third perspective refers to the instrumental or teleological aspect of action. In this example, it is the medium of preaching as a way of communicating, directed towards the purpose of reconciliation. We call this is the strategic perspective of action.

It will be clear that empirical and hermeneutic elements are closely interrelated. With a view to empirical practical theological research, we can elaborate a design. We can choose between a quantitative or a qualitative approach. Or we can combine both of these.

A qualitative research proposal requires – in the above case – a way participating in the religious service and an analysis of the sermon. And comparing the latter with the text of other services that have been celebrated that same Sunday. Churchgoers can be interviewed with the help of an open-structured questionnaire about their experiences. In this way, we can investigate the effect of preaching in a defined context. And can gain from this an indication as how the Gospel is (can – or should be) communicated in comparable situations.

A quantitative research proposal requires a broader survey among ministers and churchgoers: about the conditions and effects of

preaching in a defined social situation. There is a great many variables which have to be elaborated.

In the research program of the Institute of Practical Theology in our faculty, we usually try to combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Depending on the theoretical framework, two approaches are open to us. If we have an elaborated theory and well-defined hypotheses, we can analyze an amount of sermons: in an effort to select different types of preachers and different styles of preaching. For this operation we make use of a survey.

Next we can select some preachers, representative of different types of preaching. Then, by interviewing them, we can get a deeper insight in the aims and theological backgrounds behind their different styles of preaching. When we only have an – as yet – unproven theory, we opt for an exploratory kind of research. Using participatory observation and interviewing methods, we try to discover variables in preaching. When we have found these, we can rectify incorrect insights and elaborate a more reliable homiletical theory.

Empirical research always starts from a hermeneutically defined situation of action. And always implies a practical theological aim: to serve the cause of improving homiletical theory for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Context Western-Europe: Individualization and church-membership

I'll give you another example. Actually, we (the research group of our faculty) are elaborating on a program 'Church-membership and participation in the local church'. The background of this program is the ongoing tendency of churchmembers leaving the church, the process of secularization. We investigate the culture and the structure of local communities belonging to the main reformed churches in the Netherlands and the participation of their members in the processes of individualization and subjectivity. These processes characterize the context of Western-Europe.

The research questions run as follows: What has changed the way people experience their churchmembership in modern time? What kind of tension can we observe between the experiences and expectations of church members and the expectations and requirements of church leaders about their members behavior? How do we judge

those requirements in relationship to the Scriptures and the tradition of the church?

First, we had to work out a theoretical framework concerning concepts of individualization and ecclesiology. We understand individualization as an ongoing process of leaving traditional life patterns (family, village, neighbourhood). The individual becomes more independent and autonomous. The shadow side of this development can be that people who are dependent on others and on the community as a whole become more lonely and isolated.

From the view of ecclesiology, we can identify six types of community:

- the church as a sacramental community, stressing ritual and worship;
- the church as a charismatic community emphasizing the different talents of the individual members;
- the church as a confessional community stressing the purity of church doctrine;
- the church as a solidary community emphasizing the diaconate in relationship to the poor and oppressed;
- the church as a 'folkchurch' with incidentally participation of the members (baptism, marriage and funeral);
- the church as a 'liberal' community with optimal freedom for the individual. Investigating the practice we expect to find mixed types also.

In the next phase, we have to develop an empirical research design investigating six main reformed communities. Our methods are analyzing the content of documents (minutes of meetings for instance), participatory observing and interviews. Next we shall develop a questionnaire, concerning the results of our qualitative research in relationship with the different types of community. The results shall be evaluated with help of literature. At the end, we hope that we can formulate suggestions to initiate a model of community development honoring processes of individualization and subjectivity at one hand and normative ecclesiological insights at the other.

Finally, I hope that I have offered you a clear view of the empirically orientated approach in the field of practical theology, especially in the Netherlands.

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E.

The Contribution and Identity of an
Academic Practical Theology

Reiner Preuß

Contextuality and the Unity of Practical Theology

I was asked by the organizers of the conference to contribute with three papers which would represent different methodological approaches to the subject-matter of Practical Theology. The purpose of this request was that I should show – I assume – that these different approaches are complementary in such a way that the blind spot of one approach is filled in by the other so that in the end – beyond from a theoretical standpoint above the different approaches – the unity of the whole discipline would become visible as a *totality*, only showing the way to productive cooperation with other fields of work or labour for all Practical Theologians. Now, I am very sorry to say that I cannot fulfill this task and that I must content myself with a preliminary attempt at combining the different approaches to Practical Theology or at placing them in a comprehensive conceptual framework, which is for me too complicated a task. The reason for this is that I do not want to present a program for Practical Theology, but rather to reflect on the different approaches such as – for example – hermeneutical or linguistic approaches.

E.

The Contribution and Identity of an Academic Practical Theology

In this situation, I can only make reference to my own, self-experienced witness to what Riet Bone-Sapin and Jürgen Habermas and Hans Joerges have expounded. My remarks will concern first of all, my understanding of the task and objective of Practical Theology. Second, my view of the unity of our discipline. Third, values which of understanding the concept of contextuality, which in the end is anything but univocal.

1. What is Practical Theology?

My answer is: Practical Theology is an integral part of the system of theological disciplines. Even though doing Practical Theology implies knowledge from all theological disciplines, and even though we produce theories ourselves, Practical Theology is – as Bonhoeffer said – a technical discipline, the concern of which is the ongoing improvement of ecclesial activities. The *realis* corresponds to the subject-matter of Practical Theology. The *univocal* and, at the same time, internally differentiated subject-matter of Practical Theology is a

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Contextuality and the Unity of Practical Theology

I was asked by the organizers of the conference to comment upon three papers which would represent different methodological approaches to the subject-matter of Practical Theology. The purpose of this request was that I should show – if possible – that these different approaches are complementary in such a way that the blind spot of one approach is filled in by the other so that in the end – viewed from a theoretical standpoint above the different approaches – the unity of the whole discipline would become visible as a differentiated unity showing the way to productive cooperation and an organized division of labour for all Practical Theologians. Now, I am very unhappy that I cannot fulfill this task and that I must disappoint such expectations. The attempt at combining the approaches in the given presentations or at placing them in a comprehensive conceptual framework seems to me too complicated a task. They represent – in my opinion – different programs for Practical Theology as a whole with certain implications for Theology as a whole rather than different methodological approaches such as – for instance – sociological, psychological or linguistic approaches.

In this situation, I can only make remarks of my own, with occasional reference to what Riet Bons-Storm and Gerben Heiting and Camil Ménard have expounded. My remarks will concern three points: First, my understanding of the task and objective of Practical Theology; second, my view of the unity of our discipline; third, various ways of understanding the concept of contextuality, which to my mind is anything but univocal.

I. What is Practical Theology?

My answer is: Practical Theology is an integral part of the system of theological disciplines. Even though doing Practical Theology implies knowledge from all theological disciplines, and even though we produce theories ourselves, Practical Theology is – as Schleiermacher said – a technical discipline, the concern of which is the ongoing improvement of ecclesial activities. This interest corresponds to the subject-matter of Practical Theology: The unitary and, at the same time, internally differentiated subject matter of Practical Theology is a

social system, a system of activities, namely the church as the system of communication of the christian understanding of reality. This system comprises different *positions* or standpoints (all professions and jobs in the church including those of lay people), different *situations* of praxis (worship, education, pastoral care and so on), and different *media* for communicating the christian understanding of reality (like words, gestures, pictures, liturgy, forms of behaviour). The activity of the church, the maximum improvement of which is the concern of Practical Theology, takes various forms in this system. They are, however, capable of precise classification according to the criteria of 'position', 'situation' and 'medium'. A full explanation of this would elaborate on the morphology of the ecclesial system in its present state of affairs.

So my answer to the question „What is Practical Theology?“ obviously combines Schleiermachers conception of Theology as a whole with a systemic approach in the field of Practical Theology.

Let me add two brief remarks for more precision:

1. Practical Theology has not only to deal with the activities in given traditional situations of communication, but also with the arrangement or rearrangement of such situations and their connection. This is the main concern of the subdiscipline of cybernetics, a neglected subdiscipline which should be revitalized.

