CONFLICT: A MODEL FOR EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The Christian Church today shows signs of being in shock - future shock. The world around it is going through an era of accelerated change, leaving persons in need of safety and security. The church has always been able to provide sanctuary for the needy of mind, body, and spirit. People are seeking out the church today for such sanctuary, looking for answers to deep questions of life. People are also coming to the church with a great diversity of experience, both secular and religious. The central search for all, however, is for meaning.

This diversity amongst the people has led to a state of affairs described as shock. Immobilization, caused by such variety of experiences and desires, results in the church turning inward upon itself. When so much change is around us, individuals seek out someone with THE answer. It would be most comforting if someone would just tell us what is right and that everything will be all right. Some churches are responding to the call and fulfilling the expectations with THE answer, and they are growing. Other churches are resolutely trying to allow growth and change to be worked out by the members in community. These latter churches are learning the use of conflict as an educational tool. They are responding to a series of myths which surround the church, such as those described by M. C. Hendrickson in his article, "Conflict In A Future Shocked Church," (*Journal of Pastoral Care,* 1971, pp. 77-81).

Dealing with change and learning about ourselves needs to be seen in terms of coming to understand and learn from each other in our diversity, each as a child of God. Each has been given separate gifts and we need to learn how we may all contribute our part to the whole Body of Christ in this ever changing world. This approach is seen in contrast to the idea that conflict is demonic, a myth that the church still keeps. Anything which disrupts the peace and tranquility of the Christian community is a mark of Satan. The base of this mythical community is the loving person who is always tranquil, stable, and serene. Is this the model to be taught in our education in the

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church? Conflict in such model is met by withdrawal and repression. To the contrary, conflict need not be handled in such fashion. Growth can come from conflict. Love may indeed demand conflict in order to be true love.

The intent of this paper is to address the above problem. Conflict will be defined in its social, psychological, and theological dimensions such that it might be seen to be a useful tool in the educational experiences of the Christian community. The concept of self-esteem or self-worth is a central one in this analysis, which will need psychological and theological understanding. The church needs to understand the full dynamics of conflict if conflict is to be useful in the growth of individuals as well as the community in times that have shocked persons and organizations into stagnation, fear and immobility. It is to these ends that this paper is addressed.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

It is interesting to note the changes which have come about in the sociological understanding of conflict. Early sociological movements saw conflict as a basic interaction and valued it as good. These sociologists were reformers in society. They felt the need to change structures to make them serve people rather than limit them. Contemporary sociology shows signs of turning more toward the view of conflict as negative and stress producing. The contemporary movement tends to see adjustment as the mode, not reform.[1] A representative, Talcott Parsons, sees conflict as a disease. He sees conflict as dysfunctional and disregards its positive functions. There is also a trend to view modern group skills as a means toward the reduction of conflict rather than the utilization of the dynamics of conflict for growth. Avoidance through social management is that strategy that has emerged.

Avoidance is not the model to be affirmed here. Conflict and cooperation are affirmed as the base of group development and growth. This means that no group can be entirely harmonious, for it would then be devoid of process and structure. Disharmony can be seen to be a requirement as well as harmony, giving conflict an important place within the organization. This is to discount the thesis that one process tears down while the other builds up. In fact, Lewis Coser (*The Functions of Social Conflict*) bases his insights on the idea that stability is indicated in a system or relationship if conflict occurs. Non-stable relations cannot afford conflict, so it is repressed.[2] Coser quotes a central

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[1]Coser, Lewis, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956), p. 20.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. 81.

thesis of Georg Simmel saying that,"conflict is a form of socialization."[3] There is strength of potential in this form.

REALISTIC AND NON-REALISTIC CONFLICT

A helpful distinction can be made within the dynamics of conflict to better understand how to use conflict creatively and positively. It is the differentiation between realistic and non-realistic conflict. Coser again gives some help with definitions.[4] Realistic conflict is defined as that which arises from frustration of specific demands within a relationship and from an estimate of gains from the participants, and which is directed at the presumed frustrating object. Such conflict is a means toward a specific end. Non-realistic conflict is not occasioned by the rival ends of antagonists but rather by the need for tension release of at least one of them. This is not issue directed and not directed toward the atttainment of a specific result or end. Failure to distinguish between these two types of conflict can seriously confuse the situation for those wanting to use conflict for growth and educative purposes.

The source of non-realistic conflict comes from such as deprivations and frustrations from the socializing process and later role obligations, or from a conversion of originally realistic conflict which was not allowed expression.Realistic conflict should not be understood as one which is accompanied by hostility and aggressiveness. Realistic conflict is possible without such accompaniment. Mediator assistance may be desired in order to ascertain realistic and non-realistic elements. If a mediator is involved, one of that person's main functions may be to divest conflict situations of non-realistic dimensions often expressed in aggressiveness so as to allow the participants to deal with the claims at issue.

