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# Ethical Methodology: Between Public Theology and Public Policy

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## INTRODUCTION

That public theology is relevant to public policy debates and formulation should be self-evident. After all, public theologians aspire to develop ethical frameworks and discourses about how we should live together in plural civil societies. Public theology is offered as a form of discourse.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, contemporary public theologians have largely failed to develop models for ethical analysis directly appropriate for public discourse and relevant to public policy decision-making. While they have developed methods and theologies for understanding and interpreting the nature and dynamics of civil society, including the emerging global civil society, they have not explicitly provided a procedural method of ethical analysis that is informed by public theology.

In this paper, I propose an ethical methodology as a form of public discourse, a model that incorporates the insights of public theology. Public theology has rejected theology as a discourse that withdraws into a spiritual gated community of sectarian isolation. It has equally rejected ways of speaking about the reality of God and God's will that are not valid in the contested common that is the modern civil society. It has instead proposed an understanding of ethics that speaks socially and theologically to the developments and issues of our times, and has taken the position that theology is capable of investigating—"according to the highest standards of truth and justice that are known and debated in reasonable discourse"—the relative validity of various religious claims about how civil

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<sup>1</sup> As Max Stackhouse puts it: "[P]ublic theology intends to selectively put modernizing developments on a more secure basis by exposing, and where appropriate correcting, the submerged theological assumptions that are internal to them and sustaining them. Such an intent entails the belief that theology as a critical and constructive discipline is, properly, a *mode of public discourse* that both interprets the key areas of the common life in ways indispensable to the historical and social sciences, by pointing out the religious and ethical presuppositions that are operating in a given ethos, and simultaneously offers normative ethical guidance for the reformation and sustenance of a viable civil society, the basis of civilization." Italics added. (*God and Globalization: Volume 4, Globalization and Grace*, p. 85, New York: Continuum, 2007), 85. See also pp. 91–99, 112.

society should operate.<sup>2</sup> It has also taken on the responsibility of clarifying the religious and ethological foundations of policies and ideas that shape civil society.

In the model of ethical analysis that I am proposing I show how public theologians can come into an informed judgment on public policies in the light of how people ought to live in civil society. It provides a robust “mechanics,” which is ideationally rooted in public theology and deliberately crafted, to aid both experienced theologians and doctoral students to prepare ethical analyses for public discourse in a pluralistic society like the United States.

As a teacher in one of America’s seminaries I have to parse together from various works a discernible pattern or method of analysis to train my students in public theological-ethical analyses. When teaching public theology, I am interested in not only leading students through the history, themes, and debates in the field, but also in training them to be good ethical analysts in the public sphere. I have encountered students who wanted to work for public policy institutes where they thought they might be in positions to influence public policy debates from informed theological standpoints. Similarly, there have been students who wanted to go to the traditional parish pulpits but also desired to acquire the competence to analyze public policies from a public theology perspective. There has not been a handy and readily available model to guide such beginners in the practice. With this paper I hope to fill the gap to creatively advance the development of public theology.

My desire to fill the gap is not just about giving (would-be) ethicists another instrument in their toolbox. But to convey to them the notion that ethics is a methodical form of reason and speech. This is fundamental to understanding public theology as a form of public discourse and discerning from what philosophical position it sallies forth into the public arena. It is important to note right away that ethics as reason and speech is not about the process of an ethicist *reasoning* through a problem and voicing his or her thought about the moral fabric of society. What I have in mind is much more fundamental. I am here thinking of ethics as a process that unlocks the power of truth, justice, and harmony embodied in any form of human sociality. This process of unlocking truth, justice, and harmony is not aimed at providing the means or wisdom for perfecting the bureaucratic management of any current social order or sociality—although this is an aspect of reason we will call technical reason. But there is also ontological reason, which is really about the determination of the proper ends,

<sup>2</sup> Max Stackhouse, “Introduction: Foundations and Purposes” in (ed.) Max Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann, and Shirley J. Roels with Preston N. Williams, *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics and Economic Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 10–34.

