The Functions of Sociology in the Theological Curriculum

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IN **Through The Looking-Glass,** Humpty-Dumpty has conversation with Alice about the meanings of words. Doubtless Humpty-Dumpty is not the founder of contemporary semantics, but in any event he says, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." But, Alice retorts, "The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things." Oh, replies Humpty-Dumpty in effect, that is no problem. "The question is which is to be master—that's all."[1] The use of such a conversation to introduce this paper is perhaps justified on two counts: first, the theological seminary and its curriculum are in some respects an Alice in Wonderland world—on this point I shall not comment directly; second, the words in the title of the paper require careful specification of meaning, since the content of what follows depends greatly upon the meaning attached to the key concepts—function, curriculum, and sociology.

We shall return to this matter in a moment. But a word concerning the context within which the paper is written seems appropriate first. The author has recently completed four years of teaching in a theological seminary. Since he has taught in only one seminary, the paper will undoubtedly reflect primarily the situation of sociology in theological education as experienced in the setting provided—a Protestant (Methodist) seminary with a reputation for extreme liberalism in areas of religion and theology, and in the tradition of which great respect is paid to the empirical method in philosophy, theology, and the social sciences. The seminary involved is one of a not large number in which sociology is afforded the status of a full-time chair. The academic context certainly influences the view one has of the place of his discipline.

[1] Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking-Glass.*

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I.

Basic Concepts

The concept of function needs definition in this paper primarily because, as R. K. Merton has indicated, the concept is subject to great ambiguity. The concept of function, when correctly employed in sociological work, "refers to observable objective consequences, and not to subjective dispositions (aims, motives, purposes)."[2] The writer subscribes to this view. Yet too little is known at present about sociology in theological education to provide answers to such questions as "what are the observable objective consequences of the presence of sociology in the theological curriculum?" If this is correct, what we shall be dealing with is really the **charter** for sociology in the theological curriculum. The charter might, in the mood of Malinowski, be thought of as the values in pursuit of which sociology is introduced into the theological curriculum, the idea of sociology as defined by the theological community, the purpose(s) for which the data, hypotheses, and perspectives of this field are given a place in that curriculum.[3] But rather than

[2] *Social Theory and Social Structure,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1957, Rev. Ed.), 24.

introduce a new concept into the title of the paper, we shall settle the question by stipulating that we shall discuss the objective consequences sociology **should** have in the theological curriculum and not its **actual** function, except where ideal and actual may converge.[4]

The concept of **curriculum** is also subject to ambiguity. A recent work on school curricula[5] points out that by "curriculum" we can mean at least the following: the course of study, the list of courses given (together with the sequence in which they are to be taken), the subject matter taught (chosen on the basis of its imputed cultural value, timeliness, or usefulness in preparation for a given occupation), and the planned experiences of the student under the supervision of the school. The consideration of the functions of sociology in the theological curriculum will have in mind all of these understandings of curriculum, but the final one—curriculum as planned experience—is the only meaning of curriculum which can do justice to the potentialities of sociology in theological education. If we think of the seminary curriculum in terms of adding courses or departments, the seminary becomes like a cafeteria to which we are adding another item (in the instance of sociology, is it entree, vegetable, salad, or dessert?). Actually, no field of study is introduced into the curriculum of a theological seminary without some minimal consensus that the planned experiences of students need to be changed or augmented.

The well-known study of **The Advancement of Theological Education** seems to support this point of view. Speaking of the introduction of non-theological subjects into the course of study, the Niebuhr-Williams-Gustafson study states, "In part this movement seems to reflect the concern that theology be studied in a large context and in continuous dialogue with the ideas that most affect contemporary secular thought; in part it is due to the need to supply background knowledge for practical studies in pastoral work and social ethics; in part it is made necessary by . . . students who are poorly prepared in . . . humanistic disciplines and social sciences."[6] Subject matter areas and specific courses are added to the course of study in the belief that they will enrich the total experience of the student, and not, one supposes, because "no self-respecting seminary would be without a Department of Sociology."

