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The Teaching and Learning of Theological Reflection: *Case studies of practice*

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Roger L Walton: *The Teaching and Learning of Theological Reflection: case studies in practice*

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the teaching and learning of theological reflection. Since the late 1960s this term has become widely used in Christian denominations. Beginning with the literature on theological reflection, I outline the emergence of the meaning of the term in the last 30 years and its relation to the discipline of practical theology. I argue that the two notions arise from the same impulses, are closely intertwined and sometimes used interchangeably. Both terms are strongly associated with a study of theology which takes as its starting point the concrete experience or the practice of individual Christians or Christian communities.

The empirical research is concentrated on institutions involved with the teaching of theology in Britain. Using an exploratory survey I identify a number of institutions involved in programmes for theological reflection and extrapolate common features of the curriculum. I conclude that, with a small number of exceptions, programmes for theological reflection are most frequently found in the theological seminaries, colleges and courses preparing people for church ministries and are strongly linked with practical placements or internship programmes. This survey is followed by a detailed examination of the programmes of three institutions, research carried out using qualitative methods in a multi-site case study over a two-year period. The study compares and contrasts educational approaches and teaching methods, describes the perceptions, ownership and practice of those who participate in these programmes and identifies factors in the nurture of theological reflection.

The findings of the cases studies are discussed using theoretical and research perspectives drawn from fields of educational study which bear upon the subject: reflection and reflective practice; education for professional development; critical thinking; and the theory of situated learning. This discussion allows me to suggest some implications for the teaching and learning of theological reflection.

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Declaration

No material in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or another university.

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Introduction

Why study Theological Reflection?

Since about 1970 there has been a growing interest in the notion of “theological reflection” in a variety of Christian and theological education spheres and in Church related discourse. The literature on the subject has grown exponentially in these 30 years, though as the Dutch Theologian Johannes van der Ven points out it has not necessarily led to a clarity about the subject.

“Anyone who dips into the abundance of literature on theological reflection has a hard time suppressing first of all a sense of astonishment at so much productivity, but also amazement at so much confusion...this enormous production has not led to a clear insight into the essence and aim of theological reflection and has perhaps actually raised the level of confusion.” (van der Ven 1998 p210).¹

The apparent lack of clarity has not, however, inhibited this notion from exerting enormous influence over church discourse and on planning and curriculum design. For example, in 1999 the Methodist Church in Britain used the term as a category to help in the stationing of ministers². At about the same time a distance learning course for lay people appeared on the topic (Aveyard 1997).³ During the 1980s and 90s the Catholic organisation Young Christian Workers (YCW) regularly organised conferences and programmes based on the idea of Theological Reflection. Across the churches the phrase regularly features in reports and commissions and it appears explicitly or implicitly on the curriculum of many theological training courses.⁴ In the late 1980s the Association of Centres of Adult Theological Education (ACATE) set up a working party on the subject, which reported twice through its journal the *British Journal of Theological Education*. More recently adult Christian educationalists have discussed on-line what is meant by Theological Reflection. Throughout the period books, articles and conferences addressed the subject⁵. This literature cries out for review and analysis for the sake of understanding and possibly clarifying what is being discussed. Such a

¹ Durston (1989) refers to a conference which had “come apart at the seams” (p32) through failure to agree “on what it was they were talking about”.

² Stationing refers to the appointing of Methodist ministers to circuit appointments. This though ultimately a decision of the annual Methodist Conference, is facilitated by various matching mechanisms.

³ This book is the text of a module offered by St John’s College Extension Programme, Nottingham.

⁴ US Catholic Conference Commission on Certification and Accreditation: *Accreditation Handbook for Ministry Formation* p41 c.f. O’Brien (2001) ‘Facility in “Theological Reflections” is increasingly regarded as a key competency for ministry’ (p290). See Chapter 3 of this thesis for institutions in the UK.

⁵ References are too many to list in the text here. A brief viewing of the bibliography will substantiate this point.

review may also reveal why in some circles, at least, the notion is ubiquitous and influential.

Why study the teaching and learning of theological reflection?

The extent of the influence of the notion in theological education particularly in the seminaries, colleges and courses for those training for formal ministry in the church was confirmed by a survey of institutions in the UK which I carried out in 1999. Of those institutions training people for recognised ministry over 80%⁶ were explicitly addressing theological reflection within their training programme. In addition, a number of church related training institutions were including theological reflection as a vital part of their training for teachers, youth workers and adult educators. Within the literature however, there is only passing reference to teaching and curriculum design⁷. A primary reason for a study of the teaching and learning of theological reflection is, therefore, that this has not been carried out before to my knowledge. What are teaching institutions aiming to do with theological reflection and how are they doing it? What educational theories are utilised and how is effectiveness assessed? What do institutions teach and what is the students' experience of learning? Are there ways of improving pedagogical practice? These are appropriate questions.

The investigation is undertaken from an educational perspective and hence it is primarily concerned with the pedagogy of theological reflection but, in a field where the concepts could be said to be in the process of clarification, it may contribute also to the defining and refining of the terms and underlying concepts, which are the subject of the teaching and learning. Furthermore, a field of investigation within education, namely Christian Education, thus researched is, potentially at least, able to offer insight to and critique of theory and practice in the field of education as whole. In particular by examining both student experience and institutional intention and activity, it is possible to engage critically with theories and practices of teaching and learning which are derived from other contexts.

⁶ 40 out of 48 institutions indicated that they were involved in teaching theological reflection. See chapter 4 for full details of the survey.

⁷ Ballard & Pritchard (1996) includes much that can be used for teaching but do not set out an educational programme.

Methodology and the structure of the thesis

The research methodology is primarily descriptive-interpretative. It acknowledges that the field is relatively unresearched from an educational perspective and that a degree of confusion characterises the discourse on theological reflection. Initially, therefore, it attempts to describe and interpret the views, experiences and practices identified within the literature on theological reflection.

The literature search on theological reflection is followed by empirical research, which has two elements corresponding to the two phases of the research. In the first phase of the investigation I used a questionnaire survey to gather information about theological reflection and the structures for teaching and learning within various educational institutions in the UK. In the second phase I undertook case studies of three institutions' approaches to the teaching and learning of theological reflection. This involved a detailed examination of course programmes, including inspections of course documentation, interviews with teaching staff, and observation of teaching. In addition I interviewed students at various stages in relation to course programmes and with one group was able to interview at different points over a two-year period.

This qualitative approach to research in the second phase, the analysis of which takes up almost half of this thesis, was prompted by the need to understand in more detail how theological reflection functions in relation to the whole curriculum and the institutions in which it is taught and learned. Theological reflection, as becomes apparent from the literature review and survey, stands on the interface between various different worlds: it is not only defined and practiced as interdisciplinary, involving the perspectives of other human sciences, in attempting to relate theology to phenomena which are open to many interpretations, it also is taught in relation to the preparation for and practice of ministry. It thus does not fit into a neat curriculum box but must be understood within the total programmes of Christian and/or theological education and the institutions which deliver them. Having established by the survey and literature review certain common elements in the structures used in different institutions for teaching and learning theological reflection, I considered that the case study approach would be most illuminating in this stage of the research of this field. (A more detailed discussion and description of the methods used appears in chapter 4 where the empirical data is presented and analysed.)