Another dimension needs to be lifted up at this point. The projection has been made that if total personalities are involved, it is more likely that non-realistic elements will enter the realistic conflict.[5] This is based on the concept that in groups which engage the total personality of members, the bonds between the members are much stronger than in groups where segmental types of relations prevail. Groups with such strength of bond tend to suppress conflict. That is the description of the churches shown in the introduction of this paper. When conflict occurs in that situation it will likely be intense and passionate. It is the basic threat to the unity of the group and against the threat of renegadism and heretics that leads to the suppression of the conflict.

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[3]*Ibid.*, p. 31.
[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 48 - 55.
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 69.

The boundary lines of the group come under doubt with conflict from within as over against that from without. Yet it is in the very midst of this doubt and threat that conflict works to bring the group into unity. Conflict can be designed to resolve differences which lead to unity. Conflict has the potential of a stabilizing function and can operate to help clarify feelings of ambivalence about self and others, dealing with feelings of enmity within a group. The integrative force can be operative if the group structure is not too rigid to prohibit its operation. This leads one to say that the absence of conflict cannot serve as an index of underlying stability, nor can the presence of conflict serve as an indicator of growth and unity.

It is of interest to note the difference of out-group and in-group conflict dynamics for churches as implied in Coser's analysis. It would follow that churches which engage in continued struggle with outside forces tend to be more intolerant within, more selective in membership, and more demanding of the total personality involvement of their members. Any dissent must be dealt with by withdrawal. Church groups which are not involved in a continuous struggle on the outside do not make such claims on the total personality of their members, and because they are not so rigid in criteria for membership are more likely to be large. They also resist outside pressures more successfully because of their elasticity of structure, allowing tolerated conflict within.

Clarification is in order at this point. It has not been said that every type of conflict will benefit group life and structure. The type of issue and the type of structure will have a lot to do with the possible benefit of conflict. Internal social conflicts which concern goals, values, or interests which do not contradict the basic relationship tend to be positively functional. The conflict then tends to lead to readjustment of norms and power relationships within the group in accord with the feelings of the individual members or subgroups. When the internal conflicts are amongst parties that no longer share basic values then such conflict will threaten to disrupt the structure. Whether the conflict bring equilibrium to social relationships or threatens to tear it apart may depend largely on the social structure within which it occurs. Conflict is dysfunctional for social structures in which there is insufficient toleration and institutionalization of conflict. The intensity is also related to the rigidity of the structure. What threatens the group equilibrium of such structure is not the conflict but rather the rigidity itself which permits hostility to accumulate and channel along some cleavage once conflict breaks out.[6]

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[6]*Ibid.,* p. 157.

Another major personality in the positive social analysis and use of conflict is Ralph Dahrendorf, the author of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959). Both Coser and Dahrendorf represent the positive view of conflict in social organization. There is a major difference in their approach, however. Coser sees the empirical end to which society is committed as stability. Conflict is necessary for stability. Dahrendorf, on the other hand, sees conflict as being useful for society towards its end of change, not stability. Coser sees conflict essential for society to maintain itself, to be stable. Dahrendorf sees the end of conflict being the facilitator for society to achieve needed change. He sees conflict as the base of all creativity, innovation, and development in the life of the individual or group.[7] He does affirm that all is not good, but subject to initiation, regulation, and solution through strategies and structures which may be created to facilitate such action. Regulation becomes most important since unanticipated factors can result in consequences very different from those desired. Since conflict is seen as a means to an end, it must bear the responsibility for moral evaluation of those means, which can come through institutional controls.

STRUCTURING CONFLICT FOR POSITIVE FUNCTIONING

Conflict does not necessarily mean violence. There is regulation and organization that can be added to the conflict situation. However, this must not get in the way of open confrontation and public hearing so necessary for the process. H. W. Yates makes a list of four conditions which he feels are necessary for the institution to structure in order to accommodate conflict. They are:

1. Diversity in the group must also have commonality to balance.
2. Organization must be brought to the conflict.
3. There must be voluntary associations for open hearing and criticism.
4. There should be a general distribution of authority and power.[8]

Yates also contributes some procedural factors to add to the preceeding conditions. Such factors are:

1. Clarification of issues and points of agreement are needed.
2. The empathetic dimension needs to be added to the intellectual, which recognizes the opposition's position.

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[7]Darhrendorf, Ralph, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 219.
[8]Yates, H. W., "A Strategy for Responding to Social Conflict," *Pastoral Psychology*, 22 (216), 1971, pp. 39 - 40.

3. Factors leading up to the conflict need recognition to see deeper roots.
4. A range of solutions deemed feasible and desirable need to be listed.[9]

If this procedure is utilized, the conflict can be kept from being pathological satisfying needs which are not related to issues. Such procedures should lead to a constructive course for solving conflict.

The preceding conditions and procedures could lead to the positive experience of conflict that could be useful to individual and group. A list of some positive functions has been made by Morton Deutsch.