*teleoi*, of any form of human sociality.<sup>3</sup> Ethics points us to ends beyond the existing forms of human sociality. It insists that an existing order can find those ends beyond itself only when its agents rise beyond themselves.

Reason is principally about the determination of ends of human sociality. These are ends that should point us beyond the existing forms of human sociality, to move our gaze further beyond ourselves. Reason is the source of meaning; it is the search for fulfillment; it represents an inescapable moral call on humanity to deepen and widen being. Ontological reason is the precondition for technical reason. Ontological reason is the process in which technical reason reaches beyond itself and its world. Ontological reason is the movement of technical reason toward ultimate meaning and significance. Technical reason is the presupposition of ontological reason, and ontological reason is the fulfillment of technical reason. The two concepts of reason are in means-end relationship. Technical reason deals with the discovery of the means of actualization of human potentials. Ontological reason is the longing for the source of all meaning, the driving force toward the good itself.<sup>4</sup>

In this quest for fulfillment our brains, voices, and bodies are all involved in both resisting existing orders that absolutize themselves and in forging and straining toward a new window of “else-where” and “else-when.” This idea of window points us toward both what is present and what is absent in an extant order. In ethics we are trying to paint a portrait of our community and/or the subject of our focus. The portrait becomes a space (a “rectangle” for example) through which the community or the subject is seen. But it also provides the lens, perspective to see what is absent in the community. Like all windows, an “ethical-window” marks the boundary between what is currently obtained (what is inside the house) and what is outside, what we can strive for in the open, unconfined space. Through this window we are trying to see what is outside of ourselves, outside of our current existing order, but it is not always totally transparent; we see through an inherited (though continually reworked) mental representation. We are trying to see the world, the cosmos outside, through our particular *thrownness* into the world.

Theological-ethical reasoning is in large part an attempt to provide a window on creativity and show how the creative principles at work in human coexistence and the larger cosmos can be harnessed for human flourishing

<sup>3</sup> Practical reasoning (wisdom) as the ability to exercise sound judgment and discerning of the best means to attain goals is part of the deliberative process that goes into technical reasoning which is finding the means (wisdom) and technical mastery for attaining and advancing an end or goal. Ontological reasoning is about the determination of proper ends and the ultimate vision that should guide society.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 72–77.

(*eudaimonia* in the Aristotelian sense). It is an ordered speech that attempts to link forms of human sociality to perceived<sup>5</sup> inner thrust of God's liberatory activity in the world. In other words, ethics attempts to relate the inner life of social institutions to the invisible rhythms and creative force that sustain and move the universe. (I have here in mind Paul Tillich's notion of theonomous ethics.)

Let me now state how the rest of this paper will unfold. There are three sections in this paper: section 1 lays out a philosophy of ethical analysis. It develops some insights about ethical analysis that serve as gangway connecting the notion of ethics in the above introductory remarks and the practical, nitty-gritty task of constructing a meta-ethical model. Based on the philosophy developed, I describe in section 2 the appropriate methodology for doing theological-ethical analyses of social problems. It is important to mention that the methodical steps spread out in this section are not like a cookbook recipe. In cooking food, attention to the recipe has an end other than itself, but the methodology adumbrated here does not; good and effective methodology in itself is an end. Cooking is an activity of producing something beyond the cooking act itself. In contrast, ethical methodology as understood by this author is the activity of doing ethics well as such. Methodology is not fundamentally the production of "goods external" to the ethical reasoning, but the excellence or perfection of "internal goods," goods constituting the internal aims of the social practice of public theology. I conclude with final remarks in section 3. Specifically, I uncover the deep theological-social theoretic assumptions that are internal to the model.

