Every form of the theological enterprise should forever be about the business of breaking up its primitive unity in order to include relevant factors it has previously been unaware of, and to bring these into an integrity that is more complex.

Integrity in Pastoral Care*

In this discussion I shall consider the integrity of pastoral care, and the threats to that integrity, in two principal dimensions: first, its skill and technical competence; and second, its orientation to the Church and its theological basis. I shall then consider newly emerging issues that may prove to make for or against integrity in pastoral care, depending upon how they are dealt with.

1. Levels of Integrity

Some preliminary remarks, however, are needed about the notion of integrity as applied to pastoral care. Of course “integrity” means simply oneness, and thus implies that parts work together, in some kind of harmony, in a whole. But especially in a field like a pastoral care, we are immediately reminded that integrity is only as commendable as it is complex. Let me illustrate.

Kurt Lewin told of a very small child who was asked to draw a picture of a man running. The child drew a circle, and then all around the circle drew right angles. When viewed by a sympathetic adult, this drawing contains both unity and movement. The fact that the running man has no distinguishable head, arms, or chest does not negate the unity of the drawing, and even contributes to the impression of movement. The analytical adult will say, of course, that the unified impression given by the drawing is false since parts necessary to a human being are not depicted. He is thus contending that a unity is proper only if it includes the component or necessary parts.

Some years later the child who made the original, impressionistic drawing may be asked again to make a picture of a man running. He has now become sophisticated. He knows that people have heads and arms as well as bodies and feet. But by the time he draws these parts, the chances are strong that he will be powerless to solve the problem of having the man run. His picture will be fairer to the component parts, separately considered, than the original. But he will not be able to solve the problem


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of motion. Give him another two years, and a good art teacher, and he may have both unity and movement, including head and arms. But from an impressionistic point of view, he may never excel his original drawing.

In every kind of development from the biological on and upwards, it would seem that unity or integrity must be viewed in similar fashion. There is a kind of primal unity which, however, achieves its integrity by unconscious neglect of component parts. Then comes differentiation, attentiveness to necessary parts; and, temporarily, either unity or movement, or both, are lost. But then they are regained at a more complex level. The resulting unity is more faithful to more facts, and the resulting movement is a bit more faithful to the human pace. Thus the commendability of integrity is proportional to its dealing with actual complexities.

For the criteria we may use in examining integrity in pastoral care, I draw three conclusions from this parable. First, the significance of integrity is proportional to its uniting of relevant factors. Thus levels of integrity may be distinguished. It is insufficient to integrate the obvious if the more significant but less obtrusive factors are ignored. It is not enough to integrate motives while ignoring ineptitude in performance; and it will not do to integrate skills but be unaware of what one represents as he exercises them.

But second, we may respect an integrity at any level so long as it is prepared to let itself be broken up by new perceptions of differentiation in order that a more complex unity may be achieved. No one comes to the complex unity straightaway. He finds a unity at one level; then, in chagrin, he becomes aware of what his first unity had overlooked, and for a time is "all thumbs." He integrates at a more complex level, and so on. He must be forever relinquishing former integrities; but in doing so he need not be ashamed of them. There is nothing wrong with any level of integrity unless it becomes fixated. But fixation is not the fault of the unity itself.

Third, it is impossible to appraise the significance of any integrity without reference to its movement. Even if unified at a complex level, it is suspect if it is static. In contrast, even if its integrity is at a relatively primitive level, that is not reprehensible if the movement is through more complex differentiations toward a new level of unity.

II. The Integrity of Competence

The first American textbook-like work on the theory of ministry, including pastoral care, was not published until almost 1850. Such works, with some American novelties of a minor character, tended to follow the outlines of their German predecessors, and reached their peak in the 1880's. The last one of this type was issued just after the turn of the century. The main thrust of all these works was that a theory of ministry could somehow help actual ministering. Most of them were dull, for they contained no cases and often no illustrations. Their authors knew quite well that novelties and variations would be encountered in actual experience that no amount of classroom teaching could predict. Hence they confined themselves to general principles, not realizing that cases, rightly analyzed, could lead to principles. Today the main body of these works seem unutterably dull, for they did not know how to link theory and practice. But their underlying conviction—their primitive unity, so to speak—should not be forgotten. They believed that theory was important. They disdained practice without theory. Here they were right.