1. Conflict prevents stagnation.
2. Conflict stimulates interest and curiosity.
3. Conflict is the root of personal and social change.
5. Conflict is a means of testing and assessing oneself or a group.
6. Conflict demarcates groups from each other and establishes group and personal identity.
7. Conflict is a stabilizing function and is integrative for relationships.
8. Conflict revitalizes group norms and forms new ones.
9. Conflict keeps from rigidity of structure and norms for changing times.
10. Conflict helps to ascertain the strength of antagonistic interests.[10]

It is true that not all theorists follow this line of argument. Some respected movements take issue. Examples of such may be found within the psychoanalytic movement with its base in the pleasure principle, field theory with its stress on tension reduction, dissonance theory with dissonance reduction as its main concern.

One more distinction needs to be made to help understand the positive functioning of conflict. Competition and conflict should not be used synonymously. Competition produces conflict, but not all conflict reflects competition. Competition is a win/lose dynamic. Conflict can occur, however, where there is no perceived or actual incompatibility of goals. It can occur in either a competitive or cooperative context, which can strongly influence the resolution. This is particularly true when conflict is viewed psychologically, or is perceived conflict. This psycho-social dimension can be helpful as it highlights the pos-

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[9]*Ibid.,* p. 40f.
[10]Deutsch, Morton, *The Resolution of Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 8 - 9.

sible difference between our perceptions and their correspondence to reality. This dimension also raises the question of the influence of our expectations concerning others' actions and conduct, whether accurate or not.

CONSTRUCTIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

There is a constant question in the mind of people when conflict is said to be a positive phenomena. How does one distinguish between constructive and destructive conflict or become able to guide the course of conflict such that it can become constructive?

A definition of constructive conflict might be given as that in which all are satisfied with the outcome and feel they have gained as a result. Destructive conflict would then be that in which participants feel dissatisfied with the outcome and all feel they have lost as a result. These definitions of Morton Deutsch reflect an ethical value of the greatest good for the greatest number.[11]

The course of destructive conflict could be described as that which tends to expand the conflict or escalate it. This can lead the conflict to become independent of the initiating causes and to continue after those causes have become past and irrelevant. An increase would be observed in the reliance on power, threat, coercion, and deception. Competition, misperception, and pressure for social consistency all work to further escalation of the conflict.

The question to be asked at this point is what are the distinctive features in the process of resolving conflict which leads to constructive outcomes? A creative response comes from Morton Deutsch. His hypothesis is that productive conflict resolution is similar to the process involved in creative thinking. This process is described as follows:

1. An initial period leading to the experiencing and recognition of a problem which is significantly arousing to motivate efforts to solve it.
2. A period of concentrated effort to solve the problem through routine, available, or habitual actions.
3. With the failure of customary practices, there is the experience of frustration, tension, leading to temporary withdrawal from the problem.
4. During this incubation period of gaining distance from the problem, it is perceived from a different perspective and reformulated in a way which permits new orientation to a solution to emerge.

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[11]Deutsch, Morton, "Conflicts: Productive and Destructive", in *Conflict Resolution Through Communication*, ed. by F. E. Jandt (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 158.

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5. A tentative solution appears in a moment of insight often accompanied by a sense of exhilaration.
6. A solution is elaborated, detailed, and tested against reality.
7. Finally, the solution is communicated to the relevant audience.[12]

This system does depend upon the social conditions and the personalities of the problem solvers. A non-threatening environment is important. Rigid structures would also prohibit the creativity to begin let alone be open to new conclusions.

Cooperative problem solving is very much a part of constructive conflict. Parties have a joint interest in reaching mutually satisfactory conclusions. When that joint interest is felt, there is open, honest communication of relevant information, reducing the likelihood of miscommunication. The legitimacy of each other's interests is recognized, minimizing the need for defensiveness, allowing for persuasion and not coercion as a strategy. Mutual resources and mutual power become objectives. This cooperative problem solving results in a trusting, friendly attitude which increases sensitivity to similarities and common interests, minimizing the differences.[13]

One danger of this process which is liable to be found in the church is the pathology of a premature agreement. This means a superficial convergence of beliefs and values before the underlying differences can come out. This is a possibility in church groups where they are experiencing difficulty engaging in conflict and want very much to cover it over again. Some degree of controlled competitive conflict can be used to prevent such premature cooperation. Authentic cooperation is the end hoped for in contrast to the pathology. It does presuppose an awareness that one is neither helpless nor powerless, even though one might be at a relative disadvantage. Powerlessness and an associated lack of self-esteem can mitigate against cooperation.

However, even if the course of conflict is competitive and moves toward a win/lose situation, it should be noted that not all may be destructive. Defeat can be constructive. It can help bring about a realistic view of one's own power. Illusions can be broken so that the organization can regather to take a better form. Loss in competition may also help the parties to see the benefits of the cooperative process.

