14. Integrating the Approaches: A Practical Theology

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Integrating the various perspectives on the study of the congregation is primarily an exercise in practical theological thinking. Most ministers practice practical theological thinking as an art. But like many artists, they have little conscious knowledge of or control over the rules of the art that they intuitively practice. And if their judgments are challenged and they are asked to justify their thinking, they find it difficult to trace their steps, give reasons if required, or put things straight when they go wrong.

Most ministers were not taught how to do practical theological thinking. They were taught some species of systematic or biblical theology and then told to go forth and apply this knowledge to concrete situations. Their professors proudly offered them the meat and potatoes of basic theological thinking and led them to believe that there was nothing more to do but to apply it, and this, they suggested, was the easiest part of all.
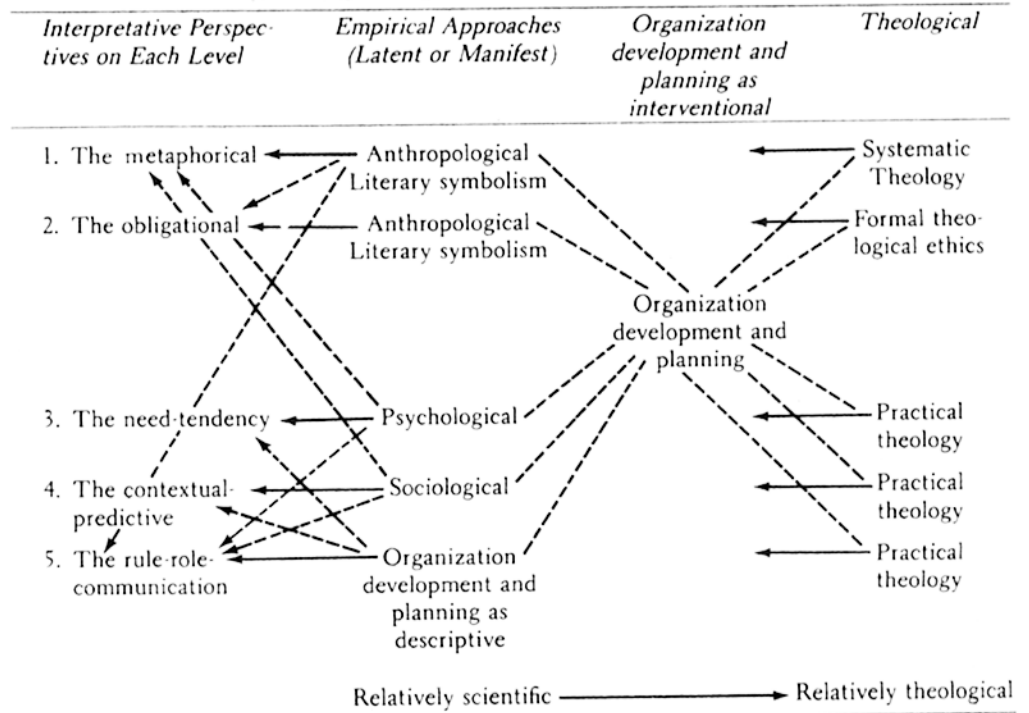
If this characterizes most theological education, I hope that theological professors will not take offense if I assert, rather strongly, that this is not enough. Practical theology is not applied biblical or systematic theology. It is not the easiest or most simple-minded branch of theology. It is the most complex, most difficult. Many ministers and laypeople are good practical theologians without having too much conscious knowledge of the actual rules that govern the art. Yet we might be better at it if we knew the basic principles of this discipline. And we certainly would understand and prescribe more ably for this congregation (and for other congregations of our own experience) and better use these various approaches, if we could be more self-conscious about our practical theology.