2. Reflecting upon the church system in order to improve the areaspecific activities and the arrangement of ecclesial interactions does not only presuppose knowledge from all other theological disciplines but also implies knowledge from the humanities, especially from sociology and psychology. There is, actually, no research in the field of humanities and social sciences which could be judged useless for Practical Theology. This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the participants and addressees of ecclesial communication are *individuals* developing their mind, attitudes and forms of behaviour in the context of modern life, and that, on the other hand, the ecclesial system as a whole is *interacting with all the other systems and institutions of society*, such as the system of political organization, the system of jurisdiction, the system of economy, the educational system and so on. This is another reason to reinforce the approach of cybernetics. We should pay more attention to the interaction of the ecclesial system with all the other systems and institutions in modern society.¹

¹ For a precise analysis of this interaction cf. Eilert Herms, Kirche in der Zeit, in: E. Herms, Kirche für die Welt, Tübingen 1995, pp. 231-317.

Envisaging society and the various functions of the church in society, we should not merely complain about secularization.²

II. How the Unity of Practical Theology can be conceived

My hypothesis is: The 'unity of Practical Theology' can only mean that the objectives pursued in its different subdisciplines are not only non-contradictory but complementary.

Let me outline the context and the meaning of this definition of the unity of Practical Theology by some brief remarks.

1. The hypothesis is a conceptual definition, not an abstraction from observations of what is actually going on: In fact, many Practical Theologians disagree about the objectives of their endeavours, and that calls the unity of Practical Theology into question. Thus, I only wanted to mark the battlefield on which the struggle for the unity of the discipline has to take place, if there is to be struggle.

2. The unity of Practical Theology is not achieved by the proclamation of a new paradigm or by the predominance of a particular methodological approach – for instance pastoral psychology –, not even by common research projects or by international conferences, although the latter are very useful.

3. The unity of Practical Theology is called into question neither by a pluralism of methods and methodologies, nor by a high degree of specialization, nor by the intensification of area-specific debates in its subdisciplines. All this may be a burden for the dialogue of Practical Theologians, but it has to be tolerated. The unity of Practical Theology conceived in terms of a systemic coordination of objectives and aims must be compatible with the plurality of specialized methodologies corresponding to their respective fields, with the dispute about different models of action and with the development of relatively independent debates in its subdisciplines.

4. The central idea of a systemic coordination of objectives in the area-specific theories corresponds to the subject-matter of Practical theology which I described as a system of ecclesial activities. So contradiction in the aims of the respective theories amounts to contradiction in the very activities which would be disastrous for the whole

² For a more extensive development of my conception of Practical Theology see my article „Was leistet die Praktische Theologie für die Einheit der Theologie?“ In: Pastoraltheologische Informationen 13 (1993), vol. 1, pp. 77-92.

social system of the church. And it would disturb the minds of the members of the church who need a clear concept of the identity of christian faith and life. Such a contradiction is given in its extreme form when the activities are based on incompatible ideas about the destiny of humanity or the character of the Christian's liberation and liberty. Therefore: A system of complementary objectives and, consequently, the unity of our discipline can only be established on the basis of a consensus about the identity of christian existence, an identity which, though not positing a uniform picture of christian life, must be the same for men and women, young and old people, poor and rich people, Europeans and Africans and Americans and so on.

Is this identity called into question or, perhaps, even rendered impossible when we pay attention to the difference of cultural context? This question leads us to our last issue.

III. What do we mean by „contextuality“?

The word „context/contextuality“ is an element in the ordinary language of English-speaking people, not so of German-speaking people. The term has only recently been introduced into both our ordinary and academic language. In my own writings I used the term very seldom, though I am consistently concerned with the phenomena the term stands for. The introduction of the term and the consistent demand that we should be aware of contextuality when doing Theology or Practical Theology raises the question what the term really means. Is there some sort of program behind the term?

As far as I can see, there are at least three ways of using the term „context“ or „contextuality“.³

1. First, it can mean and usually means that the christian message – like any other message – has always been confronted and will at all times be confronted with questions, needs and interests which emerge from life experiences under various and changing conditions; and this applies to social, cultural and intellectual conditions. An outstanding example of this is the demand of women who want to know what christian liberation from evil and sin and christian liberty means for them. We are concerned with comparable questions in every good

³ I skip the unproblematic usage of „context“ which occurs e.g. in the advice that we should always pay attention to the context of a sentence if we want to grasp its precise meaning. In German we say: Man darf einen Satz nicht aus seinem Zusammenhang reißen.

sermon as well as in Systematic Theology and in Ethics. „Contextuality“ on this level also implies that the christian and the theological discourse within the church and beyond the church focusses upon certain topics which we call „Schlüsselprobleme“ in German. As the three papers have pointed out, „hope“, „liberty“ and „justice“ are among these key problems. Practical Theology is primarily concerned with this kind of „contextuality“.

2. In another context – if I may say so – „contextuality“ refers to the means we use in doing Theology in all its branches. In all our studies in Historical, Systematic and Practical Theology, we employ terms, concepts and methods which are worked out outside of Theology in other sciences and in Philosophy. In conjunction with the evolution of extra-theological thinking and research, our own vocabulary and conceptual network changes. And that, of course, has a tremendous impact on how we see and interpret the phenomena we are concerned with. There is, in fact, no specific theological method at all; Theology has only a small number of words of its own which only make sense in a religious language game, words like „God“, „religion“, „salvation“, „sin“, „creation of the world“ and „prayer“. Exactly these words have to be permanently reinterpreted by means of other words borrowed from other language games.

This aspect of „contextuality“ can be derived from the general theory of signs worked out by Charles William Morris.⁴ There is a syntax of signs, which means that every sign and every system of signs can only be understood by reference to other signs and other systems of signs. And that prevents us from being trapped in our own language games. It is obvious that this aspect of „contextuality“ is stressed in a pluralistic society. I adopt the proposition of the british Rabbi Jonathan Sacks that in this situation we should all become bilingual⁵. We must be able to articulate our own belief sufficiently in terms of our own inherited biblical language and we must develop another language for the dialogue with other believers and non-believers, a language that enables us to express shared meaning and difference.

By the way, on this second level of „contextuality“, the juxtaposition of normativity and contextuality does not make sense. There is only normativity for any speaker *within* contextuality; whereas on the first

⁴ Charles W. Morris, Foundations of the Theory of Signs, in: Foundations of the Unity of Science, vol. I, n.2, edited by O. Neurath, Chicago & London 1938.

⁵ Cf. J. Sacks, The Persistence of Faith. Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age, London 1990, pp. 66ff.

level mentioned above – that of question and answer, challenge and response – there is a tension between normativity and context.

3. On a third level, „contextuality“ must be considered in connection with the issue of truth claims. In this respect contextuality often means the same as relativity. Propositions and doctrines are relative to certain historical or social contexts. They only apply to their original or to similar contexts. This immediately raises the question, whether our christian doctrine or message is also relative to a certain context.

Now, this seems to be a problem for Systematic Theology. Being Practical Theologians, we do not produce doctrines but theories, models and rules of action, and these, of course, primarily refer to a given specific state of affairs of the ecclesial system. So we could leave the question to our colleagues in Systematic Theology – if there were not the problem mentioned above: the problem of the identity and nature of christian existence all over the world, which is the basis for our search for a system of objectives.

Instead of an extended discussion, I just want to point out two ideas which we should take into account when attempting to solve the question of contextuality in connection with the question of truth claims. Both ideas amount to a reformulation of the relation of normativity and contextuality, namely – on the one hand – in terms of identity and variety of human communities and – on the other hand – in terms of identity and variety, continuity and discontinuity of the christian life. So I plead, on this level, for a solution of the problem by its replacement.