This sociological analysis of conflict should help us put together a meaningful model for the use of conflict as an educational tool in the church. The psycho-theological dimension needs to be added yet

[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 171 - 172.
[13]*Ibid.*, p. 176.

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before the picture is filled out. This will include the components of self-acceptance and self-actualization, understood psychologically and theologically, culminating in an examination of the concept of power.

PSYCHO-THEOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

There are two psychological terms which are important to understand as we get into this dimension of conflict. These two are anxiety and hostility. Anxiety is defined by Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary (1964) as a disturbance of mind regarding some uncertain event. A significant word in that definition is the word uncertain. The object of anxiety is usually unknown. Another definition of anxiety is proposed by Richard N. Dearing in his dissertation from The Iliff School of Theology. He cites anxiety as the emotion of being between, of being in conflict, with no real object. He cites Freud's proposal that the ego is the seat of anxiety when it is faced with danger from the outside. Philosophically, anxiety is the fear of the loss of self in accepting freedom. Basically, Dearing sets anxiety at the crux of profound conflict, or of ontological conflict. Ontological conflict is that conflict in life which expresses struggle with the meaning of being. God in the Christian faith creates life as good and meaningful. If we experience meaninglessness, we are driven in search for meaning. Anxiety is the struggle between meaninglessness of life and the potential of meaning or of being. In the theology of Paul Tillich, this is expressed in the term ultimate meaning.[14]

The second term is hostility. The Dictionary defines it as the state of being hostile, or, having a spirit of enmity (antipathy, hatred). Hostility is an attitude or a sentiment which may or may not emerge as conflict between parties or groups. It is a predisposition to conflict behaviour but may or may not culminate in such dynamics. Conflict always takes place in interaction with two or more persons. It is always a transaction. The expression of hostility in conflict can serve a positive function when it permits the maintenance of relationships under stress, preventing group dissolution through the withdrawal of hostile participants. How many times have we seen this dynamic acted out in a local church. In a church where the structures are rigid, not allowing the expression of differences, the disgruntled person has no way to express hostility or dissatisfaction and is left no recourse but to leave the church. Some merely withold financial support as an expression of hostility but are not allowed to get into the interaction of conflict

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[14]Dearing, Richard N., "The Theological Significance of Psychological Conflict: A Case Study in Paul Tillich." (Th.D. Dissertation, Denver: The Iliff School of Theology , 1970) pp. 4 - 9.

which might find resolve. A clearing of the air must come through interaction and not just the expression of hostility. If hostility is allowed to accumulate without healthy discharge, substitute objects may be selected for the original thereby confusing the situation. This may act as a safety valve function for the preservation of the organization, but it will not promote growth and development. If hostility is held in and unrelieved, it can lead to rigidity of structure and create the potential for disruptive outbreaks.[15]

Hostility is not necessarily a temporary mood of anger but rather a way we participate in this world. This is significant in our present consideration of conflict. Hostility can be illustrated as the basic dichotomy in life as we strive to live between love and hate. Freud would set this in terms of life and death instincts. The theological dimension of this dichotomy is illustrated by Gordon Jackson through the theology of Karl Barth.[16] Jackson alludes to Barth's concept that hate is a form of saying that there is no God. This culminates in the sin of pride. People refuse to be themselves by loving God, who alone can guarantee them their selfhood. But God continues to love and accept people who reject Him. The resulting shame and guilt furthers this hatred and hostility and isolates people from their neighbor as well. In sum, precisely because people continue their ontological relationship to God, their hostility is alive, provoked by God not letting them alone. Barth is representative of the biblical-theological point of view that hostility and conflict within the human community is a derivative from the relationship that exists between people and their God.

This theological interpretation relates to the problem we have with our self-esteem or self-worth. It is quite easy to see how a recurring sense of guilt could engulf us in this God-person relationship, reducing our self-worth. Gordon Jackson uses a concept of Whitehead that maintains how a self relates to its past constitutes what the self is. The past presents an affective tone that is responded to by the subject. How the self feels its world determines the constitution of the self.[17] God also plays a part by bringing His will and aim to the self. The self feels this pressure of God, focused sharply in Jesus Christ. The self is confronted with its past hostility and tries to repress it. The result is a problem of self-worth which is so critical to the understanding of conflict, especially for the church.

There is a conscious and an unconscious dimension of this self

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[15]Coser, *op cit,* pp. 37-47.
[16]Jackson, Gordon, "The Problem of Hostility: Psychologically and Theologically Considered" *Journal of Religion and Health,* Vol. 11, 1, 1972, pp. 79 - 84.
[17]*Ibid.,* p. 85.