Imagine that you are someone close to Wiltshire Church but, at the same time, someone with enough distance to think freely about it. Perhaps you are the district superintendent or perhaps the president of the administrative board. You have a job to address the issues facing the church, and you have an opportunity to use some of the interpretative perspectives offered in this book. How do you proceed? Your job is more than just studying the congregation; you must study, interpret, and understand with an end toward action, prescription, decision. You have the task of relating more or less theoretical and scientific frameworks of interpretation toward the end of *praxis*. You furthermore have the task of relating and using perspectives that are clearly partial, that thematize certain aspects of the total situation but neglect others and, for that reason alone, are inevitably reductive. And you do all of this in order to take faithful Christian thought and action. Of course, the kind of thought and action I am recommending should be taken by the congregation as a whole; it should be congregational reflection and congregational action. But nonetheless there will need to be individuals, and you might be one of them, to lead and educate the congregation in the processes of practical theological deliberation.

The interpretative perspectives reviewed in this book can be organized along a continuum from relatively scientific to normative. The two theological positions by Hough and Pacini are clearly normative; even their attempts to describe Wiltshire Church in its is-ness are clearly colored by their normative theological commitments. The approaches of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and literary symbolism are much more nearly scientific and far removed from the task of practical theological thinking. But even with them, we can almost always detect some mild normative commitments lurking in the nooks and crannies of these perspectives. But the multidisciplinary approaches are most nearly a mixed breed, blending scientific analysis with practical and normative recommendations for action. To this extent, they are potential mediators between the more purely objective approaches and the theological perspectives. They approach, although fall short of, genuine practical theological thinking. Because of their mediating position, they receive special attention in Figure 14.1.

They help illustrate the strengths and potential hazards of the church consultant specialist.

Figure 14.1   Levels of Practical Theological Thinking

Interpretative Perspectives on Each Level	Empirical Approaches (Latent or Manifest)	Organization development and planning as interventional	Theological
1. The metaphorical	Anthropological Literary symbolism		Systematic Theology
2. The obligational	Anthropological Literary symbolism		Formal theological ethics
		Organization development and planning	
3. The need-tendency	Psychological		Practical theology
4. The contextual-predictive	Sociological		Practical theology
5. The rule-role-communication	Organization development and planning as descriptive		Practical theology

Relatively scientific ———————→ Relatively theological

NOTE: Solid-line arrows indicate the level at which a particular social science or theological discipline tends to specialize; dotted-line arrows show lines of relevance.

Practical theology, in our time, must be philosophical and critical. Practical theology, like all theology, starts in faith, but to live and communicate in the pluralistic world in which we live, it must be a faith seeking reasons and a faith determined to articulate itself before both believing and nonbelieving publics. Especially must practical theology be seen as philosophical if it is to help us integrate the diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretative perspectives used to study this church. The very fact that we as theologically-minded people are interested in what anthropology, sociology, and psychology have to tell us about the church indicates already that we are in the kind of dialogue that requires mediation by a reflective and philosophical mood.

We return to Wiltshire and the approaches later in this chapter. But let us now look at what practical theology is. Three generalizations can be made about it: (1) practical theology tries to

answer the question of what we should do in the face of problems and challenges to faithful action, (2) it consists of several different levels, and (3) it is correlational and critical.[1]

Practical theology is practical because it deals with practice or action and the problems of practice and action. It is one of the three great branches of theology: fundamental or philosophical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. It is the branch of theology toward which fundamental and systematic theology point; it is their *telos,* for, finally, we seek the truth of fundamental theology and the meaning of systematic theology in order to know how to live and act faithfully, which is the major concern of practical theology.

There are five analytically distinct levels to practical theological thinking. Failure to do work at all these levels, especially the lower ones, keeps our theology abstract and opens it to the charge of irrelevance. Practical theology contains (1) a metaphorical level, (2) an obligational level, (3) a tendency-need level, (4) a contextual-predictive level, and (5) a rule-role-communicational level. Our going academic theologies tend to specialize at one or more levels and ignore others. For instance, our philosophical or fundamental theologies preoccupy themselves with the first level, that is, the question of the truth of our Christian metaphors of ultimacy. Systematic theology concerns itself primarily with the meaning of these metaphors. Contemporary theological ethics concerns itself very much with level two, that is, the implications of our faith for our obligations. And it debates the various ways our Christian theories of obligation are related to our Christian metaphors of ultimacy. All of these theologies—philosophical, systematic, ethical—generally fail to carry their inquiries to the lower levels, that