As for the concept of **sociology**, we are aware that this is not the place to decide the question of the definitive interpretation of the work in which we are engaged. Nor can we be content to define sociology in an operational manner by asserting that sociology is what the people who call themselves sociologists do. For our purposes, we had best steer between the Scylla of jurisdictional disputes among specialists and the Charybdis of begging the question by adopting one widely accepted definition of the field. Since we are discussing the functions of **sociology**, we need some tentative stipulation of what it is. Yet this need not be treat-

[3] Cf. Malinowski, B., *A Scientific Theory of Culture,* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 48, 52, 162. In this connection, see also the study by Ellsworth, J., *Factory Folkways,* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1952), in which he utilizes the Malinowski institutional approach and provides a cogent discussion of the aspects of the institution, one of which is the *charter.*

[4] If this seems to render questionable our acceptance of Merton's important discussion of the concept of function, we feel compelled to take the risk. As indicated, not enough is known to be able to answer Merton's kind of question in this area. The term "function" was in the subject assigned for this paper, but we have felt compelled to adapt it to our understanding of the situation being looked at in the paper.

[5] Anderson, V. E., *Principles and Procedures of Curriculum Improvement,* (New York, Ronald Press, 1956), 7-10.

[6] Niebuhr, H. R., Williams, D.D., and Gustafson, J., *The Advancement of Theological Education,* (New York, Harper, 1957), 21.

ed as anything more than settling the question for the purpose of getting on with the discussion. In the spirit of Humpty-Dumpty then, "sociology," as used in this paper, is the study of "human groups and the principles which govern their organization, and the consequences which result from their existence and activities."[7] While sociology shares with the the other social sciences a common interest in human behavior, its central focus is on human groups.

II.

Sociology in Dialogue With Other Disciplines

With this background, we are ready to set forth some major functions of sociology in the theological curriculum. The first of these functions is the **communication of the data, hypotheses, and perspectives of sociology,** as these seem relevant to the professional aims of theological education. This function may best be viewed as consisting, in the main, of two aspects—a dialogue with other disciplines in the curriculum, and the communication of the growing body of information from the sociology of religion.

The dialogue with other disciplines is particularly relevant to the fields of theology, philosophy, psychology of religion, and social and/or Christian ethics, but it is evident with Biblical studies and religious education as well. In this connection, the study of theological education referred to earlier speaks quite emphatically of the service to the theological enterprise performed by non-theological, "secular" disciplines. "A student has not been introduced to the core of theological education until he has entered into this conversation between Christian thought and the many disciplines which are concerned with man and his world. . . . Philosophy, psychology, and sociology . . . are essential to the full understanding of the Christian faith itself."[8] But the point can be asserted even more forcefully. Not only are the disciplines concerned with man essential; in addition, ". . . there needs to be in the theological faculty some strong representation of scientific and cultural disciplines to act as a continual check and critic of the theological standpoint, and . . . to provide for that vital discussion between theology and the cultural situation which is necessary if the faith is to be communicated."[9] From this point of view, sociology in dialogue with the other disciplines is not an extra or frill—like a Department of Sanskrit in an agricultural college—but something integral to the objectives of the curriculum.

The dialogue can be illustrated in a number of ways. With respect to theology, the most obvious point of contact is the doctrine of man (and the related matters of sin and salvation). As the movement toward the integration of sociology, anthropology, and psychology into some kind of unified "science of man" continues,[10] the importance of the dialogue with theology will increase. Philosophy, too, will continue to figure in this pattern of dialogue, perhaps most significantly in the question of epistemological and methodological issues which cut a swath across both philosophy and sociology. Two recent indications of this are Furfrey's discussion of **metasociology,**[11] and William

[7] Freedman, R., *et al, Principles of Sociology,* (New York, Holt, 1956), 10. This view might be usefully compared with the excellent summary of approaches to sociology found in Kingsley Davis, *Human Society,* (New York, Macmillan, 1950).

[8] Niebuhr, H. R., Williams, D. D., and Gustafson, J., *op. cit.,* 87.

[9] *Ibid.,* 64.

[10] Cf. Gillin, J., (ed.), *For a Science of Social Man,* (New York, Macmillan, 1954); Komarovsky, M., *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1957); Parsons, T., and Shils, E. (eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action,* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1951).

[11] Furfey, P. H.,*The Scope and Method of Sociology,* (New York, Harper, 1953).

Kolb's provocative suggestion[12] that insights from the Judeo-Christian faith might serve as reliable presuppositions in certain phases of sociological work.