conflict that needs investigation. We are familiar with Freud's theory of the conscious and unconscious which recognizes the importance of unconscious needs (inner conflicts) which motivates behaviour (outer conflicts). The possibility exists for the unconscious will to direct the life of the conscious will for its own gratification. Inner hostility can come through in this way in displacement from the original object. A Biblical description of this conflict can be found in the writings of Paul such as that found in Romans 8: 13-20. The classic conflict referred to there is that of being caught between the will of the flesh over against the will of the Spirit, self over against God. This conflict is seen in the Old Testament in Psalm 38 as the writer shows the pathos of being caught in the battle of the wills. All of us seem to be driven by the conflict within to seek out new life in God.
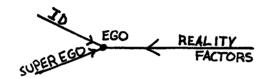
SELF- ACCEPTANCE AND RECONCILIATION

Another definition of conflict could be helpful at this point having this background of psycho-theological understanding. This is an integrated definition of personal conflict formulated by Dearing, to whom we referred earlier. It reads, "Conflict, whether heavy or light, concious or unconcious, exists where incompatible impulses seek to function simultaneously, call ego-identity into question, and, through the anxiety they create, stir the ego to self-defense."[18] This definition focuses on the issue of ego-identity and the conflict within each of us as we try to be a centered being. We need to have reconciliation with our self, with humanity, with life as a whole. Anxiety would then describe the feeling of estrangement and of alienation from our own true being. This leads back again to the center of conflict as being that intrapersonal dilemma of wills, the should and the want. Theologically, it is the battle of the arbitrary will and the divine will.

The theme of ambiguity arises again. The source of conflict is intrapersonal within the dilemma of the wills. We get embattled within ourselves and project that battle out onto the world in order that we can feel comfortable in the world. It is then like us. Our personal desires seem unacceptable, either to others or to God. They are kept repressed within. It is like that described by John Haught in his *Religion and Self-Acceptance*. It is difficult to look deeply inside oneself and accept that which we see. We resort to rationalization and self-deception in order to live. We need a religious story which establishes a world or environment which eliminates any fear of uncovering our darker side. It allows us the quest for truthfulness. One can be accep-

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[18]Dearing, *op cit..* p. 83.

ted in any case. Nothing that one can do or leave undone can change that situation. We need not hide. We can accept our inner self. We can accept our past, join with our repressed experiences, and live fully in the present. In self-acceptance, we become free. The only barrier is refusing to accept that fact. Our refusal comes from our will to power and desire for mastery.[19] It is full circle back to Tillich's anxiety and our basic need for reconciliation, with our self, each other, and with our God. It is gratitude to our God who has created us which saves us from our restlessness and non-acceptance of ourselves. Participation in the religious story which is Christianity, in the Yes by God to persons on the basis of a friendship rather than coercion, provides for us the symbolic basis for a sincere Yes to ourselves.

This theory could be put into chart form on the basis of Freud's understanding.

The person seeks a balance between their internal state and their relation to reality. Dollard and Miller see this dynamic best described in the approach-avoidance format. This occurs when the approach to an impulse gratifying goal is blocked by avoidance of that goal or something intimately connected to it. The person vacillates, not being able to decide, and becomes greatly disturbed by this indecision. The ego gets into conflict because a non-integrated impulse is demanded and its effect is to approach and to avoid the goal.[20] One could experience this by being called into a situation where one needs to do well but is countered by feelings of inferiority.

It is important to note that this dynamic can be experienced either unconsciously or consciously. If unconscious, the experience is with symptoms and may become neurotic. If conscious, the conflict can register and be verbalized, available for ego resolution. It is very important that the conflict be moved from the unconscious to the conscious in order to be resolved. Here is a vital time for the activity of the Christian community to work. Loving acceptance can be a critical ingredient to free the person to accomplish this needed task. Tillich has taken this awareness of unsolved conflicts between struct-

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[19]Haught, John F., *Religion and Self-Acceptance* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 173.

[20]Dollard, John, and Miller, Neal E., *Personality and Psychotherapy* (New York: McGraw - Hill, 1950), p. 366.

ural elements of the personality and called it anxiety. The structural elements are described.

> Conflicts between unconscious drives and repressive norms, between drives trying to dominate the center of the personality, between imaginary worlds and the experience of the real world, between trends toward greatness and perfection and the experience of one's smallness and imperfection, between the desire to be accepted by other people or society or the universe and the experience of being rejected, between the will to be and the seemingly intolerable of being which evokes open or hidden desire not to be.[21]

Tillich shows conflict as that which exists between who we are existentially and who we could be within our essential nature. Conflict exists because the ego-self is simultaneously aware of two mutually exclusive possibilities. One of the life issues of the ego-self is the resolution of this conflict.