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[1] The tradition of practical theology I am advocating is associated with the names of Daniel Day Williams, Seward Hiltner, and David Tracy. It is a revised correlational perspective in contrast to a Tillichian correlational method. The following are examples of the literature of this tradition. Daniel Day Williams, "Truth in a Theological Perspective," *Journal of Religion* 28, no. 4 (October 1948), and *The Minister and the Care of Souls* (New York: Harpers, 1961); Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958); David Tracy, *The Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), and *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). As an example of my own position on this matter, see my "Pastoral Theology in a Pluralistic Age," *Pastoral Psychology* 29, no. 1 (Fall 1980), pp. 24–35.

is, the tendency-need, the contextual-predictive, and the rule-role-communicational levels. If they were to attend to all five levels, they would become genuinely practical theologies. In turn, practical theologies cannot afford to ignore the higher levels, the metaphorical and the obligational. But practical theologies are practical simply because they move further and make statements at the lower three levels. And finally, the lower levels are lower not because they are less important; they are lower only because they depend on certain judgments at the higher levels for their proper positioning. But indeed, some relatively independent judgments are made at the lower levels that complete and give practical meaning to the higher levels of metaphor and obligation.

This framework is not only a guide to thinking practically about theological concerns, it also can be used as a hermeneutical tool to study religious phenomena in general and religious groups in particular. Indeed, I will use it to organize the various interpretative perspectives found in this book. When these approaches are seen in the light of this framework, they emerge as not so much in conflict but as specializing in different aspects of the total structure of religious action. To this extent, they are incomplete yet potentially complementary to one another. But in studying the actual practical theological thinking of real communities, it is important to make a distinction between manifest and latent levels of thinking and action. This opens up the questions: what does the community manifestly say they think and do, and what does the community latently and actually think and do? Many of the differences, and potential contributions, of the various approaches come precisely at the point of providing answers to these questions.

The Metaphorical Level

Not just practical theological thinking, but all practical thinking, has a metaphorical level. By this I mean that all practical thinking necessarily has some way, which is invariably metaphorical, of representing the ultimate context of our experience. To represent anything metaphorically, we do so by taking an aspect of experience with which we are familiar and applying it analogically to aspects of experience that are more foreign or intangible.

In Christian theology we use the metaphors of creator, governor, and redeemer to represent our awareness of the ultimate context of experience as a God who is good, morally serious, and renewing.[2] Other types of practical thinking use other metaphors, such as those of natural harmony to be found in classical capitalism and humanistic psychology, the metaphors of *eros* and *thanatos* that one finds in Freud's psychology, the metaphors of mechanism that one finds behind various forms of behaviorisms, or the metaphors of free variation and selection that one finds in the background of psychologies of adaptation like the one used by Malony in this volume. These metaphors help us see the world in particular ways. They orient us to the world and lead us to see it as trustworthy or capricious, warm or cold, morally serious or indifferent. However, these metaphors of ultimacy influence, but do not dictate, the content of lower levels of practical thinking and experience. And the task of assessing the adequacy of these various metaphors of ultimacy is a correlational philosophical task, which I cannot elaborate in this chapter.

Many of the approaches reviewed in this volume concentrate their analysis at the metaphorical level. Certainly the theological positions of Hough and Pacini do this. They are concerned in their chapters to both uncover the latent and manifest theological metaphors that guide Wiltshire and then measure them against their own understanding of the normative metaphors of the Christian life. Certainly Hopewell's approach through symbolism is concerned with this level. Hopewell's characterization of Wiltshire Church as exemplifying certain aspects of the myth of Zeus is a highly suggestive approach to getting at the latent, if not unconscious, metaphors of ultimacy that operate in the congregation. But other approaches are also interested in uncovering the operative metaphorical level of Wiltshire. For instance, the section of the sociological chapter on the "social world" analyzes the God of Wiltshire Church as one who supports its members' Protestant work ethic and privatism, but the analysis sees this primarily as a function of their membership in the upwardly mobile managerial middle class. Evans and Reed in their psychological analysis also

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[2] H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

throw light on Wiltshire's metaphors of ultimacy. They speak about Wiltshire living in a universe of "expectancy" but see this primarily as a function of the church reacting to its circumstances with a particular psychological adaptive strategy, one that now may be breaking down.