First: What is the context of christian doctrine or message? The traditional and proper answer to this question is: The christian doctrine does not refer to a particular historical context but to the *conditio humana* as such. And this common condition or unitary context consists in the fact that there is interaction of persons who are individually gifted and endowed with finite freedom, reason and responsibility. Every particular human community and all forms of social life and, consequently, all sorts of specific contexts emerge from this one common *conditio humana* or fundamental situation. In other words: God did not make several orders of creation – like the state, marriage, family, the common market and so on – but only one⁶. All the rest is worked out, improved or damaged by interacting persons making use

⁶ For this understanding of the topic „order of creation“ see Eilert Herms, Die Lehre von der Schöpfungsordnung, in: E. Herms, Offenbarung und Glaube, Tübingen 1992, pp. 431-456.

of their finite freedom and being guided in doing so either by the Holy Spirit or by some other spirit. According to these different spirits or interests, there are different ways to interpret the *conditio humana* and to deal with it, but all of them refer to one and the same fundamental situation or context. Thus, identity and variety coincide in this view.⁷

Secondly, in my very last point, I switch over to Martin Luther's vision of the identity and variety, continuity and discontinuity of christian life or, more precisely: to the way he conceived what in Dogmatics is called the topic of the *ordo salutis*.⁸ Luther is in favour of a dramatic and dynamic model of the *ordo salutis*. According to his model, the believers' life is insofar identical and continuously the same as they are permanently confronted with the same radical choice between two alternatives: trusting in God's goodness and mercy or trusting in their own capabilities and merits. But, on the other hand, these radical alternatives occur in different form and roles. There is — at its best — a growing knowledge of God's mercy and an increasing experience of it on the one hand, and, on the other, an unpredictable multitude of tribulations and temptations. Metaphorically speaking: the devil plays many roles using many masks and appearances, and so does God. And that brings variety and discontinuity into the christian's life.

I think this dramatic model of *ordo salutis* is compatible with all shapes and features of modernity, because it is open to various contexts on either side. To help people in their choice, their multiple choice between the manifold and radical alternatives is the motive of all our theological work. And since nothing is more helpful than the improvement of the ecclesial system of communication, there is a lot of work to do for Practical Theology.

⁷ I was asked in the discussion at the Berne conference whether speaking of the *conditio humana* would promote „unhistorical thinking“. Instead of an extended response I would just like to reply that historical thinking implies the question how and why history and historical thinking are possible at all. Referring to a universal *conditio humana*— described in formal terms like finite freedom, responsibility and interaction— must not be confounded with any substantial interpretation of the *conditio humana* as, for instance, the christian doctrine about the nature and destiny of humanity which, of course, is rooted in a specific experience within history.

⁸ Different models of *ordo salutis* have been sketched and discussed by Manfred Marquardt, *Die Vorstellung des „ordo salutis“ in ihrer Funktion für die Lebensführung der Glaubenden*, in: *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie* III, 1990, pp. 29-53. For the most elaborated theory of the *ordo salutis* (David Hollaz) see Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, Kampen 1991, pp. 126ff.

Klaus Wegenast

Practical Theology and the Science of Exegesis Remarks to a relationship to be structured anew

Outline:

1. Introductory remarks to the development of the problem
2. Exegetical developments
3. What about Practical Theology?
4. Difficulties and obstacles of a cooperation between exegesis and practical theology
5. Perspectives for a new cooperation between exegesis and practical theology by the example of Religious Education

1. Introductory remarks to the development of the problem

Practical Theology and its Relation to other Theological Disciplines

For many years now, in all of the theological areas, the relationship of the various disciplines to the Gospel in society is being questioned. Theology is primarily based on the interpretation of texts, is dependent on an activity of application determined by others. This activity of application seems to be of secondary nature for the narrowed theory of practice. In this model practical theology, especially, however, homiletics and the different parts of religious education is something like a one-way street „from the text to the sermon“, „from the text to the instruction model“, „from the text to the situation“ or „from the Gospel to life“. That every theory, also the discipline of exegesis, does have essential presuppositions in the practice, here in the lived practice of religion in a certain society and besides this is dependent on theological and historical contexts, is blinded out just as a reflection of the possible undesired consequences of the given theoretical aspects. In this context I think also about the uncountable wounded souls of people, who were never allowed to grow up, because the respect (Nachachtung) of biblical facts did not allow it.

At this stage theology in all of its disciplines needs to be asked — especially in the German speaking countries — if she wants to hold on to the traditional hierarchies of thinking or if she should not seek new models of cooperation between the disciplines, but also between theory and practice. For our topic this is the problem: How can the exe-

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1. Introductory remarks to the development of the problem

For many theologians, especially in the German speaking areas, the relationship of the theological discipline to the practice of the Gospel in society is one of a goal-oriented theory. This theory is primarily based on the interpretation of texts, is depended on an activity of application determined by others. This activity of application seems to be of secondary nature for the narrowed theory of practice. In this model practical theology, especially, however, homiletics and the different parts of religious education is something like a one-way street „from the text to the sermon“, „from the text to the instruction model“, „from the text to the situation“ or „from the Gospel to life“. That every theory, also the discipline of exegesis, does have essential presuppositions in the practice, here in the lived practice of religion in a certain society and besides this is dependent on theological and historical contexts, is blended out just as a reflection of the possible undesired consequences of the given theoretical aspects. In this context I think also about the uncountable wounded souls of people, who were never allowed to grow up, because the respect (Nachachtung) of biblical facts did not allow it.

At this stage theology in all of its disciplines needs to be asked – especially in the German speaking countries – if she wants to hold on to the traditional hierarchies of thinking or if she should not seek new models of cooperation between the disciplines, but also between theory and practice. For our topic this is the problem: How can the exe-

getical efforts dealing with the situations of origin of faith and its first witnesses, dependent especially on historical and philological methods, and on highly specialized handicraft-knowledge of the practical-theological disciplines, which depends also on the work of social scientists in the activities of the church in society, how can these efforts be placed in a relationship with one another to assure that the Gospel is heard in its truth and the people of today are seen in their societal context.

The time has come to tackle this problem in a comprehensive way. This means that we have to ask equally after the „object“ of the Gospel – this is not only an exegetical question – and after the people in the context of their environment, to whom this Gospel is directed – this is not just a practical-theological problem. Let me speak first to the development of this problem:

When we look at the forms of cooperation between practical theology and scientific exegesis during the past fifty years, we note that they show clearly the different concepts of the individual presuppositions of the disciplines and the functions one assumes of the other. Of exemplary nature are for German Theology the developments in religious education. The special position of religious education between the church and the secular society makes some things more apparent than in other disciplines. Up to the sixties the German religious education was determined by a form of „Bible interpretation“, which worked paying no attention to the results of the exegetical discipline which had at that time reached an important stage. Stories were told, one asked what the text would want to tell us. That which one experienced was summed up in a memory verse. Critical questions for instance in the context of „mythically“ influenced texts were neglected. This was to change at the moment when at the end of the fifties the general awareness of society started to be guided by the insight that the consciousness of truth and reality of the majority, also of the children and youth, did no longer agree with that of the biblical stories. Now the importance of the Bible for each group had to be shown, without ignoring the interpretive process based on the results of historical criticism. For many teachers in the church and school this development meant a liberation from their notoric bad conscience, having to tell their pupils something as truth which they doubted themselves. It also meant that it was necessary that they gained differentiated knowledge of scientific exegesis. Looking back we can say that this turning of religious education to scientific exegesis meant a long overdue contribution for the enlightenment of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Many faithful teachers experienced, however, more or less acute faith difficulties. What was this enlightenment to mean for the

life and action of their pupils? This question led in the sixties first to a coalition between the hermeneutic of Rudolf Bultmann, more accurately the „existential interpretation“ of biblical texts, and a group of religious educators. They developed a didactic of the Bible as „a teaching art, to teach understanding“, which depended on the hermeneutic as „a teaching art of understanding“, as it was done in exegesis. This didactic of the Bible was insofar successful in that it was again and again possible to bring about a dialogue between the selfunderstanding given in the text of a biblical author and of today's youth and their questions dealing with self, world and God. It apparently did not succeed to include the life-world, the normal day and the problems of the pupils into an adequate consideration of their work. Something similar happened in view of the integration of developmental- psychological knowledge, especially as the selection of the contents of instruction for the different age groups was concerned. As a reaction to this situation and also based on the societal conditions the so-called problem-oriented instruction was developed. This was to better clarify the relevance of the tradition over against the real questions of the pupils. For this new form of instruction the biblical texts and the scientific exegesis were only insofar of interest, as they promised to contribute toward the solution of concrete problems in the here and now. The question was no longer if a biblical text was important on theological grounds for a transmission, but if it promised to contribute something to the solution of an actual problem.