#### SECTION 1: A PHILOSOPHY OF ETHICAL ANALYSIS

The first thing the student needs to know in the task of analysis is the answer to this important question: "what is ethical analysis?" Ethical analysis is about identifying a problem that threatens the moral fabric and stability of society, showing how the particular problem has moved it away from that which underlies its existence and expresses itself in it as the ultimate concern, and indicating that by solving the problem the society will be brought in close responsiveness to its ultimate concern. This rather lengthy definition has three components:

- a. Analysis of the problem;

<sup>5</sup> I carefully chose the word, perceived, to indicate that human perception of God's activities in the world is always a particular decision. "We *must* make decisions about where God is at work so we can join in the fight against evil. But there is no perfect guide for discerning God's movement in the world. Contrary to what many conservatives would say, the Bible is not a blueprint on this matter. It is a valuable symbol for pointing to God's revelation in Jesus, but it is not self-interpreting. We are thus placed in an existential situation of freedom in which the burden is on us to make decisions without a guaranteed ethical guide." Italics in the original. (James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986, p. 7).

- b. Relating the problem to the ultimate concern, ultimate reality, of the community, and
- c. Offer suggestions for solution that will strengthen the moral fabric of the community and move it closer to the principles of its ultimate concern.

Every society or tradition has certain categories, concepts, and images from which to draw and root the analysis when executing “b” and “c” above. It makes eminent sense to examine—even if only preliminarily—moral problems through them. The purpose is to show how the various dimensions of the problem and the community that bears its burden are illuminated when understood in relation to the moral and spiritual constructs of the community. One such category, concept or construct is the ultimate reality or concern. The ultimate concern is the orientation for life, the ultimate point of reference. This is usually taken as God; but sometimes it is a philosophical absolute (like eudaimonia, rational order, will-to-power). It is about that which is most important, which is taken seriously as the deepest and most fundamental.

The importance given to the ultimate concern in the solution determines whether the analysis is regarded as a theological-ethical one or social-ethical one. It is theological-ethical if the author takes as her ultimate point of reference God or a doctrine of God (*theos*). The construct of God (in dialectical inter-relationship with other theological terms) is used to grasp and interpret the crucial dimensions of the problem and its possible solution. It is social-ethical analysis if the doctrine of God is replaced by a philosophical construct or absolute.<sup>6</sup>

In the light of our elaboration of “b” and “c,” above, let us recast the description of the task of ethical analysis. Ethical analysis is both a critical and constructive investigation of a social problem in the light of a community’s ultimate point of reference for all life and its immediate environment. Unlike when the ethicist is writing ethical theories or laying out a philosophical treatise on ethics which she hopes will one day serve as a point of reference for human behavior and investigation of social problems, public ethical analysis is about identifying obstacles to the realization of the promises in a society’s construct of God or absolute and showing how to remove or overcome them in the name of that God or absolute. In faith (in terms of believing and showing concern about

<sup>6</sup> Some readers may find the distinction between theological-ethical and social-ethical analysis questionable because the difference between them is only attributed to whether an ethical analysis refers to God (gods) or a philosophical construct as the ultimate concern of society. The distinction is further muddled by the fact that there are philosophical constructs of God. I have made this crude distinction only to gesture to the idea that in a pluralistic society there are some who may believe in God (whether that deity is personal, anthropomorphic, biblical or not) and others who do not believe in God or are agnostic and thus prefer to erect a non-God, non divine philosophical ideal as the ultimate point of reference for orientation of life. It is only in this sense that I want the distinction to be interpreted.

that which is considered absolute, ultimate), the ethical analyst works to remove all obstacles to the vision of the good life or the common good. She is constantly and deliberately searching for obstacles to be overcome in the hope of realizing the good life, eudaimonia, the kingdom of God, or the common good. Does she ever reach the end of this process? Nein! This is so because, as Paul Tillich once put it faith is concern about the ultimate. We never grasp this reality; it is always beyond our reach. So we are never rest content with the quality of humanization and humanness in a given human sociality. Faith in God (the ultimate reality, point of reference) invites us to test all our human creations to see and judge whether there is something greater or better in the horizon and to always press on to it.