The Obligational Level

The obligational level of practical theological thinking is frequently closely related to, but nonetheless analytically distinguishable from, the metaphorical level. The obligational level tells us what it is appropriate to believe and feel about what we should do. Our ultimate metaphors influence, but do not strictly determine, our principles of obligation.[3] For instance we may use the metaphor "love" to refer to God's nature, but we do not know for certain what God's love means in terms of what we should do unless we add a more propositional statement such as "you should be perfect as God," or you should "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:4). And even then, we might not be clear about what we are obligated to do unless we go further in interpreting just what the Second Great Commandment means. And then we see that some of our contemporary theologians go toward more utilitarian and situational interpretations, such as Fletcher, and others toward more Kantian and deontological perspectives, such as Outka, Ramsey, and others.[4]

Pacini makes a major point about the relation of the metaphorical to the obligational levels of theological thinking. For the meta-

[3] For an excellent discussion of the relation of religion and morality (what I have called the relation of the metaphorical to the obligational levels), see Ernest Wallwork, "Morality, Religion, and Kohlberg's Theory," *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, ed. Brenda Munsey (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980), pp. 269–98. For excellent discussions of the nature of metaphor, see Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[4] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1966); Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972); Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Scribner, 1950). For an excellent introductory discussion of various theories of obligation, see William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 12–61.

phorical level he also uses the phrase "world view." Along with my term "obligational," he uses the word "legitimation." With this distinction, he makes a major, and very useful, analytical point that will go far in helping us see some of the crucial differences between the various approaches. Following Habermas, he states that it is a signal characteristic of modern societies that they try to answer the question of legitimate action (or what I would call obligatory action) without reference at all to world view (what I would call the metaphorical level). According to this view, legitimation and obligation is determined totally by free and undistorted communication, a view that may be implicit in the strong emphasis on communication in the organization development positions, especially that of Malony. Pacini experiments with looking at the Wiltshire situation from this modern perspective as primarily a breakdown in communication but believes that this explanation alone is not adequate. Pacini believes that the problem of the church, and the problem of Sid Carlson, its minister, is not primarily a matter of bad communication about whether to build new rooms for the church school and whether to help Sid buy a new house. The breakdown really has to do, according to Pacini, with the breakdown of Sid's world view and metaphors of ultimacy—his theology that God and Sid are together in control of history, assuring that both church and the corporation will grow, that the hardworking and self-reliant will be comforted in time of stress, that they finally will be victorious, and that all of this can happen with only cursory interest in the needs of those outside their church and community.

Pacini's chapter is an interesting example of my point that although our metaphors of ultimacy influence our obligations and legitimations, they do not determine them in all respects. For we finally do not find any principles of obligation or legitimation in Pacini's presentation. Nor would Wiltshire Church learn from Pacini such a principle. Neither they nor we will find in his analysis an answer to the question of what should be done or what, in fact, is the permissible range of actions. Pacini wants to replace the controlling and objectifying God of Sid Carlson's theology—the God who removes risks but who also removes responsibility—with a less controlling God, one who persuades, develops

partnerships with humans, gives heuristic guidance, but who does not dictate our actions. But Pacini does not tell us what his metaphor might mean, even heuristically, for our actions, our obligations, and that which we might want to legitimate. Pacini goes far in telling us what the problem is but addresses the solution at only the most abstract, albeit fundamental, level.