I cannot go into more detail here. As one can see, exegesis was now no longer important for religious education. This was again to change at the moment when it became more and more apparent that it was not enough to make aware of problems and to work on them with the help of the Christian tradition, but that we also need to consider that we have to face problems and conflicts, even if we fail. Were not in the Bible experiences mentioned, which could be helpful at this stage? This meant now that everyday experiences, which apparently existed in the Bible, were to be reconstructed and renewed in elementary reflections with the help of the creative and the inspiring power of religious language. But were was in the exegetical science the partner, who could pick up this new question and who could deal with biblical texts in still another way than with the categories of historical criticism? This question remained first unanswered and led on the one hand to a frontal critique of the exegetical discipline by the practical theologians and by some exegetes thinking ahead, on the other hand, it led to attempts by non-exegetes and exegetes to deal with texts of the Old and New Testament with new questions.

Let us first look at the critique: „Historical criticism is bankrupt...Bible-criticism is not bankrupt, because they had lost those things about which they could have said something....; she is bankrupt because she cannot fulfill the task, which most representatives see as her task: To interpret scripture in such a way that the past becomes alive and new possibilities of personal and societal change are made clear for the present.“ (W. Wink, *Bibelauslegung als Interaktion*, 1976,7 = *Biblical Interpretation as Interaction*) Apparently the program of „world-understanding through history“, which in theology held faith and religion methodically in the historical immanence for almost two hundred years, had failed to show the relevance of that which was historically witnessed. In other words, this means that the emancipatory program of the liberal middle class, which placed the truth of faith categorically into the past, was in danger to lose the Gospel for today. The religious educator Ingo Baldermann puts it this way: „It is apparent that that strange boredom with the Bible, which...in the Protestant realm...was articulated so strongly, could only grow on the ground of such an incapable use of the Bible. When the expectation is lacking that in the use of this book still something new and decisive can be learned, why should the sermon and instruction, week after week,...wrestle with these difficult texts?“

2. Exegetical developments

For a few years now the scientific interpretation of Scripture shows first results and side glances are given the problems of the practice of the Gospel. Besides the work of Gerd Theissen (*Biblischer Glaube in evolutionärer Sicht*, 1984 (*Biblical faith in an evolutionary view*); *Argumente für einen kritischen Glauben*, 1978 (*Arguments for a critical faith*); *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie*, Göttingen 1983 (*Psychological aspects of Pauline theology*), where he attempts to unite humanitarian-scientific and theological attempts to understand in an integrated model, I mention the hermeneutic of the New Testament by Klaus Berger, which starts with the basic sentence: „To interpret not the world from the Gospel, not to see the world as case of application for a general Norm kept in Scripture, but to disclose the Gospel from the situation (that is, also from the social situation), to discover the meaning of the Gospel from this basis anew, or to allow it to open itself.“(19) This needs to be noticed. However, we should not just start by the pressing experiences of reality, as Berger suggests, but with the everyday experience of our hearers in the context of a secular society, and that not without knowledge of the work as done by G.Soeffner „*Auslegung des Alltags – Der Alltag der Auslegung*“,

Frankfurt 1989 (Interpretation of the weekday – The weekday of Interpretation).

He would now be the place to mention this further authors, who are working on different new approaches to understand the Bible, representatives of a psycho-analytical interpretation with different emphases, materialistic interpreters, linguistic interpreters and protagonists of a so-called interactional reading, only to mention some. There is no time. And how about the aesthetic-reception originating in the science of literature, which with convincing arguments makes us aware of the fact that each interpreter includes himself and his/ her life-story into the process of interpretation and „fills“ the text to be interpreted with his/her experiences and with it constitutes it anew?

Besides some fragmentary hints I did not find in the exegetical literature much of a discussion dealing with the possibilities and limits of interpretations mentioned. I finish this part with the citation out of a recent publication done by my Bern colleague Ulrich Luz and published by Fortress-Press (Matthew in History. Interpretation, Influence and Effect, Minneapolis 1994):

„Historical-critical research therefore only had an emancipative character, and helped contribute to the autonomy of the rational human subject, but it could not help establish the fundamental theological question of truth. This is – I think – the basic problem of historical-critical exegesis, the results of which today can be seen in its theological and existential insignificance. The historical-critical method today has lost even this emancipative character, and that is the final reason why it has become meaningless for us.“(11)

Thus far so bad. Luz then tries to sketch a few perspectives for a new reading of the Bible. This makes a practitioner curious and lets us hope that it will lead to a new quality of cooperation between exegesis and practical theology. Before I will say more to this, let me take a quick look at that which carefully I like to refer to as the self-understanding of practical theology.

3. And Practical Theology?

Here it cannot be my task to sketch the history of origin of the scientific discipline of practical theology, not even starting with the time after the Second World War. It will only be possible, in a few strokes to place before us an outline of that which is presently intended by Practical Theology: Practical Theology, with all of its subdisciplines and

because of the competition of priority between churchly partial systems, needs today be construed as an „open system“ (P.C.Bloth). Its character as „sum total“, out of very different disciplines and fields of action, she needs „to seek and discern from the relation to today's religious and social pluralistic context, which modern 'differentiation' was once its constitutional base and still is.“(109) The total 'sum' of the practical theological disciplines refers to, this we can say, not first of all with history, as for instance is the case of exegesis, but in cooperation with different humanitarian and social sciences with present-day societal action of the „church“. Thereby she examines and projects also conditions by which communication science, psychology, aesthetics and others are theologically received and analysed and formed onto present life-forms of the Christian religion. Analysis and construction of action are the challenge.

As practical theology she is referred to the total societal field and beyond institutional boundaries of the different churches, on which again and again „church“ in a theological sense can occur. As religious education practical theology forces the church to face the questions and attempts to understand faith and religion also from its psychological and sociological function and to transmit theology selectively. And it is here that the questions arises which possible models of cooperation between exegesis and religious education should be taken, knowing of the apparent and different secular sciences on which they are also dependent.

4. Difficulties and obstacles of a cooperation between exegesis and practical theology

From our outline of bible didactics of the past thirty years and the sketch of the scientific interpretation of the Bible, as well as of the tasks of Practical Theology, there are besides possible perspectives of a fruitful cooperation, which we like to look at in this last section, also several difficulties.

First I like to refer to the already put into apostrophies, the clarity about the relationship of the Bible and the practice of the Gospel and its simulating language, which is especially disturbing there, where we have to do with complex questions. What does the often used phrase mean „a text needs to be spoken into a certain situation“? Apparently here is everything simplification. What does text mean here? Which interpretation measures are considered? Where does one assume the tertium comparationis between „text and situation“? What is meant by situation? Looking at it closely everything is unclear and probably

places before us a mirror of unreflected practice. As if we should transmit or communicate texts! What needs to be transmitted, is not the text, but if I am right, the Gospel, which needs to seek language ever anew and which under some circumstances could be changed through holy texts.

The second difficulty I note in that the Scripture science as a rule leaves the societal usage of its results to other disciplines or at once to the practitioners and avoids the discussion with the laity or even the practitioners. This leads then to the fatal coexistence, to which Christian Gremmels had pointed to already in the early seventies: „Scientific specialists decide on correct and false interpretation of Scripture, while practical specialists are not at all touched by it decide about correct and false organisation of church structures.“

Another difficulty for a successful cooperation I see in the fact that exegetes seldom ask with clear categories for the content of experience of biblical statements and they are not interested to face an explicit social-science and theological-responsible discussion with present life-reality as prerequisite for one's own understanding. This is true inspite of the movement mentioned, which we examined previously. Instead of learning more, one fails to recognize the importance of the present scientific-methodological questions and this in part with a pseudotheological fervour.

5. Perspectives for an actual cooperation between exegesis and religious education

A cooperation between exegesis and practical theology is, as we noticed before, always also determined by a specific history of theology and by societal conditions, especially in the area of the relationship between religion and the world.