In a certain sense, ethical analysis is faith seeking resistance. This seeking aims to overcome resistance to the common good in the name of the ultimate principle. So every genuine ethical analysis aims at the overcoming of resistance. The ethicist is driven to her task by an urge to overcome that does not necessarily aim to dominate and control. She thirsts to confront and overcome the ideas, problems, groups, institutions, and any form of resistance that threatens the moral fabric of the society and in so doing oppose the satisfaction of the society's ultimate principle. The urge never rests because the principle can never be realized concretely. Her deliberate quest for resistance cannot be satisfied. The ethicist never comes to the point or state of affairs in which all resistance has been overcome because the ideal in the name of which she struggles is always in the future. An ethicist's work is never done. Hers is an activity in pursuit of an elsewhere and else-when land of "pure delight," the ultimate human good. The ethicist struggles against all that stands in the way of the common good. In other words, she strives until the paramount goal or end of her community is attained—nay, it can only be asymptotically approached. In reality, she never adjudges her society as having reached that level of human flourishing where all strivings for truth, justice, and harmony have stopped.

In conclusion, let me state that every genuine ethical analysis in any society is set in motion by four conditions. First, there is an ultimate concern that serves as a telos of society. Ethics is a search for God and how God is revealed in humanity and in the struggles for human flourishing. Basically, to undertake theological ethics is to search for God in the midst of history and to relate a community's understanding of the nature of ultimate reality and its derived truth to the logic and dynamics of human sociality. The truth we are talking about here is an anthropocentric, earthly, one. It is a truth, though sourced from an understanding of the ultimate, is pre-formed, formed, and in-formed and appropriated through an encounter with a concrete humanity, the reality of a people at a specific historical juncture.

This power of truth touches ground, as my former teacher, Professor Peter Paris would say, when it is on the side of human freedom and affirms human

flourishing in its broadest meaning. Thus the search for God is, in a certain sense, a search for human freedom and flourishing in the name of an “ought to be.” In terms of the prophetic tradition of the Israelite prophets of the Bible, the “ought to be” is a demand for justice in the name of Yahweh, in the name of the principle that implies ultimacy and universality. The God in whose name the “ought to be” is given and sustained is “the God of justice, who because he represents justice for everybody and every nation, is called the universal God, the God of the universe.”<sup>7</sup> The “ought to be” stands as a critique of the present situation and driving it beyond to an utopological-progressive state of communion between God and humans and between humans and humans.

Now let us focus on the rest of the conditions that set ethical analysis in motion. The second condition is this: there are (perceived) obstacles and resistance to the realization of the “ought to be.” Third, there is a desire to overcome such resistance by the power of one’s analysis which can induce political will and social action to alter the prevailing situation. An ethical analysis is not completely a dispassionate exercise. It involves a vision or desire to change certain social circumstances, the *eros* to aid a given society to reach a higher level of human flourishing. Finally, the ethical analyst must be willing to oppose her proffered solutions because no solution or institution is timeless. They must all be subjected to the demands of the incoming future. Every generation must be allowed to be creative in its own terms. Every age must seek for its “permanent” laws and institutions which must be washed away like sand castles at the beach, if need be, by the crashing waves of the incoming future. Ethical analysis is an activity of creative destruction. The ethicist who is unwilling to surpass that which she has created or inherited in the name of that which encompasses and transcends her “heirloom” has not fully grasped the notion of ethics as the science of harnessing the creative principles at work in existential conditions for human flourishing or the common good.

## SECTION 2: THE METHODOLOGY OF ETHICAL ANALYSIS

[A]n inquiry in social ethics should begin with some actual, concrete problems arising among human beings in their public actions. That is to say, such an investigation should begin with some conflicting views about the good that humans can and should do... The result of such an investigation should be some resolution of the problem or a restatement of the problem in order to liberate the agents and their activities and to establish thereby the conditions for more creative enterprise.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2001), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Paris, *Black Religious Leaders*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, 31-32.



It is now time to sketch the network of analyses that constitutes ethical analysis and give determinate content to the philosophical position I have just sketched out.<sup>9</sup> For the sake of convenience, I will divide the process of ethical analysis into three major segments or stages: (1) Social or ethos analysis, (2) Resources for reflecting on the problem, and (3) Ethical solution and payoff.

It is germane to mention at this juncture that the task of ethical analysis is not only about the public issues and pursuit of social justice. Ethics definitely includes personal conduct, individual fairness, and our actions and behaviors in the private spheres. In this paper, for our limited purpose as informed by the nature of public theology, the ethical is limited to the social, the common, spheres of human coexistence.