Hough, like Pacini, attempts to show an intimate relation between our world views (or metaphors of ultimacy) and our obligations but goes further than Pacini in actually developing a principle of obligation. It is through the metaphor of the church as the "body of Christ" that Hough determines both the nature of God and our obligations to our fellow humans. The body of Christ is a metaphor representing the reality of God's presence with us. This presence affirms creation and reveals God's redemptive work for its fulfillment. The metaphor of the body of Christ also reveals for Hough our radical obligation to be with and for the poor and the whole of the natural world. Wiltshire's moralistic, comforting, and success-oriented theology is seen as inadequate from this perspective.

In articulating this principle of obligation, Hough goes further than Pacini toward a truly helpful practical theology, a theology that might really assist Wiltshire to assess its situation. Pacini is interested in getting Wiltshire Church to relinquish control and open itself to real risk and the true grace of God, but he does not give us a more general principle of obligation to guide our actions. Hough does this in his admonition to identify with the poor and to work for the ecological integrity of the world. But even here, a moral philosopher would be quick to tell us just how ambiguous principles like "being with the poor" really are. Does it mean giving directly to the poor, or taking from the rich and giving to the poor? Does it mean the greatest good for the largest number of people, the poor included, as utilitarian definitions of love would suggest? Does it mean acting toward the poor on principles that we could will to be universal laws, as Kantian definitions of love suggest? And does being with the poor mean meeting their needs, and if so, what are their needs?

Pacini and Hough give highly suggestive, but limited, positions on the first two levels of practical theological thinking. They con-

stitute suggestive perspectives from which Wiltshire Church could gain critical understanding of its own preferred metaphors and principles of obligation. Hough and Pacini make crucial but not exhaustive contributions to addressing the problems of Wiltshire Church. They say little if anything about the lower three levels of practical theological thinking. They do acknowledge the impact of the social context—Wiltshire's isolation, its upwardly mobile families, its corporation orientation—but they say little about levels three and five, the tendency-need level and the rule-role-communicational level. What are the real needs of the Wiltshire people, and how do they affect what the church is obligated to do in its ministry? What are the needs of the poor? And finally, what are the effective roles and communication patterns in the church and the rules that cover them? It is doubtless Hough's and Pacini's hope that if Wiltshire gets the right theological metaphors and the right principles of obligation, the right specific roles, rules, and patterns of communication will follow immediately. But is that necessarily true? And what if there is continuing conflict over metaphors and general obligations, are there then more specific roles to be played and rules to be followed until consensus at the higher levels emerges? Clearly, it is at these lower, also crucial, levels that sociology, psychology, and organization development have important contributions to make. It is because of the theologian's lack of attention to these levels and because of the social scientist's expertise at these levels that the church has more and more turned to theoretical and practical specialists in these sciences of human behavior.

Of course, it helps any practical theological analysis of a church to know more about the actual manifest and latent theology (its metaphors of ultimacy and its principles of obligation). This is necessary to be more accurate in commenting on and closing the gap between the actual thought and action of the church and what it ideally should be. Here, as I have already indicated, the social science approaches of anthropology, sociology, and psychology can make a distinct contribution. It is helpful to the practical theologian to know that the latent metaphors and beliefs of that church reflect the structure of the ancient myth of Zeus killing Chronus, overcoming time and tradition and establishing a new rule of effi-

ciency and progress. This might be especially helpful to know the depth of these unconscious themes when planning certain interventions. But except for Hopewell's novel conviction about the mythological depths of the human psyche, his view of the actual theology of the church is analogous to that turned up by several other investigators. His view of the actual meanings operative in the church does not differ essentially from Evans and Reed's emotion of "expectancy" and sections of the sociological analysis that interpreted Wiltshire as privatized and work oriented or a refuge in support of upward mobility. All of these are highly similar pictures of the actual latent and manifest culture or world view of Wiltshire. They differ mainly in seeing this world view as a function of mythical structures (Hopewell), socially conditioned perceptual structures (Carroll/McKinney/Roof and Williams) or psychological responses to perceived threats (Evans and Reed). These anthropological, sociological, and psychological analyses throw light on the actual beliefs, values, and metaphors of ultimacy functioning in Wiltshire Church. But unless these investigators let their own values show forth, and frequently they do, they cannot and should not as scientists argue for what Wiltshire's ultimate commitments ought to be. The practical theologian should make use of their analyses. The knowledge they give us primarily helps make interventions more precise, but such knowledge should not and logically cannot dictate the actual content of our practical theological recommendations.