The dialogue between sociology and social and/or Christian ethics takes on growing importance in connection with the implementation of ethical norms and values in the contemporary society. One facet of this is the introduction of the study of social disorganization and "social problems"[13] into the curriculum, and another is the increasing recognition by Christian ethicists that the normative considerations with which they deal must be interpreted in the context of competent description and analysis of the is of any given situation. A current example of this dialogue is the study by Campbell and Pettigrew of what Little Rock ministers did (or did not do) in the school integration crisis.[14] In this instance a letter to the writer from one of the ministers who was interviewed in the study indicates the importance of the dialogue among the areas of theology, Christian ethics, and sociology. Said this minister, "They had no place in their schema for my approach. . . . While witnessing in my own congregation, I channelled my energies through secular organizations and power groups that work to change society. Pettigrew and Campbell, strangely enough, had little, if any, conception of the responsibility of Christians to work through secular organizations to achieve their ends. . . . Preachers may nurture consciences and appeal to them, but changes do not usually come about except through some kind of organized approach."[15] The sociologists may not finally have agreed with what the theological practitioner (if we may refer to a minister as such) told them, but they must certainly have become aware of the lively dialogue that is possible among the areas mentioned.

III.

Sociology of Religion.

The communication of information from the sociology of religion is indispensable to the functions of sociology in the theological curriculum. What has been accomplished in the field, and where it ought to develop, or will develop next is a matter of argument. But there seems little question that there are intellectual stirrings within the field, fraught with potentialities for substantial contributions to our understanding of the place of religious behavior in human societies. The publication of the two major textbooks in the field by Yinger and Hoult, and the briefer study by Nottingham,[16] indicate at least that the findings in this area are capable of taking on substance and a meaningful structure. Earlier papers by

[12] Kolb, W., "On Being a Christian Sociologist," *Religion in Life,* XXVI, (1957), 501-512; "Religion and Values in Sociological Theory," *The Christian Scholar,* XXXIX, (1956), 204-208; "Basic Assumptions Underlying Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge and Science," Unpublished paper.

[13] We are not at the moment concerned with the argument over whether social disorganization is a value-loaded concept, or whether the "conflct of values" approach is to be preferred to that of social disorganization. The "ideology of the social pathologists" is an important issue, but the description and analysis of "problems" seem to proceed without benefit of final solution to these issues.

[14] *Christians in Racial Crisis,* (Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1959). In connection with the general topic of the dialogue between Christian Ethics and the social sciences, see the writer's paper, "Some Issues in Contemporary Christian Ethics: Interrelations wth Theology and Social Science," *Iliff Review,* XV, (Winter, 1958), 39-46.

[15] Personal Communication, 15 March, 1959, from a Little Rock minister who participated in a vigorous way in the school integration situation.

[16] Yinger, J. M., *Religion, Society, and the Individual,* (New York, Macmillan, 1957); Hoult, T. F., *Sociology of Religion,* (New York, Holt-Dryden, 1958); Nottingham, E., *Religion and Society,* (New York, Random House Short Studies in Sociology, 1956).

Yinger[17] and Dynes[18] outlined the program which might be followed for developments in this field, and suggested some of its contributions to our understanding of the complex and reciprocal interaction between religion and society, culture, and personality. We are forced to agree with the recent estimate of Glock that "In a discipline as young as sociology, . . . the accomplishments will add up to much less than the prospects. This is certainly the impression obtained from our examination of the state of the sociology of religion. We can say little with authority and specificity about the place of religion in contemporary society. Yet the promise for the future is far from discouraging. Of not inconsiderable importance is the fact that sociologists' curiosity about religion is on the increase."[19] While prospects continue to exceed accomplishments, we must stand ready to communicate accomplishments when they occur, and to make increasing contributions to the research in the field.

In the research concerns we are handicapped by the familiar problems of lack of time and resources which beset those whose major energies must be devoted to preparation for, and the performance of, classroom responsibilities. At the same time, we have a certain advantage—those of us who teach in theological seminaries—in the fact that we are in close contact with the on-going processes of organized religion in our relationship with students who are serving churches while participating in theological education and with officials and administrators of various churches. In the communication of accomplishments in the field, we are perhaps handicapped by the kinds of difficulties suggested by Page, in his discussion of "Sociology as a Teaching Enterprise"[20]—to wit, we are in the position of being academic imperialists; we spread ourselves too thin; we are social reformers in disguise;[21] we are marginal to the academic scheme of things. Yet these matters must be taken in stride and regarded as challenges to which, like good students of Toynbee, we must respond.

IV.

Sociology as Mediator of the Social Sciences

A second major function of sociology in the theological curriculum, related closely to the first one, is this. Sociology functions as a **mediator of knowledge from all the social sciences.** The degree to which this function is performed will vary with the orientation of the seminary and with the extent to which insights from anthropology, political science, and economics are introduced through social ethics, psychology, and church history. In some seminaries the mediation of social science knowledge falls to the lot of the sociologist for the reason that his is the only social science represented, as such, on the faculty. In a seminary where the proposition that a minister, in order to function in his various roles, must have an adequate understanding of the church as a social institution, and of the church's relation to other major institutional complexes in community and society, the communication of knowledge from all the social sciences is indispensable. Up to the present, it must be admitted that in the implementation

[17] "The Present Status of the Sociology of Religion," *Journal of Religion, XXXI* (1951), 194-210; and "Areas for Sociological Research: In Sociology of Religion," *Sociology and Social Research,* XLII, (1957-58), 466-472.