In the final stage of research there is a second literature review. This is a discussion of the findings within educational framework, where I consider a number of fields of research and theory which parallel or relate to my investigation of theological reflection and seek to interpret the findings of the empirical research using these perspectives. The outcome of this is fourfold. First, it enables a better understanding of some of the findings. Secondly, it suggests ways in which the teaching and learning may be further developed. Thirdly, it raises some questions for these educational discourses and finally, it indicates possible areas for further research. These points are gathered into a final chapter.

The role of the researcher

The role of the researcher can never be wholly neutral or value free. One comes to any hermeneutical enterprise, as Gadamer (1982) has suggested, with one's interests and bias and these are used in the interpretative process. Provided this is accompanied by some critical openness, the possibility of new knowledge is present but the researcher cannot be outside the interpretative process nor would it be appropriate, were it possible. Hence, here I attempt briefly to indicate the personal history I bring to this investigation. I come to the research as an educator, for a number of years holding a national post with responsibility for adult Christian education within the Methodist Church (1987-1999) and currently director of the Wesley Study Centre, Durham, one of Methodism's training institutions. My interest in the issue of theological reflection began when it appeared on courses and in course design for programmes with which I was associated or inspected and when it began to feature at conferences in which I participated. I found the concept both attractive and frustratingly vague and have been and continue to be involved in programmes that seek to develop theological reflection ability within students. During the time of my research I was appointed to my current post and now work within an institution that has theological reflection as a strong feature of its programme. The Wesley Study Centre is in close partnership with Cranmer Hall, one of the three case study sites and whilst much of the research took place before I had responsibility for programmes of theological reflection, towards the end of the research period I took part in certain aspects of the programmes I was studying, in all three institutions studied. Since the research work was completed, I have undertaken significant responsibility for the teaching and learning of theological reflection within the partnership and have implemented a number of the recommendations at the end of

this thesis as part of an ongoing action-research project to improve the nurture of theological reflection.

The particular personal interest and involvement in the case studies raised both ethical and methodological issues. The ethical issues of access and anonymity⁸ were dealt with by following a strict pattern of informing institutions and all participants of the nature and purposes of the research, seeking consent, and agreeing the methods for safeguarding student anonymity by the use of pseudonyms. Staff of the three institutions read the sections of the thesis relating to their institutions and agreed that whilst the anonymity of students should be and was properly protected, the name of the institutions could be given as this would help in the examination and appropriation of the research. The methodological issues concerned research undertaken by a senior figure in an institution with students of partner institutions. The questions of how honest students would be in this framework and whether they might be deferent in their responses, were contemplated. It was thus important to make clear to students at the beginning that the research was completely unconnected with their own progress through training, that anything said in the interview would remain confidential, that the recorded interview would only be listened to by myself, and that any quotations used in the thesis would be strictly anonymous⁹. In the latter stages of the research work, I also was invited to take part in teaching and assessment in all three institutions on the subject of theological reflection. As discussed later¹⁰, this provided opportunities for a different perspective on the teaching and learning of the subject and so, after some consideration, I agreed to participate in this way. Interviews were completed by this stage. Nevertheless, I was not involved in the assessment of work of any student who participated in the interviews. My conviction is that students were clear about the role I was taking in research, they were not compromised by the process and that they were honest in their contributions.

⁸ Bell (1993) pp53-59; Oliver (1997) pp61-69; Cohen and Manion (1994) p366ff

⁹ See Appendix 4 introduction to interviews

¹⁰ See Chapter 4

Chapter 1: What is Theological Reflection?

The beginning of the use of the term “theological reflection” in modern times probably lies with Father Pedro Arrupe, General of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983. In an address given in 1970 he challenged Jesuits to be engaged in theological reflection in order to address some of the great issues of the contemporary world. He explained this activity as “rethinking” these urgent issues using a “truly evangelical theology” working in collaboration with the human and exact sciences in order to yield “Divine solutions” to the problems.¹¹ Whilst both words making up the term have separate meanings, and may even have been used together, prior to that date, the use of the name ‘theological reflection’ to describe a particular approach to theology has its origins here.

The Jesuit theologian, Avery Dulles (1973) expounds the idea by contrasting theological reflection with what he calls the “two most prevalent styles of Christian theology...the biblical and the magisterial.” Biblical theology is that favoured by evangelical Protestants and starts from the decisive expression of God’s revelation in the Bible and then seeks to apply the norms of biblical faith to the belief and preaching of the church. Magisterial theology, which has flourished in Roman Catholicism since the Reformation, looks to the pope and bishops for authoritative guidance on matters of faith and action. Both these types of theology begin with a given authority and are oriented to the past and the church rather than the world. Theological reflection by contrast begins with the experience and questions of the contemporary world. Along with other recent developments in theology such as “political theology” and “liberation theology” it may be characterised as “secular dialogic” in that it attempts to find new insights through a dialogue between traditional Christian faith and the aspirations and insights of contemporary human beings.

Dulles highlights certain features that mark out theological reflection. First, its subject matter is not the traditional focuses of doctrinal theology. Rather it starts with the concerns of today’s world such as poverty, environmental destruction and war. In bringing the problems of the contemporary into dialogue with the Christian tradition it acts in the conviction that the church has a distinctive contribution to make and in the

¹¹ Collins 1984 believes that its first appearance in Catholic circles was in 1971 when the “Program of Priestly Formation” was published by the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

belief that in so doing the gospel can renew and improve human life. Second, the method proceeds by reflection, which he defines, using the writing of Gibson Winter (1965) as “a coming to consciousness in the consideration of the present meaning of events”. The underlying assumption of this process is that God is to be found in current experience as well as historical revelation and that this divine presence can be discerned by reflection.

Revelation is to be found not so much in clear directives from the past as in the dimension of ultimacy within our experience. God’s revelation to our predecessors affords paradigms or guidelines for the present; they serve to suggest and open up the depth-dimensions in the experience of the believer today. In this sense, one may speak of ‘continuing revelation’ (Dulles 1973 p117)

Third, for the process of theological reflection it will be advantageous to make use of a team. This team should be varied in temperament, background and specialisation. This may include those whose primary expertise is not theology and may draw from other academic and professional disciplines.¹²

Fourth, attention must be paid to context and the personal interests and commitments of those seeking to reflect theologically. Each will alter the process in some way and therefore it is important to be clear about both.

The sociology of knowledge makes it clear that answers are in large measure predetermined by the situation in which the discussion is carried on. In the classroom, theology becomes academic; in the pulpit kerygmatic; in the chancery, juridical. It cannot be assumed that the best theology will come from the universities and seminaries or for that matter from curias or monasteries (Dulles 1973 p120)

Finally, practical living and action are to be outcomes. This says Dulles is consistent with the Ignatian ethos, though thought and action are not separate entities, rather two aspects of the same reality.

Dulles thus sets out clearly a theological process which he calls theological reflection and in so doing he identified features which recur in other descriptions of theological reflection. He envisages a group of people committed to Christian faith, engaging in a process of analysis and reflection. This process begins with a pressing contemporary issue, is developed by considering the Christian tradition and using other disciplines and

¹² It is interesting to note that a number of Centres for Theological Reflection were set up as a result of responses to Arrupe’s call, for example, Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, Washington DC and the Center for Theological Reflection, Florida. See Kostelac (1992) for a description of Woodstock’s work.

aims at facilitating new insight and action as expressions of the Christian gospel for today's world.

During the 1980s and 1990s theological reflection began to be used in connection with particular areas of the Church's life and ministry. We identify three.