The Tendency-Need Level

Neither the theologians nor the social scientists say anything clearly systematic about the tendency-need level of practical moral thinking. Yet they all assume and imply a great number of things about this level. Much is said about the more or less culturally shaped needs of the Wiltshire people for success, for affiliation with like-minded people, for weekend rest and renewal, for educating their children, and so on. But little is said by any of these perspectives about the truly human needs of the people of Wiltshire Church. What are their legitimate needs? What are the legitimate needs of other people outside Wiltshire—the inner-city working poor, the working families of Detroit, the peasants of El Salvador? How do the people of Wiltshire Church adjudicate the

conflicts between their needs and the needs of others?

Good practical theological thinking requires both theories of obligation and theories of what humans really need. This is true regardless of how a particular principle of obligation is derived.[5] We get our theories of human needs from a variety of sources. Intuitions of our own needs is one source. Our cultural and religious traditions deliver to us indices of human need, some quite authentic and some quite distorted. Finally, in the midst of conflicting claims about what humans need, we turn to the sciences of the human—psychology or sociobiology—to get some idea of our central tendencies or more fundamental needs.[6]

The language of needs is tricky, and we hear a lot of it, especially in the social sciences. But some felt needs are more important than others, and needs conflict with one another, both those internal to ourselves and those between ourselves and other people. That is why we turn to morality and to principles of obligation; we do this to organize, form hierarchies, and resolve conflicts between diverse human tendencies and needs. It is the view of several of these studies that Wiltshire Church has been successful to date in its growth because it has met a variety of needs experienced by the people in that community, some quite authentic needs but most culturally and socially induced by the class, vocation, and geographical location of the families of that community. In addition, it is the moral sensibility of many studies, and the explicit view of Hough, that the people of Wiltshire are meeting their needs unjustly, that is, at considerable cost to those outside their church and community.

But this level of discussion needs further clarification. The lan-

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[5] It is commonly accepted in formal moral philosophy that teleological theories of obligation require theories of nonmoral good that in turn generally require theories of what humans want and need. But I take the position that deontological perspectives, even of the Kantian kind, must be supplemented with theories of generic human need once the logic of obligation has been established on logical and formal grounds. I believe this is the position held by John Rawls and his religious interpreter, Ronald Green. See Green's *Religious Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[6] Three excellent discussions of the relation of nonmoral values or needs to ethics can be found in the following books: Mary Midgely, *Beast and Man* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); George Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); and Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1981).

guage of needs is everywhere, but seldom systematically discussed. For our purposes, let me distinguish between (1) basic human needs, (2) existential needs, (3) culturally induced needs, (4) technical needs, and (5) moral needs. Basic human needs are those largely biologically grounded needs that include everything from our need for food and clothing to our needs for affiliation and mutual recognition and even our need to care for and educate our children. Our existential needs center around anxiety and loss to our basic needs and are met by assurance, security, love, and presence, both of a finite and an ontological kind. Then we have more culturally induced needs and wants; these are frequently basic needs that take particular, and sometimes overdetermined, forms due to cultural conditioning. Most of our interpreters saw a great deal of cultural conditioning of basic needs among the Wiltshire people. Technical needs refer to our needs to instrumentally organize our resources to satisfy our basic needs. And finally, moral needs refer to the characterological and obligational requirements necessary to mediate justly the conflicts between our basic, existential, technical, and cultural needs. We have moral needs because we need ways to coordinate harmoniously the conflict among all our other needs. Even though ethics and morality are of crucial importance for human life, they are fed by weaker energies than any of our other needs, be they basic existential, cultural, or technical.