[18] Dynes, R., "Toward the Sociology of Religion,' *Sociology and Social Research,* XXXVIII, (1953-54), 227-232.

[19] *Sociology Today,* ed. Merton, R. K., Broom, L., and Cottrell, L., (New York, Basic Books, 1959), 175.

[20] *Ibid.,* 579-597.

[21] In this connection, note Riesman's comment about the social sciences. "All these sciences, and particularly sociology, became a decompression chamber for ministers and sons of ministers." *Constraint and Variety in American Education,* (New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), 70.

of this function not nearly enough has been accomplished. Blizzard, for instance, has recently pointed out that "the frame of reference that ministers have toward community structure, community problems, and approaches to the community does not differ on the basis of the community cultural location of their church."[22]

Yet the possibility of accepting a tremendous responsibility in the carrying out of the objectives of theological education exists at just this point of sensitizing the future minister to the institutional, communal, and cultural contexts in which he will enact his professional role. Recognizing the conclusion of Blizzard that "Granting the differences in community structure and culture, the implication is that there is a basic orientation that every minister needs whatever the uniqueness of the demands and expectations he may encounter in a particular community."[23] we must go on to joint out what a tremendous gap there is between the knowledge a minister needs to function intelligently in contemporary society, and the knowledge he actually has. The kinds of knowledge we are referring to are available primarily through the avenue of the social sciences.

The potential use of sociology in the theological curriculum as a mediator of this knowledge from the social sciences —whether by default or deliberate planning—is seen in the writer's experience with a course on "American Society: Its Institutions and Culture." In this case, while the approach was consciously sociological, along the lines suggested in Robin Williams' **American Society,**[24] a deliberately broad definition of the work was encouraged, and provocative use was made of Max Lerner's **America as a Civilization.**[25] Students were asked to fill in gaps in their knowledge of economics and political science, and in other ways exposed to insights not always available to them in other disciplines in the theological seminary.

There is a definite place for this mediator approach in the theological curriculum, because of the evident lack of preparation in the social sciences among present theological students. The performance of this mediating function does present major difficulties—such as whether the sociologist can, like St. Paul, succeed in being all things to all men. But if the job is there to be done, the sociologist, when called upon, should rise to the occasion. We do not suggest that this responsibility necessarily falls to the sociologist in any exclusive sense. On the faculties of many theological seminaries there are men in several fields whose training may make it possible for them to mediate insights from the social sciences. The sociologist's contribution to this process is needed, in any event, since what he selects from the social sciences would tend to differ from the material selected by persons whose training and orientation is in psychology, history, ethics, or philosophy.

V.

Sociology and the Provision of Skills and Techniques

A third major function of sociology in the theological curriculum helps in large measure to account for the fact that sociology is a part of theological education today. This is the function of **providing training in skills and techniques of demographic and ecological description and analysis, and community survey.** The practical matter of

[22] "The Parish Minister's Self-Image and Variability n Community Culture," *Pastoral Psychology,* October, 1959.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] (New York, Knopf, 1960, Rev. Ed.)

[25] We are aware of the controversial response to Lerner's work. But it is interesting that the work was considered important enough to absorb time for one entire session of the American Sociological Association meetings in 1959. We can testify to the reality of the provocative uses of the Lerner volume.

making intelligent decisions concerning the location of new church plants and relocation of churches which are subject to invasion and succession (or the decision to remain to carry out a ministry to a changing neighborhood) depends upon the possession of the requisite knowledge from the areas of ecology and demography. These disciplines are contributed to, and indeed have been developed in crucial ways by scholars not identified with sociology,[26] but it is nevertheless through the sociologist that this kind of knowledge is usually funneled into the theological curriculum.

While adequate information on the point is not at hand, a reliable impression seems to be that in many seminaries where sociology is formally admitted into the curriculum, it is usually through the doorway of a department of rural or urban church. In this context, some useful work has been done, and it has resulted in the production of helpful manuals of procedure, frequently used by theological students and ministers to good advantage.[27] For our purposes what is most significant to note is the way in which what started as a quite practical concern with the problems of locating church plants and keeping up with population developments has expanded to the proportions of full-scale departments of sociology of religion. In part this is due to the increasing realization that demographic and ecological approaches alone are inadequate tools which to deal with the problems of urban or rural churches. Sociology of religion has entered the curriculum of theological education in other ways—for instance by gradually declaring its independence of social and/or Christian ethics, with which it is often still associated—but certainly one important way this has come about is out of the concern for urban and rural churches by way of demography, ecology, and community survey.