CONFLICT AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Every person is a new, original, and unique being. The task that each has is to discover that uniqueness. That is a task not only for the individual but for the whole Christian community. All have needs and it is the degree to which our needs are satisfied that will be the degree to which we can risk our actualization. The process of that actualization will depend upon our internal power. It is accomplished when one has all aspects of the self united in a single identity. That identity must be actualized. But this is always ambiguous! We desire this wholeness but we always face the potential of being fragmented. This insecurity and ambiguity is our source of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflict. It is the same as when we feel the danger of attempted growth, which is the new creation of centers for our identity. It is the experience of fear that self-creation will fall into self-destruction. The chaos of these experiences leads us to the need for reconciliation. But the conflict which fills the gap between the chaos and reconciliation is not desired. We cry for cheap grace to avoid the conflict, not wanting to go through the suffering of the cross. We all long for an unambiguous fulfillment of our possibilities of life. Therein is the pull of the Christian concepts of The Kingdom of God or Eternal Life. They can overcome our ambiguities and resolve our conflicts for us. Our psychological conflicts do have religious and

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[21]Tillich, Paul, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 64 - 65.

theological significance. Ultimate meaning is our goal, and conflict is the awareness of both the pains and the dreams of that goal. The conflicts of life are healed in the new Being of Christ.

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT

The primary conflicts which are expressed in the ego are the deepest issues of life in which persons are asking questions of their identity as part of their ultimate concern. In asking for ultimate meaning, people are posing the question of God.

The theological contribution to the problem of conflict resolution lies centered in the healing found possible in the Gospel. The life of being healed is that of knowing one is ultimately significant and valuable regardless of the problems of ambiguity in life. It is the discovery of being counted as one of the loved ones of God and experiencing that joy of counting. Knowing this can be critical to ministry. For the ministry of conflict is seeing, hearing, and knowing the conflicts of existence, being able then to witness to the experience of being healed, and making that healing available to others.[22]

AN UNDERSTANDING OF POWER

It is essential to deal with the subject of power in any treatment of the subject of conflict. The church seems to avoid this dynamic in any way, except as it talks about the power of love. This avoidance of an openness with power is based upon an understanding of power as competitive and seeking control, a power of domination that is seen as unloving and unchristian. Another understanding of power needs to be brought to the surface and used in educational developments in our churches. This understanding is grounded in the self's basic thrust toward self-expression and self-actualization. Power in its deepest sense is not some persons dominating others, but of all persons fulfilling their richest possibilites in the interactions of the human community. Power has positive import in relation to the moral and religious grounding of our lives. It is the positive thrust in human life toward fulfillment and self-actualization.

This is not to deny that power may be gained at the cost of others, but it is to say that power can be enhanced only cooperatively. Coercive power used for domination is most costly and less likely to prevail than non-coercive power. The win/lose lifestyle is shortsighted.

Power has rootage in our basic need for self-esteem or worth. Power used for selfish ends of domination and control is being used as a distorted form of self-affirmation. Reinhold Neibuhr saw this

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[22]Dearing, *op cit.*, p. 337.

struggle for the moral use of power in his *Nature and Destiny of Man*. Power becomes our tool to use in order to compensate for our limitations as human beings. Tillich sees it as our anxiety resulting from facing our nothingness. It leads us in our quest to be everything or God. Both Tillich and Niebuhr see this form of power to be the basic sin of man and woman. Justice becomes an important concept in order to achieve a balance of power for persons and groups to protect their vital interests. Power in the form of dominance and control cannot overcome the brokenness of the human community that results from its use. The fundamental need of self-worth does not get satisfied.

T. W. Ogletree has written an article on "Power and Human Fulfillment." In this article, he makes reference to a study made by Harold Lasswell found in his book, *Power and Personality* (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1948). This study says that persons who have unusually high power drive are characteristically insecure, uncertain of their own worth. They compensate for this inadequacy by attempting to dominate others. The strong persons can let others be to call forth their own creative possibilities. The conclusions indicate that such leaders cannot dominate and be effective leaders.[23]

We are continually led back to our basic human need for self-worth. Conflict seems to result from our inadequate ways of handling that need. Self-acceptance emerges as a crucial feature in the understanding of power. Accepting our limitations, we can get the full power of our being realized through the creative appropriation of our limits. It means the embracing of all our life to be actualized. It means self-acceptance. The more unified our life is the less energy wasted in internal conflicts. This means there is less wasted on external conflicts if we assume their source to be internal conflict. This process is not meant to diminish the significance of tension and conflict used creatively for our growth. In the encounter with others who are also in a drive to fulfill their potential, we may find ourselves blocked. However, encountering others may spring transformations that would not have otherwise come to happen without the encounter.

Power for actualization cannot be treated only in terms of the unification of our life resources. Other persons are indispensible in the fulfillment of our given potential. They are catalysts and contributors. The strength of the Christian community is seen best in this manner. The expression of care and love in the mutual task of helping one another discover our potential and then develop it is tremendous power. The community uses power positively as it has been described.

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[23]Ogletree, T. W., "Power and Human Fulfillment," *Pastoral Psychology*, 22 (216), 1971, p. 47.

It uses a cooperative framework rather than a competitive one, using power for fulfillment and not for domination. Domination is not needed when one is able to accept limitations and is supported by others. Power is not basically a scarce commodity for which we all compete, but rather it can be seen as an expansible dynamic awaiting release from within as well as from without in creative interaction with other persons. Maximum development of power consists of mobilizing the resources of all in pursuit of common compatible goals. This power is within the grasp and experience of each within the Christian community.