Wiltshire Church has specialized its ministry toward meeting existential and culturally induced needs of people within their own congregation. Most basic needs for nourishment and so on are assumed to be met by the general affluence of the community. Other basic needs for affiliation, recognition, and the education of their children are met within the framework of the cultural values of upward mobility, success, and privatism. Existential needs surrounding loss and stress are addressed. The love of God is affirmed. The pastor helps those undergoing stress, grief, or illness. Practical wisdom for handling challenge and loss is offered. But moral needs are largely ignored by the church, and a moral review of how the Wiltshire people meet their basic, technical, and culturally induced needs is also largely overlooked.

But neither the social science analyses offered here by anthro-

pology, psychology, or sociology nor the theological analyses, as far as they go, help to distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic needs being addressed in the Wiltshire situation. This is because of, on the one hand, the aspired-for neutrality of the social sciences and, on the other, the theologian's omission of this necessary level of practical theological thinking. The people of Wiltshire Church need to know how to distinguish their authentic needs from those that are culturally induced or distorted. They need reliable images of their authentic needs to guide their own principles of obligation: which needs are they morally obligated to justly and fairly help actualize, both in themselves and in others outside their community? And, in turn, they need principles of obligation to help them coordinate and adjudicate between conflicting authentic needs, both within their own community and between their community and the rest of the world. For instance, it may well be that even if Wiltshire Church were to forsake its more superficial needs to grow and to support success, it might still conclude that it does have an obligation to meet the basic, existential, and moral needs of the community's children and that, in order to do this, it should expand its facilities. It also might conclude that it has an obligation to meet the basic and existential needs of its pastor through adequate income, housing, and retirement. Because of the immense untapped financial resources of that congregation, one would think that it could simultaneously expand its educational facilities, take care of its minister, and expand its outreach to those outside its own immediate community. But in order to do this, the church must be motivated by commanding vision, a clearer understanding of its own social situation, and better communication between the different role players and actors in the congregation itself. In other words, it needs insight into several other levels of practical theological thought and action.

The Contextual Level

We already have examined to a considerable extent the cultural and social context of Wilshire Church and the way this context establishes certain trends that shape its world view, values, perceptions, and expectations. In fact, much of what is done by Wil-

liams, Carroll/McKinney/Roof, and Evans/Reed is to show how the sociological situation of Wiltshire works to condition and shape the dominant metaphors and world views operative in that community.

There are two strictly social-structural ideas that might be usefully highlighted here. The sociological chapter emphasizes the extremely wide gap between home and work that exists in the Wiltshire community. This is typical of many suburban communities, but especially true of Wiltshire because of its physical isolation between two ridges. The second is the structural fact of the influence of corporate life and its accompanying features of bureaucratization and rationalization. In both the structural differentiation between public and private realms (work and home) and in the bureaucratization that marks corporate life, we find dominant characteristics of modern life. Both features of modernity tend to specialize and narrow our lives and make responsible individual or collective action in the public realm all the more difficult for everyone. It has been well known in sociological literature for decades, going back to, and even before, Gibson Winter's *The Suburban Captivity of the Church*,[7] that the church itself has been caught to a considerable degree in these two sets of social forces. This, then, is the major sociological context of the church in advanced industrial countries. Recognizing this has helped give rise to another truth: if the church is to get beyond these privatizing forces and once again address the whole of life, it must develop a higher degree of intentionality than was needed in simpler, more organic societies. It is against the background of this need for heightened intentionality that the substance of level five becomes so important for the modern church. It is against the backdrop of the pluralism and relative isolation of the modern church that there is required more intentional communication, more faithful roles, and more flexible rules.

Roles, Rules, and Communication

This is the level of analysis attended to most by Schaller, Malony, and Anderson, and the final section of the chapter on sociol-

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[7](New York: Macmillan, 1965).

ogy. Although the consultants also attend to the higher levels, they concentrate on the various roles functioning in a given congregation, the rules that govern these roles, and the communication that occurs as roles and rules support goals. This is an absolutely essential level of analysis required to complete the practical theological process. Of course, this level does not stand by itself; we only know what roles, rules, and specific processes of communication must be after we have received our metaphors of ultimacy, determined our principles of obligation, decided which human needs are most deserving of fulfillment, and analyzed our sociocultural context. Nonetheless, our roles, rules, and communication do have some degree of autonomy from these higher areas; there indeed can be subtle confusion about role expectations and subtle distortions of communication even when our higher-level metaphors and moral principles are sound and well understood.