Sociologists sometimes lament the fact that it is difficult to secure research grants for projects which might yield results significant for the advancement of sociological theory, but from which no immediately "usable" or practical outcome is assured. They mention, in this connection, that research funds are most often available for market research—for projects which use existing research techniques to d i s c o v e r whether a product of a certain size and color, packaged in such and such a way, and intended to meet an existent felt need (or a need the manufacturer hopes to create) will sell. To be sure, recent developments have improved this situation, and sociologists have begun to devise ways to make market research relevant to the advancement of sociological theory. Our point in the present context, however, is that—in a real sense—the demographic and ecological community survey represents an "ecclesiastical market research" approach to the study of the church as a social institution. In the past, the kind of sociological inquiry which church groups have been most willing to underwrite is that which promises to yield immediately practical information—which answers a market research type of question (where shall we locate our next retail outlet, so that our product will be sure to reach the consumer for whom it is intended?)

While the interest in population characteristics and ecological processes has been in some respects superseded by attention to other aspects of the re-

[26] Cf. the recent "encyclopedia" on demography, by Hauser, P., and Duncan, O. D., *The Study of Population,* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959).

[27] Cf. Leiffer, M., *The Effective City Church,* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1955); Smith, R. C., *The Church in Our Town,* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1955); Shippey, F. A., *Church Work in the City,* (Nashville Abingdon Press, 1952); Stotts, H., *The Church Inventory Handbook,* (Denver, Wesley Press, 1951); Kloetzli, W., and Hillman, A., *Urban Church Planning,* (Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1958).

lation of the church to its milieu,[28] the desirability of giving theological students an appreciation of, and some adequate training in the skills of, the community or neighborhood survey still remains. This cannot be done, realistically speaking, with the intention of making demographers, ecologists, or—perish the thought—sociologists out of the future ministers. Yet such training can sensitize them to the importance of the survey to their future work, and can acquaint them with ways to obtain relevant and accurate information about their communities. Even so, we are bound to add a caution suggested in the Niebuhr - Williams - Gustafson study. "Sociological studies . . .are not to become merely auxiliary support for the study of rural (or urban) peculiarities . . . It (theological e d u c a t i o n) should not be a concentration on the needs and skills required in dealing with but one type of church problem; it should not substitute 'vocational training' for mastery of the Christian heritage."[29]

VI.

The Potential Sociology of Theological Education

The fourth function of sociology in the theological curriculum is to **contribute significantly to the understanding of the process of theologicol education itself, and of those who participate in it.**[30] Two major facets of this function are here singled out for detailed consideration: the possibility of a sociology of theological education, and the cruciality of self-and-role-images as they emerge in the experience of theological students. A potential sociology of theological education could learn much from recent developments in the sociology of **medical** education. Donald Young has pointed out that "the key to effective collaboration between sociologists and members of the practicing professions lies in detailed study of the subcultures involved."[31] Medicine is perhaps the profession with the great-

[28] Cf. Underwood, K., *Protestant and Catholic,* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1957); Sklare, M., *Conservative Judaism,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1955); Harrison, P. M., *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959); Pope, L., *Millhands and Preachers,* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1942); Whitley, O. R., *Trumpet Call of Reformation,* (St. Louis, Bethany Press, 1959).

[29] *The Advancement of Theological Education,* 110-111.