Before a promising and successful cooperation between the two disciplines it is important one is aware of this condition. This means for both cooperating disciplines, that they should, for example, also realize which relationships to other theological and non-theological sciences are clear and which are not. The situation is in no way this, that exegesis is ONLY theology and practical theology is overloaded by secular sciences.

Let us start with the possibilities which after a clearing of the meaning of other sciences for one's own doing would speak for a cooperation, for example, by the interpretation of Scripture. Such a cooperative in-

terpretation can not be exhausted in that the text of the past as past is to be made understandable for today, but needs to make aware that the present experience of reality and insight of faith is an important prerequisite for the interpretation and needs to be included in the exegetical work. For this there is needed next to the known historical-critical instrument a whole arrangement of other approaches to the biblical tradition, which needs to be activated. It will also be necessary to correct the relationship of authority having been developed through the centuries between the so-called experts and the laity of interpretation. In this connection I like to mention in first place the desirable dialogue between scientific exegesis and the present experience of the so-called laity, as already tested in the so-called interactional reading, but also in biblio-drama and in symbol-didactics for some time. Desirable is also a dialogue between scientific exegesis and interpretive methods of non-theological sciences. I am thinking here of the methods of in-depth-psychology, linguistics of different kinds etc. In such dialogues not only creative capabilities could be set free, but also the discovery is possible that different interaction forms in the context of exegesis can lead to surprising insights in the process of understanding. This I have especially experienced in connection with different responsible forms used with youth and adults in religious education in the work with the Bible. In other words this would mean that the content and relationship dimension in the process of interpreting texts is distinguished, but also related to one another.

Another chance for a sensible cooperation between religious education and scientific exegesis lies in the well known fact that not only the biblical text has a certain „Sitz im Leben“, that is, a certain situation of origin with specific kinds of communicative action in the context with the constitution and change of reality, but also today's hearing and reflecting the Bible is tied without a doubt to life-historical, societal and cultural presuppositions.

The work with tradition within the New Testament is for that which is meant an impressive example. Thus there is in the writings of the New Testament nowhere an „exegesis“, for example, texts out of the tradition Israel's used for themselves and with the understanding that by pure explanation of such texts one could present the „Holy“ and his eternal will. By such „exegesese“ the tradition and the situation of single persons and groups are related in a reciprocal interpretive process. This means: referring to tradition is not enough for establishing a theological statement. A tradition gains meaningfulness and binding force for the present only when it helps to understand present experience of reality anew and in this process itself being understood anew, under circumstances can also be critically changed.

Peter Biehl, religious educator in Göttingen, states: „Present relevance of biblical tradition is not primarily given by scientific work, but made possible and experience in that it becomes real in present life-relationships of Christianity and the church. In that persons, groups and institutions in their faith, behaviour and action use today biblical tradition and this usage is responsible within the context of their peers, only then critical memory becomes possible in an 'emancipatory intention'.“

From this we gain consequences for a future cooperation:

1. As system of relation for the interpretation of biblical tradition the question concerning the constitution and change of reality through communicative action is recommended for exegesis and for religious education. Thereby biblical theology through exegesis gains insofar a fundamental importance as it mentions the basic difficulties in the individual system of relation from the past and present in the horizon of human experience. I am thinking here of presuppositions and consequences of domination, the question of sense or nonsense of suffering, of evil and the acceptance of guilt; about enthusiastic joy and thankfulness...and then about forms of solving conflicts, the change of things, new beginnings, forms of resistance etc.

2. The manifold and more-dimensionality of cooperation between an exegesis, which reflects the biblical tradition in the context of present-day experiences of reality, and a religious education, which uses present-day experiences of reality in instruction each time new with the questions of traditions, how she faces it in a discussion with today's questions, this being a continuous task.

3. The scientific exegesis has a far greater horizon in such a cooperation. The domination of the historical-critical method, not as yet adequately reflected as to its prerequisites and consequences, is relativized and the task of further methodical clearing of yet unusual interpretive forms of interdisciplinary work is being tackled. That is: Neither exegesis, nor religious education can remain the same after the dialogue. Exegesis will contribute within the frame of the sketched reciprocal process of understanding between tradition and reality, that the agonizing reality is being changed and she will also in view of today's faith- and reality experience bring about objective criticism to tradition, for example, will try to question the societally selfunderstood culture of obedience in the Old and New Testaments.

Religious education, whose task it is to analyse and to construct today's practice of the Gospel in instructional learning processes, will not only work with these means of education and didactic, psychology

and sociology, but will also assume questions which come about through the new work with the Bible. Therefore in the future there cannot be a questionless church practice, which legitimates itself through the citation of pleasing texts of the Bible or through societal theories, as it can no longer exist unconditional validity of exegetical statements. Both would mean the necessity for a fundamental change of the communicative dimension of practice and theory of the church and theology on all levels.

We have arrived at the end of our considerations and ask for practicable ways for a change of reality.

Duncan B. Forrester

Practical Theology and Ethics

In the University of Edinburgh a chair was allocated to Practical Theology in the 1930s only on condition that it was linked with Christian Ethics. Christian Ethics was seen as a 'respectable' discipline, entitled to a place in the academy on the basis of an established methodology and intellectual track record; Practical Theology was still regarded as an uncritical hotchpotch of hints and tips for ministers – at best (as students occasionally amended the heading on the departmental notice board by adding two letters) Practically Theology; at worst, the tedious presentation to students by an ageing former minister of his pattern of pastoral practice of some decades before as a model of ministry. This suspicion of Practical Theology was particularly strange in a Scottish university where the tradition has been constantly maintained, against the theoretical thrust of Oxbridge, that higher education is primarily directed to professional **practice**. This distinction between Scotland and England is captured in an intriguing difference in linguistic usage: in Oxbridge one reads 'a subject, even if it is engineering or social work; in Scotland one 'does' a subject, even if it is metaphysics or literature! It used to be said that the English believed that if a student had read Plato and Thucydides, Homer and Euripides, he was perfectly equipped to govern a colony, command an army, lead a gentlemanly life of leisure, or become a bishop – which last was regarded as the explanation why some bishops seemed to understand the state of the church on the analogy of the siege of Troy, and any innovation as a Trojan horse!

Although the link between Christian Ethics and Practical Theology with us was originally adventitious, we now feel that it was almost providential, allowing us to focus on practice, approached both analytically and normatively. The ethics with which we are concerned is Christian or theological ethics, which draws on Scripture and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and unashamedly possesses that classical conviction that ethics is concerned with goodness and character, and with helping people to be good, with 'the embodiment, in the actions and transactions of actual social life of Christian insights.'¹ Although for decades many moral philosophers in the English speaking world

¹ A. MacIntyre. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1990, pp.80 & 175

under the influence of the movement of linguistic analysis devoted themselves to language games and denied that they had any concern with helping people to be good or societies to be just, **Christian Ethics** on the whole successfully resisted being sucked into this cul-de-sac, and remained an engaged normative study of action, rooted in a particular tradition, narrative and community of shared faith. With us, and in some other places as well, Practical Theology for a time simply piggybacked quite happily on this kind of Christian Ethics.

Although a linkage such as ours between Practical Theology and Christian Ethics has clear advantages, and opens a range of positive possibilities, it also presents dangers. What happens, for instance, if Ethics is detached from Systematics? Is it possible that then Systematics may lose its ethical seriousness and integrity, and become increasingly pure *theoria*? And Christian Ethics linked to Practical Theology of a certain kind might sacrifice critical theological rigour, becoming narrow, no more than ethics at the service of ministerial practice, a professional ethics for clergy. On the other hand, what happens when Christian Ethics is treated more or less as an independent discipline, with a real hegemony over other theological disciplines, as in some institutions in the States? These are issues of the relationships between the theological disciplines, and other disciplines (for the purposes of this discussion primarily moral philosophy and the human sciences), to which I now turn directly.

Academic Encyclopaedia and its Limits

The modern university and even (with appropriate qualifications) most seminaries, reflect and reinforce the increasing specialisation and fragmentation of modern life. The tidy ordering of the medieval university, with theology as the Queen of the Sciences, is unrecoverable, but we are faced today with various and conflicting endeavours to give some kind of coherence to the academic enterprise as a whole. The way the definition and relations of disciplines are arranged, the way a university is structured, express implicitly or explicitly an ideology, a world-view, an overarching interpretation. In premodern days the general effort was to locate specific studies within a biblical grand narrative;² in modern times the Bible, religion, the Christian faith, theology and ethics are to be fitted into the project of an encyclopaedia, ordering all knowledge in terms of some more or less secular principle.