1. Theological reflection in ministerial practice

In 1980 JD and EE Whitehead's book *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* appeared. It was to be influential in ministerial training. Again written from a Catholic perspective the book is concerned with ministry in parishes, and the role of those in parish leadership - priests, religious and lay people in leadership, collectively called ministers. For the authors, theological reflection is primarily located in the church community and it is a method of reflection appropriate to the Christian community in its endeavour to respond to the issues of the world in which they live. Theological reflection can operate in a number of contexts including that of academic theology but the authors write about it as a task related to practical ministry.

Theological reflection in ministry is the process of bringing to bear in the practical decisions of ministry the resources of Christian faith (Whitehead 1980 p1x)

and

In every age the community of faith must discover the shape of its ministry. We must discern how we are to be faithful to the gospel and effective in mission: to celebrate God's saving presence and to contribute, by word and action and sacrament, to the fulness of this presence - God's reign that comes in justice and peace. Theological reflection is an essential tool in this discernment of contemporary ministry (Whitehead 1980 p3)

They offer a model of theological reflection that is tri-polar, in which three elements are brought into conversation when a pastoral issue is encountered and on which the minister or church community must take action (the pastoral challenge). These elements or sources of information are the Christian tradition, by which they mean the scriptures together with multiple and changing interpretations over history, personal experience which includes the experience of individual Christians and also the collective experience of faith communities, and culture, the convictions, values and biases that form the social setting in which theological reflection and ministry take place.

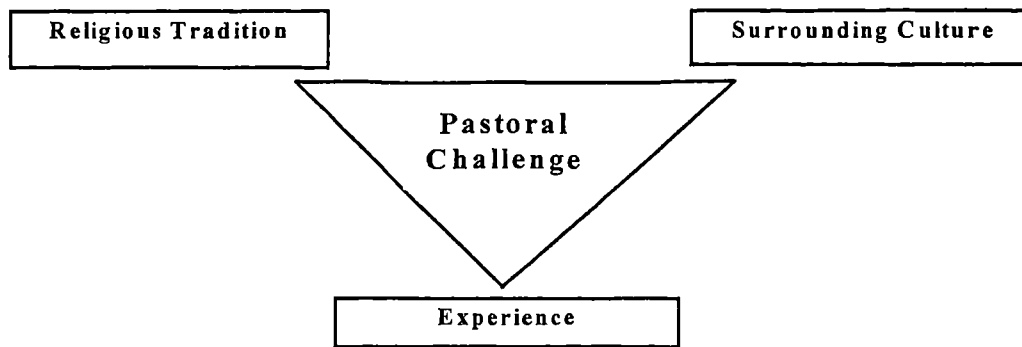


Figure 1: Whitehead Model of Theological Reflection

There is a recognition of the complexity of the sources. For example, it is argued that the composition of scripture is built on plural views and perspectives and arises itself from experience in conversation with tradition and social setting. This mirrors the basic triangular conversation of the model of theological reflection. Using John's Gospel and the Exodus as examples, they describe the stages of development in coming to a written text of scripture. These written forms are built on various stages, each influenced by the participants' needs and interests and the issues of their particular context. It is possible to discern within the final written text some of the different periods of development as well as the interests, theological convictions and settings of the contributors.¹³ The scriptures in turn become paradigms or metaphors and are read in the light of other developing church tradition and from the perspective of contemporary issues. Unlocking this source is a skilled role. Likewise contemporary culture is deeply pervasive and difficult to discern. It is often "largely invisible to us", functioning as a "formative ambience" (p56) and exploring this source means looking at rather than through these ubiquitous lenses. It can yield positive insight as well as being challenged over exploitation and dehumanisation of the world. Hence it is seen neither as "simply demonic nor unambiguously enlightened". Attention to culture can lead to mutual critique between itself and the religious tradition. Experience too is a multi-layer and complex phenomenon and needs critical discernment to explore.

The method for theological reflection proposed for this model also has three elements or stages. The first is **attending**. This is a stage of seeking out information on a particular

¹³ e.g. the many different descriptions of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus

concern from each of the three sources. It requires critical listening with suspended judgement. The second stage is that of **assertion**, which consists in bringing the perspectives gathered from the three sources into a “lively dialogue of mutual clarification to expand and enrich religious insight”. The final stage is **pastoral response**. This involves moving from discussion and insight to decision and action.

“The initial stage (attending) involves seeking out the diverse information, residing, often in a partly-hidden fashion, in personal experience, the religious tradition, and the culture. An intermediate stage (assertion) instigates a dialogue among these sources of information in order to clarify, challenge and purify the insights and limits of each. The final stage (pastoral response) moves the reflection from insight towards personal and communal action.” (Whitehead 1980 p x)

A particular strength of combining a model and method in the way they do is to emphasise the dialectical nature of theological reflection. Dulles’ presentation can appear to be linear and sequential. Whilst the Whitehead model offers a series of ordered steps, all sources are recognised as operating in the conversation from the beginning and inevitably influencing each other and the participants throughout. This is borne out in the theological assumptions also. God is seen as revealed in all three sources. One is not bringing God, revealed in the tradition, to answer experience or critique culture in a triumphalist fashion. Rather one is seeking something of God in each place and expecting the dialectical process to yield new insight, thus enabling the group to discern the presence and demands of God. In the same way the religious information available in each source is partial and in need of interrogation, and whilst in the final analysis, tradition is given a higher authority and therefore has a certain priority in the model, it is seen, nevertheless, as open to critique and reformation by the other sources through conversation. This assumption is made possible by the Catholic notion of the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*) which the authors believe acts as a form of providence, guiding or holding the process to the truth.

The locus of theological reflection in this model is, however, firmly ecclesial. Although the process may begin in individual experience the authors appear to believe that the outcomes will be parish responses or for individuals in church based ministry. This is clear in most of the concrete examples given in the book (in part 4). Moreover, although a corporate process is assumed, the role of those in leadership is vital, requiring some considerable skill. Whilst wanting to move away from the image of the priest with all the answers to people’s experiential and context questions, the process appears to favour minister-led mission and does not embrace the “*missio Dei*” concept of mission more

central to Dulles. On the other hand, this focus on pastoral ministry allows the authors to develop some thoughts on the training for those in leadership. I will discuss this later in the thesis. For the moment we note that theological reflection is here applied to the arenas of ministerial training and practice in the local church in its engagement with local pastoral concerns.

2. Theological reflection in Christian education

Writing at about the same time as the Whiteheads, Thomas Groome (1980) developed a similar approach for Christian education, which he called “Shared Christian Praxis”. His examples suggest that the education he has in mind is both within (Catholic) Schools and with adults in parish and church settings. He too assumes a group dialogue setting for the process and lists five components to the activity.

- **Present action**, means here our “whole human engagement with the world” including physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual action (p184). Hence any point of individual or community experience may be the starting focus.
- **Critical reflection** begins to be applied to this present action in order to evaluate it, to uncover the past that led to the present and to envision future possibilities. (Reason, memory and imagination are all involved.)
- **Dialogue**, the next stage in the process, is the conversation in community that engages with the critical reflection and makes it a corporate activity. The first two stages might be done by individuals but at this point the process involves others. Dialogue is not discussion but a careful telling and listening marked with a deep love and respect for the individuals, enabling individuals to see things whole.
- **The Story** is the introduction of the scripture and tradition, the religious tradition as the Whiteheads describe it.
- **The vision** that arises from the story is in fact our response to the Christian faith story and therefore incorporates our plans and actions that spring from the dialogue.