[30] In discussing this function, the writer has been influenced by the literature in three major areas: The emerging sociology of medical education (and of medicine); the sociology of occupations and professions; and the social psychology of role, and particularly the recent material on the role of the minister. The bibliography is too extensive to indicate in detail here. Some of the significant literature would include: Gee, H., and Glaser, R., (eds.), *The Ecology of the Medical Student,* (Evanston, Association of American Medical Colleges, 1958); Merton, R. K., *et al, The Student Physician,* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957); Jaco, E. G., (ed.), *Patients, Physicians and Illness,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1958); Parsons, T., *The Social System,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1951); Sarbin, T. R., "Role Theory," in Gardner & Lindsey, *Handbook of Social Psychology,* (Cambridge, Addison-Wesley, 1954); Gross, N., Mason, W., and McEachern, A., *Explorations in Role Analysis,* (New York, J. Wiley, 1958); Blizzard, S., "The Parish Minister Evaluates His Work," Association of Seminary Professors in the Practical Fields, *Report of Fourth Biennial Meeting,* 1956; Blizzard, S., "The Parish Minister's Self Image and Variability in Community Culture," *Pastoral Psychology,* (October, 1959); Blizzard, S., "The Roles of the Rural Parish Minister, The Protestant Seminaries, and the Sciences of Social Behavior," *Religious Education,* (November-December, 1955); Gustafson, J., "An Analysis of the Problem of the Role of the Minister," *Journal of Religion,* XXXIV, (1954), 187-191; Hughes, E., *Men and Their Work,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1958); Carlin, J., and Mendlovitz, S., "The American Rabbi: A Religious Specialist Responds to Loss of Authority," in Sklare, M., (ed.), *The Jews,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1958), 377-414; Goldstein, S., "The Roles of An American Rabbi," *Sociology and Social Research,* XXXVIII, 1953-54), 32-37; Leiffer, M., *The Role of the District Superintendent in the Methodist Church,* (Evanston, Bureau of Social and Religious Research, 1960).

[31] "Sociology and the Practising Professions," *American Sociological Review,* XX, (1955), 647.

est prestige in our society, and it is frequently looked to by other professions as a model.[32] The impressions we have gained in four years of teaching in a theological seminary support the hypothesis that, in the majority of instances, what is being said about medical education applies with equal force to theological education (with allowances, of course, for the differences in curriculum and professional objectives.)

Until recently, as R. K. Merton has indicated, social science research in medical education was largely confined to psychological studies of medical students, focused largely upon such matters as criteria for admittance and predictions of academic performance, with little attention being paid to the medical school subculture and the patterns of inter-personal relations,[33] not to mention consideration of the influence of patterns of faculty - student relations.[34] By and large, the same thing could be said concerning studies of theological students, although increasing attention is now being paid to the milieu of theological education, as the recognition that curriculum means more than course of study increases.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the understanding of the process of theological education which could be made by sociologists is the study of the theological seminary subculture. The larger context here is the existence of the subculture of the ministry as a profession, the norms and values of which it is certainly as a function of the theological seminary to teach its students. R. K. Merton has again addressed himself to a crucial point when he suggests that, because of the pressures which are exerted upon professional practitioners to d e p a r t from the standards they have learned, it is extremely important that they "acquire, in medical school, those norms and values which will make them less vulnerable to such deviations. . . . The acquisition of appropriate attitudes and values is as central as the acquisition of knowledge and skills."[35] If the point applies with equal impact to the profession of the ministry—and how can this be doubted?—then the significance of the study of the seminary subculture, which mediates the norms and values of the profession, is apparent. The importance of this whole matter was strongly emphasized by one theological educator, M. C. Froyd, when he pointed out that "it is commonly said that it is the minister who makes the church . . . But in a much more subtle sense it is the church, with its secular penetrations and cultural weight, that makes the minister, presses him into the shape of its own design, forces him onto a track already spiked down for him."[36]

Christie and Merton, in setting forth "Procedures for the Sociological Study of the Values Climate of Medical Schools,"[37] have provided us with valuable suggestions as to a methodology which would, we believe, prove equally productive in the study of theological seminary subcultures. Their assumptions are indicative of the sociological perspective, and they are also an excellent statement of some reasons for insisting that curriculm should be defined as planned experiences, rather than as course of study. The assump-

[32] Merton, R. K., *The Student Physician,* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957), 37.

[33] As Merton indicates, ". . . sociometric techniques have been adopted to establish the facts of the case about interpersonal relations among medical students. Inquiries are now under way to discover how distinctve patterns of interpersonal relations foster or curb the acquisition of medical skills, knowledge, and values," *The Student Physician,* 49. The same approach could, without great difficulty, be used in a theological seminary.

[34] Merton, R. K., *The Student Physician,* 57-58.

[35] *Ibid.,* 78-79.

[36] "What Is Practical in Theological Education?", *Journal of Religion,* XXV, (1955), 174-75.

[37] In Gee, H., and Glaser, R., *The Ecology of the Medical Student,* (Evanston, Association of American Medical Colleges, 1958).

tions indicated include the following: (1) that changes in one part of a social system will tend to bring about changes in other parts of the system; (2) that students, faculty, and other personnel are interdependent components of a social system, which means that educational development of each student is affected significantly by his social relationships with others in the school, and by the values others hold; (3) that climates of value differ from one school to another, in a degree as yet unknown; (4) that large differences in the social and cultural environment of school result in significant differences in the education of students. These assumptions place great stress upon the value climate of a school, because it is believed to be of crucial significance in the educational process.