Ethics is also concerned with corporate behaviors which are in the public sphere. This paper has not explicitly addressed business ethics. Nonetheless, it contains insights and ideas for business ethics. The focus of the paper is on ethical methodology for public policy (or public policy debates) which covers economic ethics and the economy. Economic ethics and economy encompass business (corporate) ethics and businesses.

If a public policy is going to be enacted to cover businesses—an important segment of the public—then the methodology as explained applies to such a process. And if a corporation is thinking of jumping into a public debate in a pluralistic society like ours it can follow the methodology of the paper to craft its argument. It may not use God as the ultimate concern, but can formulate another supreme good. The paper makes provision for alternative views of ultimate concern, supreme good, or philosophical construct. The methodology of this paper will not be of much use to the analyst who thinks of business ethics in the narrow sense of “legal ethics,” that is, the covering bases to avoid liabilities and injury to public reputation of corporations, and staying out of obvious legal troubles.

### *2:1. Social Analysis*

Every ethical analysis starts with a definition of the problem or a description of the ethical concern. This is the issue(s) that the ethicist considers to be threatening the moral fabric and stability of the society or community. The analyst needs to state clearly and precisely why the issue identified is a social problem and why the citizens need to focus on eliminating or ameliorating it.

Once the problem is adequately identified or laid out, the analyst undertakes a social-scientific examination of it; examines the “signs of the times” so to speak. She draws from social sciences, humanities, sciences, and other disciplines to help her audience understand the problem in its crucial dimensions.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Professors Max Stackhouse and Mark Taylor of Princeton Theological Seminary for their comments on an earlier version of this section in 2007.

It pays or helps to provide some empirical analyses backed by historical and contemporary data. In this portion of the analysis she aims to take into consideration the multiple forces or propensities that structure a society and its problems.

What comes next is an examination of the ethos (the web of values, norms, organizing principles, etc.) of the society and how it relates to the problem. Here again the ethicist relies on the work of specialists to discern the ethos. Why is ethos analysis important? If the ethicist wants to change anything, she has got to understand the presuppositions behind it; wrestle with values that are implicit in the culture, comprehend values that drive the legitimacy (rightness or goodness) of actions and behaviors. There are resources in every community to draw from in analyzing an ethical problem. There are traditions, constitutions, laws, and exemplars of moral excellences to bring forth to bear on the problem and its possible solution. This brings us to the next segment of the methodological process of ethical analysis.

### *2:2. Resources for Reflecting on the Problem*

At this phase or dimension of the analysis, the ethicist discusses the theological, biblical (sacred texts) or philosophical resources that she will bring to inform and shape the discourse of the problem. This is done with an eye to grounding and funding possible ethical solution, paradigm or response to the problem. The overall aim of this sub-segment is for the ethicist to state her theology (theological, philosophical, presuppositions) for funding solutions. Every search for solution to an ethical problem presupposes a theological or philosophical understanding of humans and their place in the world in relation to their God or ultimate principle.

The analyst may not always have a pre-existing theology to bring to bear on the problem. Thus, she may need to develop a fresh theology in the light of the issues before her. The important thing to note here is the need to articulate the vision or concept of an ultimate reality that both undergirds the community and can legitimize the solution to the problem. The vision is either appropriated from an existing fund or is constructed (reconstructed) afresh.

The reflection on a problem for the purpose of crafting a relevant solution to an ethical problem should not be limited to theological deliberations alone. It is to involve and requires a rigorous analysis of the operating norms in the ethos (dis-covered by ethology) to see if they are appropriate. Appropriateness may be evaluated from two angles: right and good; that is, deontologically and teleologically.<sup>10</sup> In deontological terms, the analyst would like to know if the operating norms are in accord with the best knowledge available theologically by

<sup>9</sup> Stackhouse, "General Introduction," 12–14.

common grace. That is, to see whether they are in accord with the “laws of God.” Teleologically, the question is: Are they in accord with the best theological vision of the purposes of God we can know? Of course, the analyst not working with the symbol of God can still do the deontological and teleological investigations by using other constructs such as Kant’s categorical imperative or Aristotle’s eudaimonia (flourishing life, happiness). In all of this, the analyst is inquiring as to what resources in the ethos can contribute to a solution or better solution. More importantly, the analyst wants to find out “whether what is going on ought to go on ...Are the functioning principles and governing goals valid?”<sup>11</sup> On this note, the second major segment of the methodological flowchart (see section 2.4 below) comes to a close and we shall now proceed to the next and final segment.