² So Hans Frei and others.

Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1873 ff.) pointed towards a time when '[t]he Encyclopaedia would have displaced the Bible as the canonical book, or set of books of the culture'.³ Accordingly, the Bible (and all thinking rooted in the Bible), 'is judged by the standards of... modernity in a way which effectively prevents it from standing in judgement upon that modernity'.⁴ It is here, I think, that central problems lie: is it possible for Practical Theology and Christian Ethics to be in the university, but not domesticated or tamed by the university? How can they maintain a distinctive critical distance from the increasingly secular and confused values of the university so that they can play a specific sort of constructive role? Is a dual responsibility, to church and to the academy, any longer viable?

I come from a particular Enlightenment encyclopaedic tradition in which a theologically informed and practically orientated moral philosophy was the keystone of the academic edifice, as it were. I encountered the warm afterglow of this tradition in the teaching of the moral philosopher John Macmurray in Edinburgh in the 1950s. The same tradition was for long enshrined in the old American colleges influenced by the Scottish academy, where the President, normally a theologian or philosopher, lectured to the whole student body on moral philosophy. A theologically informed moral philosophy was assumed to give coherence to the educational process, and guidance for living life well.⁵ MacIntyre suggests that in the nineteenth century there was a mounting tendency to ascribe priority to morality and to ethics or moral philosophy, on the assumption that there was a 'social agreement, especially in practice, on the importance and the content of morality', which none the less 'coexisted with large intellectual disagreements concerning the nature of its intellectual justification', although almost everyone concurred in the belief that such justification was in principle possible.⁶ General consensus about the nature of right conduct, and a bracing degree of difference about the philosophical foundations of morality were believed to give coherence to the academic enterprise.

Elsewhere MacIntyre suggest that there is a kind of tragic inevitability in the collapse of a consensus on metaphysics gradually eroding the

³ MacIntyre. op.cit., p. 19.

⁴ MacIntyre, op.cit., p. 179.

⁵ On this see especially George E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, Edinburgh University Press, 1961.

⁶ MacIntyre, op.cit., p.26.

confidence that disputes about morality may be resolved, so that we enter a stage when we have nihilism in metaphysics co-existing with a liberal consensus on morals and politics. But this liberal consensus, MacIntyre suggests, is fragile and without roots; it is already disintegrating. Yet in the nineteenth century there was still great confidence in the encyclopaedic enterprise.

An alternative encyclopaedic project to that I have outlined was contained in Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*.⁷ This was a sophisticated and creative application of the encyclopaedia principle to theology. Although, in a much abused phrase, Schleiermacher referred to Practical Theology as the 'crown' of theological study, the real crown or capstone of his theological encyclopaedia lay outside theology in 'science'; theology itself was not a science, but a discipline or set of disciplines which deploy the results of science for the sake of the leadership of the church. Theology is thus almost parasitic upon science. It is itself a 'positive' science, 'an assemblage of scientific elements which belong together not because they form a constituent part of the organisation of the sciences, but only in so far as they are responsible for a practical task'.⁸ Unlike theology, ethics is for Schleiermacher a science, but it has no pre-eminent role in relation to theology in general, or to Practical Theology in particular.

Schleiermacher is therefore to be distinguished from the Scottish tradition in the more exalted place he allocates to scientific *theoria*, and his consequent somewhat platonic downgrading of these disciplines which deal with practice – **Christian Ethics** and Practical Theology in particular. We have all heard the story of Barth finding a bust of Schleiermacher in the ruins of Bonn University after the war, and reverently restoring it to its plinth. I believe that, at least in relation to his encyclopaedia project, Schleiermacher is irretrievably bust. We do not today have agreed maps of the academy, and I do not believe that Practical Theologians should spend their time and energy asserting a claim to a place in a non-existent atlas. After all, if the university throws us out, we can operate quite happily in the church – only, as I shall argue, the university would be the poorer for it. I think MacIntyre

⁷ F. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*. Trans. Terence Tice. Richmond, John Knox Press, 1966.

⁸ Schleiermacher, *op.cit.*, p. 19; See Richard R. Osmer, 'Rhetoric, Rationality and Practical Theology', typescript, 1993, pp.4-11 and John E. Burkhart, 'Schleiermacher's Vision for Theology', in Don S. Browning, ed., *Practical Theology*. San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1983.

is right in suggesting that the encyclopaedia is a failed project, with which we should not get entangled.

Theology and Ethics Today

The position both of theology and of ethics in the academy has been much challenged in recent times. MacIntyre is surely right in suggesting that moral and theological truths became increasingly regarded as belonging in the realm of privatised and arbitrary belief: 'Questions of truth in morality and theology – as distinct from the psychological or social scientific study of morals and religion – have become matter for private allegiances, not to be accorded...formal badges of academic recognition'.⁹ Ethics has accordingly been moved to the periphery of academic life, and has increasingly nervously stressed its autonomy, from theology in particular. This has left an ominous vacuum at the heart of the academy. As a consequence academics interested in issues of public policy or social responsibility have sometimes begun to look with expectation towards theology and in particular theological ethics for help and a sense of direction. We are therefore at a time of particular opportunity for a Practical Theology and a Christian Ethics which interpenetrate and inform one another.

Although there are special difficulties today in constructing an acceptable and coherent intellectual map of the university, it is still necessary to say something about why Practical Theology and Christian Ethics continue to claim a place in the academy, and what that place might be. When I was appointed to a chair of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology some of my colleagues in the very secular university in which I then taught thought that the term 'practical theology' was a joke or an oxymoron: theology, they said, cannot be practical, and practice cannot be theological – after all, theology is now commonly used as a term for irrelevant theorising! If we are to claim that the two subjects with which we are concerned are entitled to a place in the university, and have a contribution to make to the endeavours of the university, we have to spell out something of the remit and method and contribution of the subjects. If MacIntyre and others are right in suggesting that the post-encyclopaedic university in a post-modern world is in a crisis in which it is confronted on all sides with questions it lacks the resources to answer, perhaps an ethically informed Practical Theology may be able to suggest some possible

⁹ MacIntyre, *op.cit.* . p.2 17.

ways forward towards a greater relevance and a better sense of being a community of shared purpose.¹⁰

A leading British social scientist concerned particularly with issues of public policy, Professor David Donnison, despairs of the capacity of the modern university to provide the wisdom that society requires. At the root this is because in a culture where most people believe that God is dead, moral judgements have become regarded as 'little more than approving or disapproving noises — expressions of personal preference or taste, much like the words we use when choosing between vanilla and strawberry ice-cream'.¹¹ Since there is no academically acceptable way of resolving conflicts about moral judgements, the commonest strategy is to side-step the issue. Academics are concerned with weighing evidence and assessing logical coherence, because morals are now regarded as arbitrary matters of taste and prejudice they are pushed to the margins and deprived of intellectual dignity:

'As for moral dispute — that has been banished from the lecture rooms altogether, for it leads people to say things like "You ought to be ashamed of yourself", and this is not the kind of things you say in a seminar. To make the distinction unmistakably clear, politicians and priests are brought into such academics from time to time to conduct moral debate; but on a one-off basis, usually at the invitation of student societies, speaking from a different kind of platform — thereby exposing to everybody the unscientific status of their pronouncements.'¹²

This, Donnison concludes, leads to a narrowing and distortion of academic life, which is in many cases condemned to irrelevance or irresponsibility.

Practical Theology

In such a situation the relation of Practical Theology to Christian Ethics assumes a fresh importance. Getting this relationship right may be significant for the academic enterprise as a whole, and helpful to a range of other disciplines.

Practical Theology exists in the academy to affirm that all theology is practical, just as biblical studies reminds theology of the centrality of scripture, and systematic theology points to doctrine as an unavoid-

¹⁰ MacIntyre, op.cit., p.271.

¹¹ David Donnison. *A Radical Agenda* London, Rivers Oram Press, 1991, p.42.