These components are engaged through five basic movements

1. **Naming present action:** The participants are invited to name their own activity concerning the topic for attention.
2. **The participants’ stories and visions:** they are encouraged to reflect on why they do what they do and what the likely intended consequences of their actions are (Critical reflection).

3. **The Christian community's story & vision:** the educator makes present to the group the Christian community Story concerning the topic at hand and the faith response it invites (Story & Vision).
4. **Dialectical hermeneutic between story and participants' story:** The participants appropriate the Story to their lives in a dialectic with their own stories (Dialogue).
5. **Dialectical hermeneutic between vision and participant's visions:** there is an opportunity to choose a personal faith response for the future (Dialogue to Vision).

The similarities between the approaches of Groome, Whitehead and Dulles are striking, even if the terminology and details of the process differ. All three place an emphasis on a central dialogue between personal experience and the Christian tradition, insist on the importance of current experience or practical contemporary issues as the starting point for the process and believe that the process is made possible or enhanced by attention to and analysis of the experience and by a group setting. Groome, at first sight, appears not to give attention to culture, though the phase in his "shared Christian praxis" which involves critical reflection on experience addresses this in part, by asking participants to reflect on where their current action (attitudes or thinking) has come from. This uncovering of the factors influential in forming current action inevitably involves some consideration of contemporary culture and its influence. These North American Catholic writers are drawing from the same stream of thought and offering different models for slightly different purposes.

3. Theological reflection as a spiritual discipline

O'Connell Killen and de Beer (1995) develop the concept of theological reflection along similar lines to the Whiteheads but with an interest in personal spiritual development. For them theological reflection is

... the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. (p viii)

Here again is an emphasis on conversation and dialogue. As they say elsewhere in the book theological reflection is

the artful discipline of putting our experience into conversation with the heritage of the Christian tradition (p2)

and

this is theological reflection - to allow the thought, feelings, images and insights that arise from the concrete events of our lives to be in genuine conversation with the wisdom of the entire Christian community throughout the ages. (p18)

The authors base their approach to theological reflection on the broader idea of a universal 'movement towards insight' process. This movement towards meaning process, they argue, is fundamentally a reflective process.

For human beings the drive for meaning is stronger than the drive for physical survival. We need to make sense of what happens to us, to clothe our existence within an interpretative pattern that reflects back to us lives of integrity, coherence, and significance. If we cannot, the will to live withers.

The deep and compelling drive for meaning motivates us to reflect. Often we are unaware of our reflective process. The movement towards insight describes what we do when we ponder and muse over events, people and ideas. We reflect when events do not fit easily into our interpretative frameworks, the constructs we use to make meaning of our lives. (p45)

There are 4 stages of the "movement towards insight". It begins in **experience**. Experience is defined as having inner and outer dimensions. The outer dimension is whatever happens to us either as active or passive participants, the inner dimension involves the feelings, thoughts, attitudes and hopes that we carry into and out of any situation or encounter. The first step in the "movement towards insight" is what they call "**entering our experience**", that is a heightened awareness of experience through narrative. Here individuals or groups relate an experience to others and/or to themselves through telling the story. This happens to all human beings but the process can be enhanced by deliberately and self consciously narrating an experience, keeping the narration as concrete as possible and suspending judgement to avoid premature interpretation.

As people do this, they encounter **feelings**. Feelings are vitally important in the process. They are "our embodied affective and intelligent responses to reality as we encounter it" and are "clues to the meaning of our experience." This is a recognition that meaning and emotion are deeply entwined in individuals, groups and communities and in order for new insight or new meaning to emerge feelings need to be named. The second stage is, therefore, **attending to feelings**. Recognising, owning and naming the feelings that the narration of an experience evokes can facilitate an understanding of its meaning or its challenge to meaning for us. Again the authors assume that this is a natural process but it can be developed by a certain discipline in identifying and examining feeling. This means

allowing oneself to become aware of the feelings and their strength but keeping a degree of detachment in order not to be drawn too quickly into an emotional reaction. “Attending to our feelings means to feel them and to be aware of feeling them at the same time, without denying them or becoming mired in them”.

By paying attention to feelings, **images** arise. Images emerge when we shape and give voice to our feelings in the language of imagery¹⁴. An image here appears to be a word picture or metaphor which incorporates both affective and cognitive perceptions of our experience. “Images symbolise our experience. They capture the totality of our felt response to reality in a given situation.”¹⁵ Images, they suggest, work like a language in giving context as well as meaning (both are expressed in the image) but image-language works differently from conceptual language in being less definite and precise. An image that captures experience acts like a metaphor. “It discloses and surprises by revealing familiar and unexpected aspects of meaning in our experience”¹⁶. Considering and questioning the images may spark insight. Hence the third stage of the “movement to insight” process is considering and questioning the images that emerge when we attend to our feelings. Again this is seen as a natural and universal part of the process but can be extended by consciously considering and questioning the images. By this kind of scrutiny new insight may surface.

Sometimes when we muse on a situation an image emerges that at once captures the essence of our conundrum and frees us from it (op. cit p40)

The new **insight** may allow us to reformulate how we think about something and may lead, if we are willing and ready, to other action - this is the fourth stage of the process.

As far as the authors are concerned the movement towards insight is a universal human experience. It does not in itself constitute theological reflection. Theological reflection comes into play when the person reflecting includes the Christian heritage in his/her reflection towards insight.

... the rich wisdom contained in the Christian community’s theological heritage offers a context within which to test, refine and expand our insights as we carry them back to our daily lives. The Christian heritage provides a body of religious wisdom that we can incorporate into our reflection on life experiences” (op. cit p46)

¹⁴ O’Connel Killen and de Beer 1995 p35

¹⁵ op. cit p37

¹⁶ op.cit p38

The “movement towards insight” can thus be developed to create a theological reflection process by deliberately incorporating the Christian religious heritage into reflection. The Christian, because of her/his faith perspective, may be looking to find theological meaning from the process. To enhance this she or he may choose to explore the heart of the matter using questions drawn from central themes of Christian heritage and/or consciously include material from the tradition with which to have a conversation about meaning.

Hence theological reflection is the 4 stages of “movement towards insight” modified so that the pattern looks as follows:

1. Focus on some aspect of experience
2. Describe that experience to get to the heart of the matter (find the epicentres)
3. Explore the heart of the matter in conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage
4. Identify from the conversation new truth and meaning for life.

Finally, the authors argue that the gathering of the fruits of reflection are often best incorporated by writing, sculpting, drawing or in some other way embodying the insight. This is followed by chapters on how theological reflection may be developed as a personal discipline, one on guiding groups in theological reflection and one offering creative designs for theological reflection.

The strength of this presentation of theological reflection is grounding the process in the arguably universal search for meaning among human beings. If there is a common pattern of reflection on experience in a movement towards insight, then theological reflection is merely the extension of a basic human phenomenon in which the Christian heritage is enabled to play a dynamic role in the search for Christian learning and responsive living.