### *2:3. Ethical Solution (Responses, Paradigm) and Payoff*

There are six doorways to traverse at this phase of the analysis that is largely prescriptive. They offer, as Max Stackhouse puts it, “guidance about how we might, insofar as it is possible, form a more valid ethos and develop those attitudes, institutions, habits, policies, and programs that are in accord with a more ethically viable ethos, rightly legitimated by a valid theological view of ultimate reality.”<sup>12</sup>

At this point, the analyst has clearly identified the social problem, its impact on the moral fabric of the given community, and has pointed her audience to the theological and philosophical resources she hopes can offer valuable insights in the search for solution. Now she is ready to suggest solution. This is the first of the six doorways she has to traverse. The background question that drives her discourse at this stage is: What is the ethical solution (response, idea, paradigm, or intuition) that flows from my theological analysis (discourse) that bears upon the problem? Her task here must remain incomplete until she shows how her vaunted solution either strengthens the community or ameliorates (resolves, restates) the identified problem.

Second, the presentation of the “solution” should be informed by a dialogue with important thinkers in the field. Ethicists are not gods who pronounce solutions from Olympian heights. Thus an ethicist is expected to show how her preferred solution is better than those offered by other scholars or how it improves on existing practices of the community.

Third, once the solution is well defined and defended, the ethicist must show how it fits into the ethos of the community discussed in section 2:1 above. The analyst tells her audience why her solution should be considered a fitting response by the community at the given historical juncture in which it finds itself.

<sup>10</sup> Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” 11.

<sup>11</sup> Stackhouse, “General Introduction,” 16.

Asking how the proposed solution fits or does not easily fit into the ethos may require confrontation or transformation of the ethos in that respect.

Next the analyst needs to ask herself, “do I need to propose new institution or organization to effect the necessary changes or support the realization of the proposed solution? If her answer is yes, she must determine the cost-benefit impact of establishing the new institution in the community. She goes to this length because she needs to convince decision-makers that her solutions will benefit society.

Fifth, many societies in the world are now pluralistic and thus an ethical analysis needs to adapt to this reality if it is to be taken seriously. In the postmodern world that we live in today—with its characteristic lack of a common sacred canopy over the public square—demands that an analyst must make a case for her values and solutions to perceived problems in the public domain. The ethical analysis is incomplete until the author addresses herself to these pertinent questions: how will my solution be perceived in a pluralistic civil society with multiple religions and worldviews? Will it pass muster with some academic viewpoints employed in the social-scientific examination of section 2:1 above? What are some of the deontological, ethological, and teleological aspects of my proposed solutions (response) that can serve to build or uphold common morality (common good) in an open civil society?

Finally, what are the possible payoffs to the community if the proposed solution or response is accepted and adopted? In working out the payoffs, it is important for the analyst to bear in mind that benefits and costs are not always expressible in calculative short-run economic terms. She may need to find other ways of illustrating the costs and benefits.

I have presented the steps for ethical analysis, but ethics is not only about analysis. It is also about social action. So it is important to situate our methodology within the context of social action informed by social or ethical principles. The ethical methodology we have just developed enables the ethicist or activist to do two things. First, to clearly see, understand, and judge (based on one’s theological or philosophical principles) the state of the problem; second, to identify the most fitting solutions which can address the problem in the light of one’s theology or social principles, and pluralism. These should lead to the final stage of action, praxis. The real purpose of analysis is to recognize the ways in which to act in order to change the circumstances that threaten the common good. Pope John XXIII put it well in his May 15, 1961 encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra*, when he stated:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can