¹² Donnison, op.cit.. p.44.

able element in the theological enterprise.¹³ And if theology is a practical science, in the Aristotelian or any other sense, it cannot be detached from ethics. As MacIntyre writes:

'In moral enquiry we are always concerned with the question: what type of enacted narrative would be the embodiment, in the actions and transactions of actual social life, of this particular theory? For until we have answered this question about a moral theory we do not know what the theory in fact amounts to; we do not as yet understand it adequately.'¹⁴

And a similar point was made by the English moralist and social thinker, R.H.Tawney, when he said, 'To state a principle without its application is irresponsible and unintelligible'.¹⁵ For theology to be a practical science in the classical sense first developed by Aristotle it must be a form of **phronesis**, which is 'a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods'.¹⁶ The person of practical wisdom is able to deliberate well on what is good for the individual, and on the good life in general.

If Practical **Theology** is wisdom or knowledge orientated towards action and accordingly inevitably pervaded with the ethical, it is important also to affirm that it is theology. But what is theology? In the excellent brochure about the University of Berne with which we were supplied, we read that there are two faculties of theology. The Old Catholic Faculty declares that 'Old Catholic Theology is concerned with the question of God'; the Protestant Faculty announces, 'Theology is concerned with religion, Christianity, and the history of the church as well as its present status.' But here lies a central problem for us all. If theological discourse is primarily about religion, it is always in danger of dissolving into study of the context, and becoming a kind of sociology or psychology of religion.

But if theology is discourse about God in the presence of God, and discourse with God, we are engaged with something *totaliter aliter*. We cannot talk about God or talk to God while setting aside, even temporarily, the ethical or normative question: What is God calling us to do? How should we respond? We are also involved simultaneously in doxology, for in the familiar saying, you can't chant the psalms unless you stand up for the Jews.

¹³ On this see especially W.Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*. London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976, pp.231-241 & 423-440.

¹⁴ MacIntyre, *op.cit.*, p.80.

¹⁵ R.H.Tawney, *The Attack and other Papers*. London, 1953, p.178.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi.5 - p.43 of D.Ross edition, Oxford, 1954

Karl Barth was, I think, a paradigmatic practical contextual theologian. He sought to speak of God and to listen to God's command, and to discern the signs of the times. And he addressed the context of his time in two principal ways: first, by producing tracts for the times, declarations (most notably that of Barmen), and manifestos; and, secondly, by taking fundamental theological work with a new seriousness because of his conviction that bad, untrue, sloppy theology leads to unjust, idolatrous, murderous practice, and vice versa. Like any contextual theologian of discernment he provided insights of validity far beyond his immediate context, and fairly quickly he came to see that the primary issue God was posing was what Hitler was doing to the Jews, not the freedom of the church.

Karl Barth was, I believe, right to speak of dogmatics as ethics, and ethics as dogmatics. He refused to set alongside church dogmatics an independent and separate church ethics, let alone an autonomous or freefloating ethics established on an entirely non-theological foundation. 'Dogmatics itself and as such', he affirmed, 'is ethics as well.'¹⁷ It is also true, in Barth's view, that ethics is dogmatics, that ethical activity and reflection inevitably imply beliefs and fundamental assumptions. Ethics and dogmatics, ethics and theology, cannot be divorced; they are inseparably bound to one another. The modern tendency to subordinate theology to ethics, or to separate them, lead to serious distortions. If Barth is right that 'Dogmatics itself is ethics; and ethics is also dogmatics'¹⁸, Christians should be suspicious of the distinction between the theoretical and the practical, especially as it has been developed in the Greek and Enlightenment traditions. For the practical theologian there should be no ugly ditch between 'is' and 'ought'. You cannot name God without recognizing God's claim on you; and you cannot do God's will without in a real way knowing God. The First Letter of John puts the point with admirable clarity and boldness: 'The one who loves is born of God and knows God'.¹⁹ We are reminded again and again in the gospels that disciples are to be 'doers' as well as 'hearers', for Christianity is far more than theory or speculation — it is a way of life. Particularly in the Johannine writings there is a stress on the **doing** of the truth, and on those who love and do the truth as being the ones who know God: 'He who does what is true comes to the light'²⁰ The truth is not regarded as something to be contemplated or examined in a detached way; it is to be encountered, lived out, re-

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1956, p. 783.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 793.

¹⁹ I John 4.7.

²⁰ John 3.21.

lated to, but above all **loved** if it is to be truly known. theology therefore must be concerned with the doing of the truth, with what Roger Garaudy called 'the active nature of knowledge'.²¹

This means that theologians should be very cautious about buying into a sharp cleavage between fact and value, as if there were such a thing as a naked fact, and values were merely cultural constructs. Christian theology is characteristically uncomfortable with the positing of a gulf between 'is' and 'ought' or a sharp disjunction between fact and value, as suggested famously by Max Weber. Weber promoted an ethically neutral social science based on the assumption of an unbridgeable, and tragic, ditch between the 'is' and the 'ought'. Leo Strauss, in attacking Weber, argues that a refusal to entertain the possibility of true value judgements is intellectually and morally spurious; it actually distorts reality, for it

'Would lead to the consequence that we are permitted to give a strictly factual description of the overt acts that can be observed in concentration camps and perhaps an equally factual analysis of the motivation of the actors concerned: we would not be permitted to speak of cruelty. Every reader of such a description who was not completely stupid would, of course, see that the actions described are cruel. The factual description would be a bitter satire. What claimed to be a straightforward report would be an unusually circumlocutionary report. The writer would deliberately suppress his better knowledge, or, to use Weber's favourite term, he would commit an act of intellectual dishonesty.'²²

'Facts' are not part of the givenness of things; our values and our beliefs play an indispensable role in the way we construe reality, discern the signs of the times, and respond. A central academic responsibility is to be critically aware of our values and their roots, as these things deeply shape both our logic and our empirical work, the way we see reality and the way we respond to it. Although I believe that Practical Theology today must have the social sciences as its principal dialogue partners, and I feel Milbank's cautions are exaggerated, there are real dangers if a Practical Theology buys into a Weberian understanding of social science uncritically.²³

If Alasdair MacIntyre is right that the modern university is fragmented and lacks the resources to deal with the questions which confront it, partly because it has become incapable of coherent and rigorous

²¹ Roger Garaudy, *The Alternative Future*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, p.89.

²² Leo Strauss. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p 52.

²³ John Milbar&, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford, Blackwell. 1990

moral enquiry, is it possible that a Practical Theology effectively integrated with Christian Ethics might have a major contribution to offer towards a renewal of academic integrity and responsibility? It is at this point that I think Don Browning's project of a 'strategic practical theology', and his successive studies of ways in which theory-laden practices relate to norms and values are so important²⁴. He constantly sees Practical Theology as an exercise in theological ethics, and Christian Ethics as a central dimension of Practical Theology. For this approach the ugly ditch between 'is' and 'ought', fact and value, has been bridged, in however tentative a way, in order to enable reflected and effective practice. Could this be our gift to the whole academy, in its post-modern disarray and uncertainty?

An Ecclesial Discipline

Both Practical Theology and Christian Ethics are rooted in, and have responsibilities towards two communities—the academy and the church. Schleiermacher famously spoke of the relation between the 'scientific spirit' characteristic of the university, and the 'ecclesial interest' which marked off theology as concerned with leadership in the church. He was right to see the subject as having two homes, and to discern a creative tension between them and their expectations and standards. But Schleiermacher's distinction is in some ways too neat. Perhaps theology can contribute significantly to the recovery of a true scientific spirit in the university. And ecclesial interest can provide both motivation and material for scientific investigation.