The **process** of theological education needs more study from the point of view of the professional subculture of the ministry. The Niebuhr-Williams-Gustafson study deals with a number of matters which are relevant to this kind of inquiry, but much more needs to be done. The experience of seminaries with the method of altering the course of study without considering in serious fashion the importance of extra-course of study factors in the educational process has not proved noticeably successful. Apparently, reducing or increasing the number of r e q u i r e d courses, or adding new elective courses (even sociology courses!) to the program does not bring in the Kingdom of God in theological education. The need for some other approach to the more complete realization of the objectives of theological education is clear. A new approach will depend upon more adequate knowledge of the **total process** of theological education than we now possess. Sociologists will, one hopes, find it possible to make significant contributions to this knowledge. This is indeed an important function of sociology in theological curricula.

VII

Theological Students and Ministers: The Importance of Self and Role Images

An English woman asked a physician, "Where do all the horrible medical students go and all the fine yong doctors come from?" Dr. John R. Ellis, the physician who was asked this question, comments that "presumably the answer lies in the nature of the milieu which is responsible for the dramatic change."[38] The same question might well be asked concerning the minister. Where do all the horrible theological students go and all the fine young ministers come from? The question focuses attention upon the process by which the **student** begins to acquire the role of **minister,** and the relate this role to the other roles which he plays. Acquiring the role of minister is very much involved in the nature of the educational process. Learning to be a minister, as Merton says of learning to be a physician, "like complex learning of all kinds, is not only a function of intelligence and aptitude, of motivations and self-images; it is also a function of the social environments in which learning and performance take place."[39]

In connection with the acquisition of any professional role there is the obvious process of acquiring a body of knowledge and a set of skills. Yet the role of minister is apparently acquired in ways not set forth in the seminary catalogue, that is, indirectly through contacts of various kinds with instructors and peers.[40] H. S. Becker and Carper have observed in a study of "identification with an occupation,"[41]

[38] *Ibid,* xxiv.

[39] Merton, R. K., *The Student Physician,* 63.

[40] *Ibid.,* 41.

[41] "The Development of Identification With an Occupation," *American Journal of Sociology,* LXI, (1955-56), 289-298; and "Elements of Identification Wtih an Occupaton," *American Sociological Review,* XXI, (1956), 341-348.

that the elements involved in such an identification include the occupational title and its associated ideology, a commitment to the task, a commitment to specific organizations or institutional positions, and the development of the sense of significance of the occupation for one's position in the larger society. If all of these elements are involved in identifying oneself with the role of minister (and they appear to be) then it can readily be seen why it is crucial to the objectives of theological education for us to learn more about what happens to self-and role-images during the period of seminary training. In large part, the development of an identification with role of minister would seem to depend upon learning situations and experiences which are only indirectly associated with the course of study **per se.**

If sociologists are to make a contribution to the understanding of the process of theological education, there are excellent reasons for making the study of the development of the role of the minister in the seminary milieu a focal point of that contribution. One of these reasons is that working through the concept of role would relate the sociology of theological education to work going on in a number of social sciences, and would potentially contribute to sociological theory. Gross, Mason, and McEachern have pointed out that "The concept of role has assumed a key position in the fields of sociology, social psychology, and cultural anthropology, Students of the social sciences frequently make use of it as a central term is conceptual schemes for the analysis of the structure and functioning of social systems and for the explanation of individual behavior."[42] A second reason for making the concept of role a focal point in the sociology of theological education is more directly related to the aim of that education, and the goal of the churches which provide most of the support for the seminaries—the production of competent, skilled, and committed ministers, priests, and rabbis.

The importance of the study of the minister's role from this second standpoint has been underlined in a perceptive paper by James Gustafson. "The problem the minister faces in any social conext," writes Gustafson, "is that of determining **who he is** and **what he is doing** within the complexity of his functions. . . . Frequently what his seminary has failed to help him find is a theory of the ministry and . . . a sociological definition of his task. If he has worked out either of these, he has frequently not integrated the two so he can find some basis of legitimation for many of his specific activities within the gospel and tradition of the church. Or he may understand what the tradition and theology of the ministry are, without understanding the complexity of the institutions and communities in which he must actualize his norms."[43] The theological student certainly learns something about who he is and what he is doing as he attends class, hears lectures, asks questions, writes papers, and takes examinations, but again, too little is known about the processes involved in the indirect learnings which appear to be so important in indentification with the minister's role.