and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.<sup>13</sup>

#### *2:4. Flowchart of Ethical Analysis*

In the preceding pages I set out the “mechanics” of executing an ethical analysis. I also briefly located the analysis in the context of an overarching purpose of social action. It bears noting that the methodology that has been presented is an ideal format. Most ethicists do not religiously follow this step-by-step approach. They often use a network approach—looping in and out of these stages in a non-sequential manner. The important thing is that the various elements, segments, or stages we have laboriously laid out are discernible in their works. A good and rigorous ethical analysis will always define or state the problem it intends to address, give a sense of the theological (philosophical or ethological) resources it is using to shape the discourse, and fund the offering of solution to the problem. Of course, not every analyst will endeavor to present each of these three dimensions in the manifold richness of a unified and coherent discourse as I have endeavored to present in this essay. I have explicitly presented an ideal format implicit in the majority of good ethical analyses.<sup>14</sup> The purpose is to enable students to clearly follow the pedagogy of ethical analysis. Below is the summary of the methodology in a “flowchart” format for quick reference.

#### *Stage 1: Social Analysis (Ethos Analysis)*

- a. What is the problem or concern? Why is it a problem? This is the issue(s) that you consider to be threatening the moral fabric and stability of the society or community.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961), no. 236. This document can be accessed online at the following link: [http://www.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jxxxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater\\_en.html](http://www.va/holy_father/john_xxxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jxxxiii_enc_15051961_mater_en.html). Accessed February 13, 2009. It is tempting to at this point to consider the major social encyclicals that tackle issues of social justice and public theology that are indicated in this paper. To do this will take us far afield as this paper is only concerned with developing an ethical methodology for public theology, not with the concrete and specific analysis of any social issues. It will also be interesting to see how the ethical methodology of the major social encyclicals fits or does not fit with the method developed in this paper. This is yet another task that we must let pass for now.

<sup>13</sup> For examples of the use of this methodology in ethical analysis see Nimi Wariboko, *The Depth and Destiny of Work: An African Theological Interpretation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008); Nimi Wariboko, *God and Money: A Theology of Money in a Globalizing World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008); Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed Gods: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); and Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

- b. Social-scientific examination of the problem. You draw from social sciences, humanities, sciences, etc to help us understand the problem in its crucial dimensions. It pays or helps to provide some empirical analyses backed by historical and contemporary data. *This is one way of taking into account the multiple forces that structure a society.*
- c. Examination of the ethos (values, norms, etc) of the society and how it relates to the problem. If you want to change anything you have got to understand the presuppositions behind it. Wrestle with the values that are implicit in the culture, values that drive the legitimacy (rightness or goodness) of actions/behaviors.

*Stage 2: Resources for Reflecting on the Problem*

- a. Identify theological and biblical (philosophical) resources that will be brought to inform and shape the discourse of the problem and also ground and fund possible ethical solution, paradigm, response. What is your theology (or theological presuppositions) for approaching the problem?
- b. Analyze the operating norms in the ethos (discovered by ethology) to see if they are basically right (deontologically, that is, in accord with the best knowledge available theologically by common grace or in accord with the “laws of God”). And see if they are also actually good (teleologically, that is, in accord with the best theological vision of the purposes of God we can know).

*Stage 3: Ethical Solution (Response, Paradigm) and Payoff*

- a. What is the ethical solution (response, idea, paradigm, intuition) that flows from your theological analysis/discourse that bears upon the problem? Show how it can either strengthen the community or reduce (remove, restate, solve) the identified problem.
- b. This “solution” should be framed by dialogue with important thinkers in the field.
- c. Once the solution is well defined, show how it fits into the ethos of the community identified in Stage 1 above. Explain why your solution should be considered a fitting response by the community that is at a given historical juncture. Asking how the proposed solution fits or does not easily fit into the ethos may require confrontation or transformation of the ethos in that respect. Inquire also as to what resources in the ethos could contribute to a better solution.
- d. Determine whether a new institution or organization needs to be proposed in order to effect the necessary changes. If so, what is the cost-benefit impact of this new institution on the community?