But to study roles and communication patterns too much in isolation from the other levels of practical theology can lead to misunderstanding. Anderson is quite aware of this danger and cautions us against trying to study roles and communication without reference to the higher-level metaphors and obligations that necessarily form the context and content of our ethical decisions.

Schaller, Malony, and Anderson take the stance of consultants conducting studies for the sake of making practical recommendations. To this extent, in ways not typical of the other perspectives, they approach being much more nearly "mixed" thinkers who bring together scientific and practical judgments in ways that begin to merge into practical theological thinking. Malony's chapter is instructive, however, because although genuinely practical, it is isolated from systematic consideration of the metaphorical, obligational, need, and contextual levels. To this extent, his more or less exclusive emphasis upon the clarification of role priorities and the improvement of communication style comes close to exemplifying Habermas's and Pacini's claims about the tendency toward independence of communicative competence from world view in modern societies as a method for establishing legitimation. To Malony, the major problem at Wiltshire Church is not in its metaphors of ultimacy, as it is for Pacini and Hough; it is not in its privatization and its bondage to upper-middle-class values as

one might think after reading the sociological analysis. The problem, or at least the only one that he discusses, is that of level five, the level of role conflict and communication problems.

Since Malony is a practicing Christian, he simply assumes the general validity of the faith commitments of the church he studies and advises. But in his chapter he does not tell us how his communication and role analysis approach actually takes account of the higher-level metaphors and principles of obligation that make up the faith of a church. Without more explicit attention to these higher levels, an exclusive attention to roles and communication patterns can take on a marketing orientation. By using a marketing orientation, the consultant conveys the idea that he can market or sell, through the power of better communication and more flexible role enactment, any set of ultimate commitments and moral principles subscribed to by a particular organization. This would be using a technicist approach to consultation. It will work only insofar as the problems of a congregation are totally technical and its larger theological commitments completely sound. This is seldom the case, and if other analyses of Wiltshire Church are reasonably correct, it is not the case with this congregation either. Wiltshire needs consultation at the theological level, although it needs, as Malony rightly sees, consultation at the level of the roles and rules of communication as well.

Schaller, on the other hand, is eclectic in his approach to consultation and works on all of these levels. His preference for internal analyses in contrast to contextual analyses, although not entirely clear, probably puts him closer to Malony's concern with styles of leadership and communication than it does to the sociological perspectives of Carroll/McKinney/Roof. But in spite of his eclecticism, he gives little attention to practical theological thinking at the higher metaphorical or obligational levels. One gains the impression that even though he is eclectic and flexible in choosing his points of entry to a congregation, he too primarily addresses the role-rule-communicational level somewhat in isolation from the higher levels of metaphor and obligation.

The point is that both analysis and consultation need to operate on all of these levels. Theology often seems to fail us in our practical analysis and action because it frequently limits itself, as do

Hough and Pacini, to the highest level of practical theological thinking—the metaphorical—and says little, if anything, about the other four levels. Formal theology seldom actually gets to the level of helping us discern what our metaphors, principles of obligation, needs, and context analyses actually mean for the concrete roles and communicative patterns that life in our congregations demands. Social sciences can help us understand our operative ultimate commitments and, in this way, help us discern the gap between the ideal and actual in the life of congregations. They can help discern the sociological and psychological forces that condition, although do not determine, our ultimate beliefs and the actions that do or do not flow from them. And finally, the communications consultant can help us understand the actual role, rules, and patterns of communication operative in particular congregations. But our analysis will be distorted and our recommendations unbalanced if we do not address, some way or other, both normatively and analytically, all these necessary levels of practical Christian life and thought.[8]

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[8] For a fuller explanation of these five levels, see my "The Estrangement of Pastoral Care from Ethics," *Concilium* (Summer 1982), and *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).