The emphasis has shifted subtly from the earlier writers in this field, in a number of ways. Firstly, there is less emphasis on the corporate process. Instead of the group exploration emphasised by Groome and the Whiteheads, theological reflection can be a personal spiritual discipline practiced by individual Christians, similar in style to private

devotions.¹⁷ Secondly, the stress on action is a little muted. Though the book argues that insight is incomplete until our lives change through concrete action (p43), the use of the word insight rather than the words action or praxis at this stage leaves it open to the accusation that this could be a cognitive or internally oriented process for individuals. As a consequence of these two subtle changes in emphasis, the writers are able to probe more deeply into the affective area of meaning making and develop techniques for exploring feelings and images. Overall, however, the thrust lacks the radical edge envisaged by Arrupe and Dulles where theological reflection is engaging with the major world issues of our time.

Theological Reflection as a creative phase in a process

Whilst the three models above have some differences from each other, they are united in seeing theological reflection as a process of theology. Other writers have defined theological reflection as a single moment or phase of a theological process. On this side of the Atlantic, Green (1990) has had a significant influence on the discourse. Green's writing was an intentional assault on the nature of theology as taught and studied in institutions in Britain, arguing for the radical reclamation of theology into a more dynamic local church based Christian discipline. He urges a change from "reading" theology and its associations with academic, book based, historical approach, to "doing" theology, based on the liberation theology notion of praxis. He wants the work of theology to be done by the groups of Christians involved in the everyday world, particularly linked to (and, at least, partly made up of) the poor and oppressed in society, rather than by individuals who study (or "read") theology. In this attack on establishment views of theology he follows Ian Fraser (1975) who, also influenced by liberation theology, wrote about the need to change the concept and practice of theology in the West.

Theology for Green is:

...an active and critical ministry. It investigates and reflects upon God's presence in our lives, and asks what that means for us (Green 1990 p12)

Theological reflection is thus:

bringing into juxtaposition our present life experience and the treasures of our Christian heritage, to check one against the other, to let each talk to the other, to

¹⁷ It is advocated that this type of discipline is undertaken at Lent or Advent.

learn from the mix and to gain even more insight to add to the store of Christian heritage (Green 1995 p79)

Green's "new way of being theologians" involves a "doing theology cycle". This is based on the experiential learning cycle of Kolb (1984 cf 1984a) and what has come to be known as the 'pastoral cycle'.

As with other accounts, the process begins in **experience**. Whilst this might be any experience, it is more likely to be an "encounter of participation in something that touches us deeply as human beings".¹⁸ The element of worry or anguish in it gives rise to the search for some sort of understanding or meaning. At this stage stories are told and feelings are shared. The second stage is a period of **exploration** where the experiences are subject to more analysis, which might involve expert input from the fields of sociology, psychology or humanities, but people's street wisdom and their ability to read the times is also important. The purpose here is to know the situation "inside out" and this is necessary, if theological reflection is to be valuable. The third stage is **reflection** or more properly **theological reflection** wherein people make a "concerted and conscious effort to see how the Christian faith relates to experience".¹⁹ "The situation being experienced must be brought into direct intimate contact with the Christian faith..." in order to "check the situation against that Christian heritage". This can be through prayer, bible study, worship, hymns and songs, creeds and councils, theologies of the past and the church's present day social teaching. This should ultimately lead to a **response** where "In the light of all the experience, exploration and reflection," a group can respond to the question "what does God now require of us?".²⁰ This in turn leads to new situations and experience and further exploration, reflection and action.

¹⁸ Green 1995 p25

¹⁹ op. cit p27

²⁰ op. cit p29

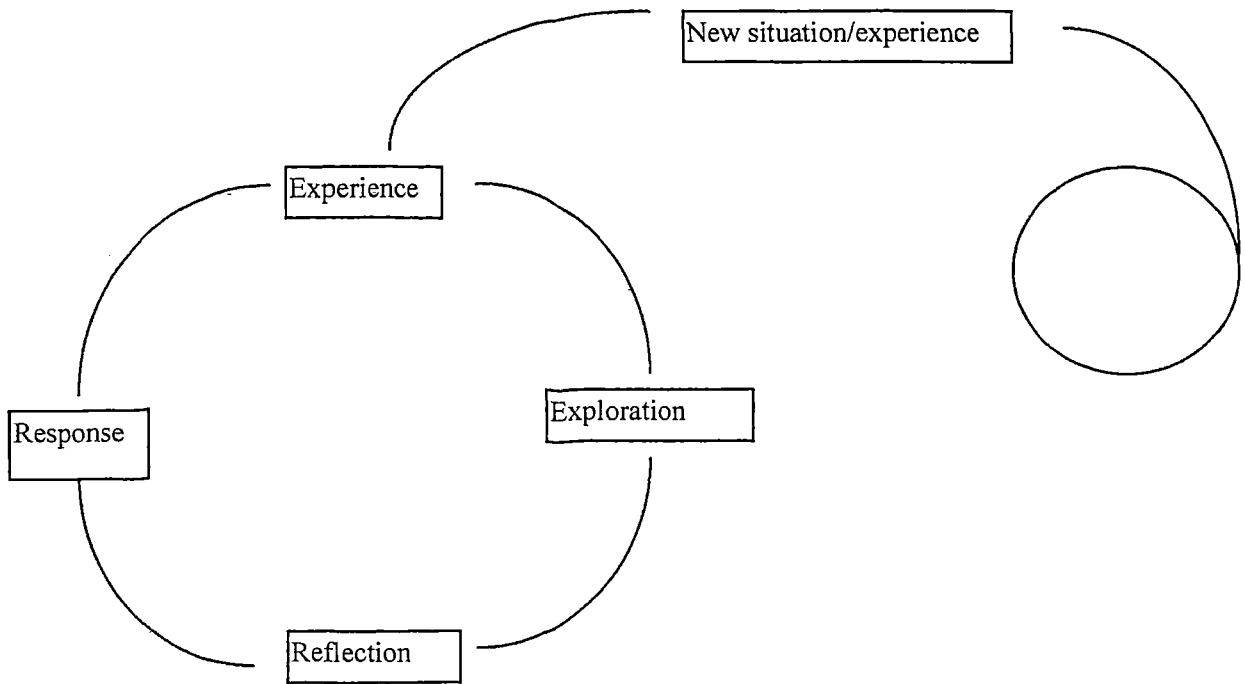


Figure 2: Green Model of Doing Theology

The phrase theological reflection is thus reserved for the reflection part of his “doing theology cycle”: “that aspect of theological activity which is centred upon the reflection phase of the cycle”.²¹ Theological reflection is thus one particular element in the theological process. In other words, Green is making a smaller claim for the term than some other writers in confining theological reflection strictly to the dialogue part of the process. This is the position of Ballard and Pritchard (1996) who also employ the pastoral cycle as their chief tool and see theological reflection as “the reflective moment of the cycle, where an attempt is made to understand the event in terms of theological tradition.”(p119). In a slightly more elaborate cycle it is also the way the term theological reflection is used by van der Ven (1993). By defining theological reflection as part of a larger cycle these models of theology not only have the strength of more discrete definition they also lend themselves more easily for teaching and research purposes, as we shall see later. They are vulnerable, however, to the criticism that they ignore the more complex dialectic at work, wherein theology is coming into play within the individual or groups at the outset of the process as well as at a particular point within it. It remains a clear position for many writers. In a later article Ballard (1999) argues against Carr (1997) that using the term theological reflection to describe the whole

²¹ Green 1995 p31

process, means that ‘When everything is theological reflection then nothing is theological reflection’²², suggesting that only by being more focused with the theological questioning of the practice or experience can insight be discerned.²³