There is a parallel in the theology of divine power. Divine power does not necessarily mean that God can do whatever He pleases as a tyrant. Rather the Gospel discloses a God that reveals Himself as an inexhaustible reservoir of power striving to realize forms of life which are adequate to His own dynamism. In and through the self-actualizing of His own creatures, He creates and fulfills His own Being. It is an inextricably bound to the fulfilment of all creation.[24] It is the ultimate description of the win/win lifestyle.

It is the ultimate description of the win/win lifestyle.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION

Some of the sources of conflict have been noted to be misperception, misunderstanding, and misinformation. These have often led to destructive conflict experience in the church and other organizations or relationships. It is cause for concern in the church. We need to remember that psychological factors can produce destructive conflict even when objective circumstances are favorable. A focus on communication is essential in any community whose concern is personal development and relationship with God and persons.

A dynamic of stability and change is desired as part of a growing, acting community as the church intends to be. This depends upon conflict to be used creatively. Destructive conflict needs to be seperated from the constructive in the educative pattern of the church. This would take some training of teachers and leaders to know the difference and then to learn how to utilize conflict constructively in their communication and leadership. Some critical areas are: balancing the affective and cognitive outcomes of educational experiences, teaching-learning about social conflict, training in interpersonal relations, maintaining affective support for adolescents, sharing decision-

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[24]*Ibid.*, p. 52.

making power related to educational objectives, evaluating procedures and norms throughout the entire organization, learning how to strengthen the cooperative orientation and reducing the competitive as a basic motivating force, learning how to understand human perception as source of interpersonal conflict, abolishing the certainty principle to increase the tolerance for ambiguity.[25] All of these, plus more, become important learning objectives for us in the church.

AFFECTIVE EDUCATION

One of the first areas of concern that comes to attention is the affective dimension of learning that comes from conflict utilization. A basic premise is that we learn as whole persons. We need to be as interested in the feeling and doing as with the rational dimension. This is particularly true in relation to the growth and development of adolescents. Their well known personality conflicts of dependence-independence sets them as prime targets for affective needs. Youth seem to respond more affectively to conflict events of tension, frustration, and aggression than adults. This is an assumption based on a report of the Committee on Adolescence of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (ages 10-20) *(Normal Adolescence,* New York: Scribners, 1968).

This affective dimension can also be applied to the problem of youth's intrapersonal conflict between aggressive impulses and socially sanctioned norms of moral behaviour, which leads to a projection of aggression externally. It is easy to project onto adult teachers or other "parent" types because of the usual discrepancy in power seen in the classroom or the home. A cooperative rather than competitive structure would be most effective in helping youth deal with this inner conflict. The training of teachers and leaders in the art of affective education and the skills for using non-verbal communication is an important concern in the furthering of educative uses of conflict.

For instance, it would be creative to utilize a non-verbal exercise for youth to experience the affective dimension of their inner conflicts. An example would be the Fingertip Exercise on power. Kinetic energy, dominance/passivity, personal space, competition/cooperation, control are all possible to experience and then talk about to reach into the tap root of this inner conflict of adolescence. The opportunity to experience both negative and positive awareness of the use of their power is at the base of this non-verbal exercise. Psychological, social, and theological dimensions could be sorted out of the experience itself for per-

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[25]Frank, Allan, "Conflict in the Classroom," *Conflict Resolution Through Communication,* ed. by F. E. Jandt (New York: Harper anl Row, 1973), pp. 306 - 307.

spective and individual growth. The actual inner conflict becomes the subject matter for learning and growth. As long as the church is a part of the problem for youth, it need not expect them to give loyalty, service, and devotion. The church has the potential to be part of the solution. Recognizing their condition is the first step, accepting it as valid, real, important to deal with is the second step.

Actually, this is applicable to the needs of adults as well. They need to be able to work out the dynamics of power that will be used in the Christian community at whatever level of organizational life. (Do the Fingertip - Power Exercise). You can see the potential that such exercises have in growth groups in the church. A sense of personal space and worth, personal and ontological relations, authority in leadership and followership are valid questions to be dealt with in such exercise. How to utilize the conflict dimension in that experience for individual/competitive ends or group/cooperative ends is positive educative benefit.

The use of this exercise can demonstrate the model for teaching-learning that I think to be of most benefit. It is an example of the rhythm of moving from theory to experience (exercise) to debriefing with personal integration and acceptance. Basic problems of anxiety and hostility can be dealt with through such movement that the ontological needs can come forth and find support in the midst of a Christian community newly discovered. Actually, the same dimensions of learning can be carried on in task oriented groups in the church structure to help them better do their job if one is sensitive to timing and personal need. Two basic human needs, love and self-worth, can be affirmed throughout the life of the organization of the church, keeping the structures flexible enough to handle destructive conflict and change it over into constructive conflict for growth and learning for all.