- e. Discern how your solution will be perceived in a pluralistic civil society with multiple religions and worldviews. Will it also pass muster with some of the academic viewpoints you identified and used in Stage 1 (social-scientific examination). *What are some of the deontological, ethological, and teleological aspects of your proposed response/solution that can serve to build or uphold common morality (common good) in an open civil society?*
- f. What are the possible overall payoffs to the community if your solution or response is accepted and adopted? *Remember, benefits are not always expressible in calculative short-run economic terms.*

### SECTION 3: CONCLUDING REMARKS

By way of reaching conclusion, I would like to briefly lay out the *deep structure* beneath the ethical model of analysis presented above. What I have submitted as a model is a discourse that attempts to relate ultimate ends, theological presuppositions, to social reality, social sciences, ethos, and pluralism. It is rooted in a Troeltschian discourse of how to relate the formal spirit of the church to the material realities that constitute the civil society, to the goods and purposes of the inner-worldly life. One of Ernst Troeltsch's contributions to Christian ethics is to show how the church was able to bring together in unity the transcendent goals of Christianity and cultural values as it engages its public. The ethical methodology of this paper has shown how the theologian can navigate the problematic relation between Christianity and culture, can mediate the tension between (religious) Christian moral purposes and humane ethical motivation without retreating behind sectarian walls. As Brent W. Sockness argues:

The modern religious crisis is an ethical and cultural one not to be solved by writing new dogmatic treatises. The question is how to mediate and hold together the tense polarity between religious and humane morality, or, to borrow Troeltsch's illustration, how to square the piety of Luther and Bach, on the one hand, with the humanity of Goethe and the statesmanship of Bismarck, on the other hand...For Troeltsch, the exploration of the "fundamental problems of ethics" is largely a matter of developing a conceptual scheme or set of categories capable of doing justice to the nature of moral reality as we find it historically and actually experience it.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Brent W. Sockness, "Looking Behind the Social Teachings" Troeltsch's Methodological Reflections in 'Fundamental Problems of Ethics' (1902)," *The Annual, Society of Christian Ethics*, 1995: 243-4.

The model has shown us a simple way to make Christian (religious) ideas relevant to social issues even when they infinitely transcend the social and ultimately pull it toward God's purposes. Put differently, it reveals how theological ethics or public theology can move away from conceptual analyses to engage with concrete policy discourse on social problems. This engagement with policies and with contemporary history is necessary to make public theology practical. The rigors of a deliberate and well thought-out ethical analysis can offer practical guidance to decision-makers as they deal with the urgent issues of our time.

There is another aspect of the deep structure of the model worth pointing out in order to further expose the submerged theological-social theoretical assumptions that are internal to it and also sustain it. The ethical analysis I have developed in this paper does not only attempt to grasp the social analysis and empirical reality of problems, but also strives to plumb the depths of the presuppositions about human nature and community's understanding of God in its discourse. The thinking is that without the analyst understanding the deep presuppositions, the deepest and broadest ethos of forms of human sociality she might miss the vital non-material motivating factors for/against a public policy, ethical reforms within the economy and society, or the pursuit of the common good. As Stackhouse, one of America's eminent ethicists, has argued, public theologians enter into debates about political and economic policies based on the conviction that the political economy—and indeed all civilizations—are deeply influenced by religion, worldview, and ethical presuppositions.<sup>16</sup> Stackhouse is, of course, drawing from what Max Weber taught us long ago. Weber argued that religion is an independent factor that substantively shapes culture and economic systems in particular are influenced by religious factors that are in constant interaction with material interests.<sup>17</sup>

Having said all this, I would like to state that neither public theology nor the ethical methodology described in this paper is about giving direction to governmental policy. Both of them—at least as I understand them—are aimed at recognizing the religious dynamics that influence social life. Whether we are talking about public theology in its thematic-discursive format or in its analytical-methodological format as presented in this paper the attention is on the need to develop capabilities that address and guide the basic ordering of the common life in non-particularistic theological terms. The overarching intention is to present

<sup>15</sup> Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). See also his *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. T. Parson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930).



arguments that promote greater inclusiveness, greater justice, and higher levels of human flourishing that spur on men and women to transformative praxis.