Theological reflection as the normative form of theology

Whilst Green does not want to use the term theological reflection for his preferred alternative way of doing theology, two recent writers do. Writing in the UK, Todd (2000) argues that our current inherited patterns of theology are flawed because they have been formed by and with the ideology of rationalism. In particular where theology is a ‘theory to practice’ model it is premised on and motivated by ideological rationalism – the search for universal concepts and ideas arising out of abstraction. This ideology of rationalism has been deeply challenged as itself contextual and therefore a new pattern for theology is called for which frees us from this particular prison. This can be done by recognising theory as a dimension to the practice (not vice versa) and by taking a hermeneutical approach to dialogue with the practice embedded in the Christian tradition. Narrative, both current and from the tradition, provides a more holistic way of ‘distancing’ than abstraction and will, therefore, pervade this process. He argues for three movements at the heart of the theological process: (a) Engaging with context, (b) Reflecting on ways we perceive our situation, and (c) Reflective action. These three movements are applied to both the present situation and the Christian tradition and together with dialogue (correlation) between the two, they provide the dynamic for the theological process. This model has the advantage over the pastoral cycle of not being sequential - the movements can be explored in any order or all at once²⁴.

²² Ballard 1999 p13

²³ Ballard 1999 accepts Carr’s desire to see the whole process as theological in orientation but fears that the use of theological reflection to include situational analysis and human sciences can obscure the value of these tools in themselves and also lose the focused moment of discernment.

²⁴ Cf West, Noble and Todd 1999

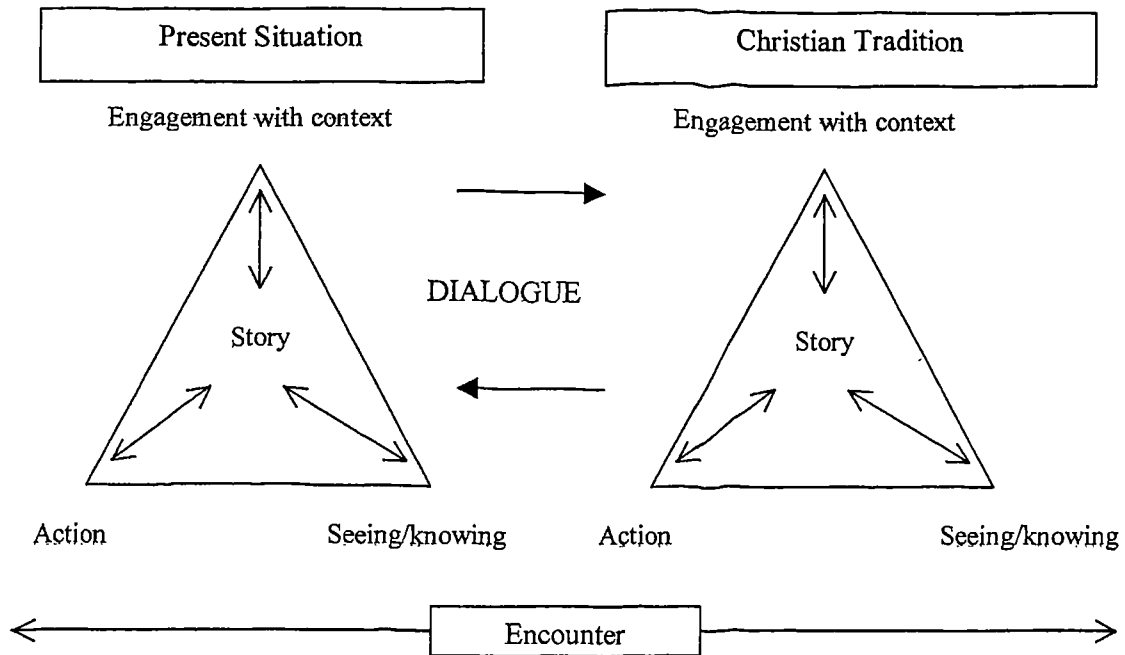


Figure 3: Todd Model of Theological Reflection

Like Green, Todd is not content with what he considers to be the current dominant models of studying theology, and unlike the earlier writers examined in this chapter, he does not want to see theological reflection as one approach among several. For him theological reflection defines a new and normative pattern for theology.

Theological reflection as a philosophical and epistemological approach to theology

Kinast (2000) denies that theological reflection is a single method for theology or a separate theological discipline. Rather he argues it is a ‘form’ of theology, which is recognisable because of a common threefold movement in a number of recent patterns of theological working: That is:

- It begins in lived experience of those doing theology
- It correlates this experience with sources of Christian tradition
- It draws out the practical implications for Christian living

His shorthand way of summarising his view is to say that in theological reflection “experience correlates with tradition for the sake of praxis” (op. cit. p3).

Kinast prefers the tag ‘form’ because, whilst one can identify the same threefold movement at the heart of this pattern of theological investigation, this form of theology can take very different expressions or styles depending on the focus of the theological

reflection. Indeed the strength of this approach to theology is that the “form that theological reflection takes is coextensive with people’s experience” (p3).

It does not treat experience as a theological or spiritual void nor does it use their experience merely to illustrate and apply theological principles. With theological reflection, theology is in the service of experience, not the other way round (op. cit. p3)

Kinast then describes a number of styles of theological reflection. The Whiteheads’ approach he portrays as a ‘ministerial style’ of theological reflection which begins in the pastoral issues of ministry is correlated with tradition through attention to experience, culture and tradition for the sake of confirmation, refinement or change of pastoral practice. The works of O’Connell Killen and Groome are both seen as a style of theological reflection that he calls a ‘Spiritual Wisdom Style’ or ‘Theological Reflection on everyday life’. In addition he identified a ‘feminist style of theological reflection’, which he describes as beginning with women’s experience and proceeding through a hermeneutics of suspicion or a pattern of retrieval and reinterpretation; an ‘inculturation style of theological reflection’ as seen in the work of Robert Schrieter (1985 and 1997) – beginning with cultural setting as the primary focus of reflection and correlating with the tradition through a form of semiotics; and, finally, a ‘practical style’ of theological reflection as seen in the work of Don Browning (1983 and 1991) – which begins with the life of church congregations and focuses on experiences which are communal and problematic and proceeds through a form of critical correlation. For each one can identify a different type of experience as the prompt and focus, a different way of engagement with the tradition for different kinds of action. Nevertheless there is an underlying pattern that is common. In each case he identifies the same basic threefold movement but within highly different and distinctive methodologies appropriate to the nature of the investigation. In this sense he makes his argument that theological reflection is not a method in the strict sense or a discipline but a common philosophical basis or epistemological approach to theology²⁵.

Conclusion

In this discourse we can discern both some shared understanding and a number of disputed points where different views or emphases complicate or confuse the discussion.

²⁵ Earlier Kinast (1983) made the case for understanding theological reflection in terms of Process Theology. Whilst this is not a prominent feature of his later writings, the underlying philosophy and epistemology appears to be a Process Theology model.