It is surely significant that Barth, in a context in which theology was firmly embedded in the university, saw a necessity to speak not of simply **Christian** dogmatics, but **Church** dogmatics and **Church** ethics in order that theology might recover its integrity, fulfil its vocation, and grapple with the issues of the day. In facing a modern situation in which he feels there is a danger of Christian Ethics losing its distinctiveness and dissolving into academic ethics in general, Stanley Hauerwas has developed Barth's point by arguing that the church not only has, but is a social ethic. The primary ethical task of the church, he argues, is to be the church as a community of faith, of worship and of

²⁴ See especially Don S. Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, Westminster, 1976; *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983; *A Fundamental Practical Theology*. Minneapolis, Fortress, 1991

service.²⁵ In expounding John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas suggests that 'Practical reason is not a disembodied process based on abstract principles but a process of a community in which every member has a role to play.'²⁶ Such a community of character, even in its sinfulness, is both a community of moral discourse and an exemplification of the moral orientation sustained by the biblical tradition. For Hauerwas, the only theology and the only ethics that matter are rooted in the life of the church and serve the development of Christian character and faithful practice, participating in the church's function of witnessing to the truth.

This does not mean that Hauerwas sees theology as a kind of in-house discourse, the language game of the Christian community which has no claim to truth in a more general sense. He engages in his writings with issues on the public and the academic agenda, with medical ethics, war and peace, the position of the handicapped, and many others. He comes at these questions from an unashamedly theological and Christian angle, and in so doing often brings a strange freshness to tired controversies, directing the attention to commonly forgotten dimensions and neglected resources. Hauerwas has been accused by James Gustafson and others of 'sectarian withdrawal' from engagement with the moral tensions and ambiguities of what some people call 'the real world'. The charge does not, I think, stick, although I am more sympathetic to the suggestion that Hauerwas tends towards a rather romanticised understanding of the church. His position might be strengthened if he spoke more clearly of how a sinful church in a fallen world can never the less be a sacramental sign of God's love and truth. Hauerwas is determined not to allow Christian Ethics to dissolve into a general ethics of Americanism, and his increasing concentration on the churchliness of Christian Ethics has led him more and more to address the traditional problematic of Practical Theology. Hauerwas is a further sign of the welcome erosion of the boundary between Practical Theology and Christian Ethics, both affirming the crucial significance of the church, and remembering that God's purposes and God's practice encompass the whole creation. Practical Theology and Christian Ethics are ultimately concerned with discerning God's activity in the world, and learning how to respond faithfully and well.

²⁵ S.Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. London, SCM, 1984. p.99. The phrase is repeated frequently in Hauerwas's writings. ²⁶

²⁶ S.Hauerwas. *Christian Existence Today*. Durham, NC, The Labyrinth Press, 1988, p.73.

I have tried to argue three things in this paper::

1. We must erode, or at least make very porous, the boundary between Practical Theology and Christian Ethics, for the sake of the Christian and intellectual integrity of each;
2. his process would make the subject(s) more critically useful to the church;
3. his would also enable a more constructive contribution from the side of Practical Theology/Christian Ethics to the confusions of the academic world today; and
4. his could encourage a more distinctive theological contribution to public moral and policy debate.

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James E. Loder

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 opposition 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“ (*τα 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; I 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.

1. Informationen aus der Fachgruppe Praktische Theologie der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie

Die Sektion Praktische Theologie der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie trifft sich zu ihrer nächsten Jahresagung vom 1.-3. Oktober 1997 in Eisenach. Das Thema lautet: „Medien“.

Als neue Vorsitzende wurden in der Geschäftssetzung am 17. September 1996 in Berlin gewählt:

Vorsitzender: Prof. Dr. Jürgen Ziemer, Leipzig

Stellvertreter: Prof. Dr. Friedrich Schweitzer, Tübingen

2. Informationen aus der Konferenz der deutschsprachigen Pastoraltheologen

G.
Berufungsverfahren in Freiburg, Innsbruck, Erfurt, Trier, Osnabrück
Eine Reihe von Pastoraltheologie-Stellen werden neu besetzt: in Erfurt (Nachf. Friemel) sind noch einige Zeit in einer einzigen in Freiburg (Nachf. Schmitt) und nur Auf des Wiederbesetzungsverfahrens in Trier (Nachf. Felzer). Bereits in Gang ist das Besetzungsverfahren in Tübingen (Nachf. Greinacher). In Osnabrück Dr. Alois Schifferle, Hochschulprofessor in Freiburg, besetzen (nicht Spichtig).

60-jähriges Priesterjubiläum von Ferdinand Fromm

Dr. Ferdinand Fromm, Limburger Domkapitular i.R., feiert im Oktober sein 60-jähriges Priesterjubiläum. Pfr. Fromm, 64, war zuerst verantwortlich für die Fortbildung im Bistum Limburg und u.a. für das interdiözesane Theologisch-Pastorale Institut Mainz. Bis zum Mai 1987 war Weihbischof Prof. Dr. Josef Maria Ruß und dem St. Georgener Pastoraltheologen Prof. Dr. Hans Hirschmann SJ gelang es, der damalige Limburger Regens und Dozent für Liturgie, Homilek und Pastoral 1960 zu den Gründern und ersten Leitern der heutigen Konferenz der deutschsprachigen Pastoraltheologen (vgl. auch einen Artikel zur Geschichte der Konferenz in: PThI 8 (1988) 237-254).

Religionssoziologentagungen

„Institution – Organisation – Bewegung. Sozialformen der Religion im Wandel“ ist Thema der Sektion Religionssoziologie in der 64. DG (Dt. Gesellschaft für Soziologie) in Naurod 7.-9.97. Vorgeschrieben sind Referate zu „Charisma, Bewegung und institutioneller Wandel“.

1. Informationen aus der Fachgruppe Praktische Theologie der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie

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2. Informationen aus der Konferenz der deutschsprachigen Pastoraltheologen

Berufungsverfahren in Freiburg, Innsbruck, Erfurt, Trier, Chur

Eine Reihe von Pastoraltheologie-Stellen werden neu besetzt: In Erfurt (Nachf. Friemel) steht ein Ruf bevor, seit einiger Zeit ist einer ergangen in Freiburg (Nachf. Müller). Erneut läuft das Wiederbesetzungsverfahren in Trier (Nachf. Feilzer). Bereits in Gang ist das Besetzungsverfahren in Tübingen (Nachf. Greinacher). In Chur wurde Dr. Alois Schifferle, Hochschulpfarrer in Fribourg, berufen (Nachf. Spichtig).

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als Problem der soziologischen Theorie“ (Winfried Gebhard, Bayreuth), „Urchristentum zwischen Charisma und Institution“ (Michael N. Ebertz, Freiburg), „Kirche und Religiöse Bewegungen des Mittelalters“ (Otto Gerhard Oexle, Göttingen), „Modernisierung als Organisierung von Religion“ (Karl Gabriel, Vechta). Kurzberichte aus der empirischen Forschung soll es geben zu „Dilemmata der Organisierung von Religion“ (Professionalisierungs-, Planungs- und Verrechtlichungsdilemma) sowie zu „Dilemmata religiöser Bewegungen“ (ProChrist 95, Campus für Christus, Kirchenvolksbegehren). Den Abschluß bilden die (Kor-)Referate „Wo liegt die Zukunft der Religion? Bewegung, Institution oder Organisation“ (Hans Geser, Zürich / Franz Xaver Kaufmann, Bielefeld) und eine Podiumsdiskussion unter Leitung von Michael Krüggeler, St. Gallen.

Katechetischer Kongreß '97 des DKV in Würzburg

Vom 19.-22. Mai 1997 findet in Würzburg der Katechetische Kongreß „Stimmen der Sehnsucht“ des Deutschen Katecheten-Vereins statt. U.a. werden dort sprechen: Rudolf Englert (Essen), Peter Härtling (Mörfelden-Walldorf), Medard Kehl (Frankfurt), Paul M. Zulehner (Wien).

Pastoraltheologenkongreß '97 zu kontextueller Pastoraltheologie

Der zweijährliche Kongreß der Konferenz der deutschsprachigen Pastoraltheologen, diesmal unter dem Titel „Praktische Theologie – Wissenschaft im Kontext“, findet wieder in Freising statt, vom 22. bis 25.9.97. Dabei soll das wissenschaftstheoretische Selbstverständnis der Praktischen Theologie reformuliert werden – und zwar im Verhältnis zu Gesellschaft, anderen Wissenschaften und anderen theologischen Disziplinen.

Mitglieder der Konferenz erhalten automatisch eine Einladung durch die Geschäftsstelle, andere InteressentInnen können gern eine solche dort anfordern (Adresse siehe Innentitel).

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