The promise of work in terms of role concept, both for sociological theory and for the developing of more adequate ministers, is shown in the research already done by Blizzard, Goldstein, Gustafson, Carlin and Mendlovitz. [44] And we should also mention that an increasing number of papers presented at the biennial meeting of the Association of Seminary Professors in

[42] *Explorations in Role Analysis,* (New York, John Wiley, 1958), 3. The concept is certainly crucial in the work of Talcott Parsons on social systems. Cf. his *The Social System,* (Glencoe, Free Press, 1951).

[43] "An Analysis of the Problems of the Role of the Minister," *Journal of Religion,* XXXIV, (1954), 187.

[44] Cf. above, note 30 for bibliographical references.

the Practical Fields deal with matters related to the present concern.[45] The Blizzard "Training for the Ministry Project" had told us a great deal about the parish minister's professional and practitioner images and much about what parish ministers think of the education they received. Only a brash theological educator would advance more than an educated guess as to why theological education succeeded where it has appeared to succeed, and failed where it has seemed to fail. A recent and substantial contribution to our understanding of these complex, and sometimes intangible, matters is a study of "Personality Correlates of Ministerial Success," reported by Howard M. Ham.[46] The reading of this paper in a recent faculty colloquium gave several of the faculty members present considerable cause for wondering how our understanding of the role of the minister is being implemented in the process of theological education. If the personality correlates of success in the ministry—verbal intelligence, emotional distance from people, flexibility of personality structure, moderate allocentric tendencies, superior marital adjustment, and relatively weak ego strength, as reported in Ham's study—are as indicated, we might entertain the hypothesis that either the criteria of success are wrongly conceived, or the successful minister simply ignores (if he does not completely reject) what the seminary course of study teaches him about the role of the minister. The way that role-image is developed in, or influenced by, the process of theological education greatly needs the kind of attention it has lately been receiving.

VIII

Conclusion: in Which the Current Status of Sociology in the Theological Curriculum Is Briefly Assessed

Here, then, are four major functions of sociology in the theological curriculum: (1) the communication of sociological knowledge through a dialogue with the other theological disciplines and through imparting information from the sociology of religion; (2) the mediation of knowledge from other social sciences; (3) the provision of training in the techniques of community survey; (4) the contribution to the understanding of the process of theological education through work on a sociology of theological education, and work expanding what has already been done on the role of the minister. There are, no doubt, other functions which are being performed, or might be performed, by sociology in the theological curriculum. But, speaking out of the context of the one-man department, it would appear to the writer that these four functions are — if performed with any degree of accomplishment—quite enough to constitute a life-time of work.

The sociological perspective, if not the creation of separate departments of sociology, receives considerable attention in many theological seminaries. More and more courses in sociology of religion, urban and rural sociology, social problems, marriage and family, and other subjects often associated with the field of sociology are being introduced into seminary courses of study. Knowledge from sociology has achieved a formally recognized sphere of acceptability, and in some matters, even priority. No longer struggling for academic **Lebensraum**—in most seminaries at least—the sociologist is free to devote his attention to the fullest possible realization of his potential contributions in teaching and research. In some instances one suspects that sociology is so completely accepted in the theological seminary that more is expected than can possibly be provided, given the existing state of sociological knowledge.

Phillip Selznick, in discussing the sociology of law, has provided a frame of reference within which the current

[45] Cf. reports of the Biennial Meetings of this association. for 1956 and 1958.

[46] *The Iliff Review*, XVII, (Winter, 1960), 3-9.

situation of sociology in theological education might be objectively assessed. He indicates that legal sociology, industrial sociology, and educational sociology (and I would add, sociology in theological education) tend to go through three stages of development. "The primitive, or missionary, stage is that of communicating a prespective, bringing to a hitherto isolated area an appreciation of basic and quite general sociological truths. . . . The second stage belongs to the sociological craftsman. It is a muscle-flexing period marked by intellectual self-confidence, a zeal for detail, and an earnest desire to be of service. . . . The third stage . . . is one of true intellectual autonomy and maturity. This stage is entered when the sociologist goes beyond (without repudiating) the role of technician or engineer and addresses himself to the larger objectives and guiding principles of the particular human enterprise he has elected to study."[47] For sociology in the theological curriculum the missionary stage is over, the stage of the craftsman is still with us, but there are many signs that autonomy and maturity are possible. When they become actual, benefits will accure to both sociological work and to theological education.

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[47] *Sociology Today,* 116.