The common core of understanding about what is at the heart of the term 'theological reflection' is an association with a particular theological process. All cited writers argue that the term theological reflection relates in some way to an approach to theology that takes as its starting point concrete experience or practice. It does not explicitly begin with Bible, or Doctrine or Church teaching but rather begins with enquiry from the existential concrete encounter. This acts as a trigger or starting point for a process of enquiry and dialogue which involves the person (or group), aspects of the experience and its interpretation, and the Christian tradition. The conversation (Pattison 1989) is dialectical inasmuch as the juxtaposition of the experience with its various interpretations and the Christian tradition prompts in the individual or group critical and creative thinking, resulting in the possible reformulation or reinterpretation of the experience or the tradition or both and prompts appropriate actions.

The exact nature of the relationship between the term and this approach to theology is less clear. Writers are divided on a variety of issues. The differences can be divided into minor and major differences:

One of the minor differences is to do with whether theological reflection is an individual or corporate activity. Green argues for corporate enterprise based in and around a Christian community as being the required way of this theological enterprise. Indeed, he appears to deliberately oppose the idea of an individualistic pursuit of theology. Dulles speaks of the value of having a team of people working together, though he seems to have specialists in mind and does not insist on a group as essential. O'Connell Killen and de Beer on the other hand appear to support theological reflection as part of an individual search for meaning. It is possible, however, that this point is more a matter of emphasis than real dispute. To some extent it may be to do with the focus of the reflection. As Kinast argues the actual process and method is determined by the nature of the experience being considered and although the method may vary considerably, theological reflection may still be going on. What is more, it may be hard to argue that any form of theological reflection which involves conversation is wholly individual. Conversation is by definition an exchange of some sort. The conversation partner may be the author of a book, or a friend, a formal structured group or the text of the Bible and any change in belief, attitude or behaviour is likely to be tried out in some public sphere and therefore open to some scrutiny and discussion. The difference is not, however, insignificant when it comes to teaching and learning. For the design and delivery of programmes for the

nurture of theological reflection will need to determine how people engage in different forms of theological reflection and how they are assessed.

A second minor difference is the place and role of emotions. Again O'Connell Killen suggests that emotions are the keys to understanding and disclosure and as such need to be attended to in the process. Interestingly, Green also points out that the feelings and anxieties surrounding an issue will be important in its examination. For others, however, the role of emotion is not mentioned. The process of theological reflection appears to be primarily concerned with acting, thinking and acting. Again much will depend on how one defines thinking or reflection and the praxis orientation of the advocates of theological reflection may assume a much closer integration of affective, cognitive, and conative in the practical living. Having been alerted to this area again we need to explore what this means in the educational context.

Finally we need to note that the outcome in action is not clear. Green and the Whiteheads appear to say that action is always an outcome and imply that this will be in concrete, observable behaviour. Green certainly has in mind action to change society and community in solidarity with and for the benefit of the poor and marginalized. This does not seem to be of the same order as the 'sculpture and painting' envisaged by O'Connell Killen. We might say here that the orientation to action ought to be a reminder of the need to return to the concrete reality which started the process but accept, against behaviourists, that change may happen but not be immediately observable. It is possible that the outcome of the process may be a confirmation, modification or change of thinking, feeling, attitude or action, some of which may be immediately manifest whilst others will not.

The major difference concerns whether the term theological reflection applies to the process, a part of the process or a philosophy of theological method overpinning a whole range of methodologies. Dulles presents theological reflection as a process of theology with several stages or elements. Whitehead, Groome and O'Connell Killen whilst not wanting to claim with Todd that theological reflection is the only or normative pattern for theological enquiry, see theological reflection as a process which can be entered by particular models and methods. Green prefers to talk about a process of 'doing theology' which would in broad terms match in most points the process identified by Dulles. He recognises the term theological reflection but reserves it to describe the point where

experience is laid alongside the Christian tradition and the time and way the dialogue or correlation takes place. Kinast's claims go beyond both in suggesting that theological reflection is neither a specific process nor a creative moment in a process but an epistemological position on which a number of theological processes are developed.

It may indeed be possible to argue for all three, though a literature that uses one term for several different objects opens itself to confusion and complicates any investigation into the teaching and learning of it. More importantly, however, the discussion of theological reflection as both a process of theology and an epistemological philosophy brings it up against similar claims for the discipline of practical theology. For example, Ballard and Pritchard (1996) favour the term practical theology for the overall framework or process and like Green identify theological reflection as the creative meeting moment within the process. Up to this point I have not introduced the notion of practical theology but having explored the literature explicitly related to theological reflection, we must turn to the subject of practical theology, for though this discipline has a two hundred year pedigree, it too has undergone seismic changes in self understanding and practice in the same period that a discourse has developed around the term theological reflection. Practical theology and theological reflection are closely linked, having developed as a result of the same forces and lines of thinking and are sometimes used interchangeably. In the next chapter we will explore the history of the discipline of practical theology, the impulses creating its new form and the relationship between theological reflection and practical theology.

Chapter 2: Theological Reflection and Practical Theology

In the previous chapter I identified the central ideas and some of the areas of disagreement and confusion associated with the notion of theological reflection. To understand both in more depth we must examine the discipline of practical theology, for, as we shall see, the central concepts and orientation of practical theology are identical with those of theological reflection. The reformulation of the discipline of practical theology in the last 40 years²⁶ is the result of a number of factors. These same factors have given birth to the notion of theological reflection. Indeed both may be ways of talking about the same thing. In the final section, I explore how various writers have related theological reflection and practical theology to each other, and outline the implications for a study of teaching and learning.

Schleiermacher's view of practical theology

Practical theology has been recognised as one of the disciplines or fields of theology since Schleiermacher who, in an attempt to justify the study of theology in the university context, identified three core disciplines: Philosophical Theology, Historical Theology and Practical Theology (Schleiermacher 1811).²⁷ He conceived of theology through the metaphor of a tree with philosophical theology being the roots, historical theology the trunk and practical theology the branches. Practical theology here designates the worship, preaching and pastoral leadership of the church, which all theology is to serve, and represents the climax and purpose of the activity of theology. Like law and medicine, theology in Schleiermacher's thinking was a form of professional training in which the practical outcomes were crucial. This meant that the study of Philosophical and Historical Theology were to be pursued in order to equip clergy to address the practical issues of the church's life and mission. In other words, the whole enterprise of theology is oriented towards the practical, and the pattern of study is a linear one that begins in the

²⁶ Heitink dates the beginnings of modern practical theology to the 1960s (Heitink 1993 p104)

²⁷ Rautenstrauch had first introduced pastoral theology as a university discipline in 1774. The first chair of practical theology was at Vienna in 1777 (Van der Ven 1988)

philosophical, progresses through the historical and culminates in the practical concerns of Church guidance.

Farley (1983b c.f. 1987) points out that the main understanding of the place of practical theology comes not from the threefold view of Schleiermacher, but from the fourfold division of theology in the nineteenth century which came to prevail in the German theological 'encyclopedic' works and in German monographs on practical theology.²⁸ A consensus about this fourfold pattern emerged in which Practical Theology was seen as the fourth theological discipline after Biblical Studies, Church History and Systematic Theology. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher's idea of practical theology as the orientation of theological study and the deductive process that underlies it remained normative.

Pedagogically, this understanding has shaped the study of theology in Europe and North American and continues to do so.