With all of the church's concern to learn the way of love in communication, it must not fail to recognize realistically the presence of hostility and to accept it. The liturgy is one point of the gathering of the community where hostility can be worked through, psychologically and theologically. The primacy of God is recognized there and yet God's complete acceptance of each of us in grace over our imperfections of life, our hostilities and anxieties, can be experienced and the conflict resolved through faith. Counseling in the church is another place to work through our basic, ambiguous hostility, with counselor transference working through our ontological needs. Children and youth need a locus for accepting this element of their growth as indicated earlier, instead of their learning how to repress it and then become defensive with the church and the Gospel as they grow. Couples

need help in dealing with their hostilities rather than just feeling guilt when they fail at the loving, no fight model.

Another dimension of this affective education concern can be viewed under the title of the "correct answer syndrome." A top heavy cognitive system leads to the filling of students' heads like empty containers. This failure to understand human learning is just as rampant in the church as it can be found in public education. Basic learning from Piaget's cognitive theory cannot be overlooked in our model for the church. There is an important move in our development from a Pre-operational Period where we learn representational thought, yet without being able to form logical relations amongst objects, to the Period of Concrete Operations where we do recognize simple logical relationships. The experience which helps bring this change about is the utilization of conflict. When we come up against something which is beyond the structure of our reasoning, the experience brings doubt and contradiction into our perception as to what is true. There is disequilibrium. However, movement toward restructuring proceeds because of the conflict and leads to the restructuring and recognizing of logical relationships. Growth and learning are direct results of the conflict.

Conflict education is needed to develop interpersonal competence in relating to other human beings, especially if we are to be dependent on one another for help in discovering our God given gifts and potential and then developing them. The "correct answer syndrome" leads to persons with a low tolerance for ambiguity. It has been stated already what ambiguity does for conflict and self-worth. A low tolerance for ambiguity could well describe the increasing trend to conservative or fundamental religion. What has happened to cause this trend?

A COMMUNICATION MODEL

Communication models are conflict-cooperation models.[26] They are process models which account for a progression of changes through time. Through communication, we can engage in social conflict and the resolution of that conflict.

One process model that is helpful is one which comes from Blaine F. Hartford, Director of the Niagara Institute of Behavioral Science in Niagara, N.Y. This model reflects the adage that the problem is not the problem, it is rather the people and their relationship. The

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[26]Hilyard, D. M., "Research Models and Designs for Study of Conflict," *Conflict Resolution Through Communication,* ed. by F. E. Jandt (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 444.

process goes as follows, based on a non-defensive, problem oriented, collaborative system:

1. Attempt to clarify differences.
2. Review similarities or overlap of views.
3. Share honest expression of feelings, or reasons for opposition.
4. Define inter-dependence (mutual goals, needs, resources).
5. Check out the feeling tone for development of trust. If trust is not present, return to step 1.
6. Redefine the problem.
7. Look at alternatives for feasibility (competitive ideas)
8. Test alternatives.
9. Select one agreeable to all to work on.
10. Implement it.
11. Evaluate.

This conflict management model is based on the potential of change in the persons involved and not necessarily a change in the problem. It assumes the possibility of individuals moving through the anxiety and hostility stages to achieve equilibrium in self-esteem and felt power. The model assumes that one can move from conflict to competition to collaboration. If all energies can be utilized throughout the conflict such that they go toward enhancing the organization, that conflict can truly be said to make the organization even stronger as a result. This is the possibility within the church if the Christian community can function up to its potential.

CONCLUSION

It has been my contention in this paper that conflict in itself is not a bad thing, but in fact may well provide the momentum for fulfillment for an individual or organization. Conflict provides for both stability and change, and that is good. Certain distinctions do need to be made, such as realistic - unrealistic conflict, rigidity of structure, constructive - destructive conflict, cooperative or competitive relations, and conditions for regulation vs. chaos. It could be said that the mark of a healthy organization is that it can deal with conflict when it arises, and that conflict can bring growth through the established structures. Such organization can avoid conflict managing them and utilize the energies of the conflict to achieve the ends of the organization.

The concept of self-worth has been given as a central dynamic in conflict such that the degree of utilization of conflict will depend upon its equilibrium. Reconciliation between person and person is dependent upon the relationship between person and God and intra-

personal peace. Anxiety and hostility must find their resolve in the conscious self to allow the self to move past the conflict into actualization. The Christian faith has something to say in this actualization. The Christian community has a central place in the strategy of utilizing conflict for growth in the church, incorporating an understanding of power as a positive force fulfilling the richest possibilities of all rather than demonic domination of others.

This understanding of conflict has implications for education in the church which touch upon basic communication within as well as intentional educative styles throughout. The question remains as to whether the church's structure and leadership will be such that it can utilize the power of conflict for actualization and fulfillment or if the church will lack the faith in the Holy Spirit and hide from conflict as demonic, repressing its God given differences in fear and anxiety.

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