The marginalisation of practical theology

Though Heitink (1993) is able to discern a developing philosophical base to practical theology through Nietzsche and Marheineke which laid the foundations of the modern form of the discipline, in the main the content of much practical theology throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries was concerned with techniques for clergy. What Hiltner (1958) calls "hints and helps" for preaching, conducting of services, catechetical instruction and pastoral practice became the normal fare of the discipline. This caused practical theology to be sidelined as a 'non-academic' subject and thus despite Schleiermacher's desire for all theology to be practical and act as a church guide, practical theology was subject to a process of marginalisation. In part this was due to the success of Schleiermacher in establishing theology as a university subject. Over the course of time theology needed to justify its place in higher education and this led to a depreciation of practical theology. As Ballard points out

the academic demand for scientific criteria meant that theology has had to justify its place in academia less and less on the grounds of cultural assumptions and social necessity (the supply of clergy) and more and more as part of the historical sciences or as a philosophical enquiry. So the Bible becomes the historical source of the Christian tradition and doctrine becomes history or metaphysics.

²⁸ Farley notes that the work of Schleiermacher was neither the first nor the most influential plan for theological studies. Its main value was its statement of the place of the study of theology in the modern university.

Practical theology becomes a neglected, even despised, option for the professionally concerned. (Ballard 1986: p11)

Campbell (1987) argues there were three other consequences of this focus on techniques. First, the relationship between practical theology and historical and dogmatic theology was seen largely as a deductive one, practical theology being understood as applied theology. Second, the question of whether practical theology was an art or a science remained unresolved and as practical theology degenerated further into a sort of “pastoral medicine” its academic status was questionable. Finally, practical theology became more focused on internal church life with the clergy as a kind of chaplain to the pious. Neither they nor their congregations were enabled by practical theology to address the changing world beyond. The church was thus ill-equipped to cope with the questions surrounding the role of the church in the modern world.

The neglect of practical theology in the university context opened the study of theology to three further problems. First, the gap between academia and church became wider. As practical orientation was less possible through lack of any practical focus for reflection, theology served mainly as a critical engagement with the tradition. If theology engaged with contemporary culture, it did so at the level of philosophical debate about meaningfulness and the possibility of belief. Whilst this is honourable and worthy, it neglects the possibility of theological thought on concrete experiences of ministry and life. Second, the development of each sub-discipline has used a separate secular methodology and hence attempts to bring these disciplines together fail because the different methodologies are left unexposed (Williams 1986). Third, theology runs the risk of the loss of a controlling idea in theological education, which can give unity to the partial enquiries. As there is no practical orientation each discipline pursues its own academic agenda without reference to either of the other disciplines or to the Church’s mission and ministries.

Reactions to the marginalisation of practical theology

The recognition of these problems has been a recurring theme in discussions about the teaching of theology, throughout the twentieth century. There have also been various attempts at ‘solving the problem’. As Ballard argues, the classic answer in England and Wales was to establish theological colleges for the intending clergy in order to bridge the gap between academic theology and ministerial practice but as these have gradually been

drawn into the university system for a variety of reasons, they have also been subject to the same accusation that practical theology was a minor or neglected aspect of training. Even where pastoral theology constituted a significant portion of the curriculum it has tended to limit its interest in this context to the practical activities of the minister: preaching, pastoral care, administration etc. The teachers of these practical activities tended to have their own ways of working rather than operating under a unified discipline of practical theology. This is paralleled in Germany and North America where in different ways practical theology moved from a 'church-clergy science to a clergy science'.²⁹ Further the effect of the 'practical' designation for this area contrasted it with theory areas and thus implied that it was absolved or emptied of theoretical responsibilities or content (Farley 1983a: 33). All in all, the attempts to address the applied nature of practical theology in seminaries and theological colleges revealed rather than solved two primary problems: first, that there existed no single discipline of practical theology, and second, theology, as conceived by Schleiermacher, separated theory from practice and then demoted the second.

A significant change began to occur, in the 1960s when university theology departments explored the possibilities of a new form of pastoral theology or pastoral studies. In 1964 the University of Birmingham began to offer courses in pastoral studies, Cardiff and Manchester Universities quickly followed suit³⁰. These courses did not arise solely from church interest, however. From the 1950s onwards there has been a growing tendency towards professional education in society in general, and in particular for workers in pastoral, social, and health related professions. With this came the new disciplines of sociology and psychology and thus 'pastoral studies' provided a rich area of study with a wide appeal to several professions. Ballard writes:

Pastoral studies, therefore, should be understood as a small but not insignificant element in the wider search for a renewal of theology as a practical activity, and within that, of the place and nature of practical theology as such. At the same time pastoral studies is also an expression of the interest in the possibility opened up by the expansion of professional education (Ballard 1986 p16)

Pastoral studies, as any new area of study, has not been without its problems. The newness of sociology and psychology and the inter-disciplinary nature of the studies

²⁹ Farley argues that in North America practical theology was influenced by pastoral manuals (e.g. Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*) and so by the time works on practical theology were published in America in the late nineteenth century practical theology had already narrowed to clergy concerns. See Farley 1987 pp2-5.

³⁰ In North America this is broadly paralleled by the 'pastoral counselling' movement founded by A T Boisen (1960) and to some extent North American Pragmatism. See Heitink 1993 p115ff

made this inevitable. For theologians and those involved in training clergy the relative weight to be given to the human sciences on the one hand and theology on the other was not an easy issue to resolve. Even among those who welcomed the new studies, there were fierce debates about these matters (See, for example, Bellamy 1986; Campbell 1987; Pattison 1993). Nevertheless, the development did embody what practical theologians now almost universally argue for: the use of human sciences in the analysis of human experience and a dialogue between these disciplines and theology with an orientation towards practice. The development of pastoral studies contributed to a new self-confidence among those whose work might be identified as practical theology. What is more, it began to engage theologians in new and emerging discourses within and between disciplines which would ultimately redefine the nature of practical theology.

A third and more radical response to the gap between academic theology and the Church's life and mission has been an attempt to reconceptualise the nature and process of theology. The theological education debate, as it is referred to³¹, was initiated by Edward Farley's historical account of the fragmentation of theology into a collection of disciplines (Farley 1983a; 1983b and 1988). According to Farley the development of the fourfold encyclopedia has decisively contributed to the problems of fragmentation and the dichotomy between academic theology and church. This disintegration has enslaved theology to specialities, and neglected its natural unity in the pre-reflective habit of faith. The only way to move away from this enslavement is to reform theology itself and recover something of the medieval notion of theology (*theologia*), a single unitary discipline which developed in the individual a personal disposition or virtuous habit of wisdom (*habitus*). It is important here to emphasise the two aspects of theology: first as a discipline (or science) that attends rigorously and critically to the interpretation of faith; and, second, as the development of reflective wisdom. In this Farley does not wish to abandon rigorous and critical elements in theology. Rather he wishes to reunite them with the reflective faith of the believer. Theology thus begins in and flows from the believer seeking to respond to existential life situations in the light of faith. It is natural, indeed universal, that humans will respond to such life situations through reflective activity. This natural reflective activity of faith can be strengthened and sharpened by structure, thematisation and critical rigour whether that be in church education

³¹ See Astley, Francis and Crowder 1996. They designate section 9 of their Reader by this name and include four key articles as an introduction to the debate. All the articles refer to Farley's work.

programmes or in theological institutions. Theology is the informed and disciplined extension of reflective faith.

This approach is partly a reclamation of theology as a whole for all Christians and partly an attack on the tendency of separate disciplines in theology to lose sight of any overall purpose. For our purposes, it is important to note that Farley has reformulated Scheiermacher's notion of theology as fundamentally practical. The differences, however, are important. Whilst Scheiermacher assumed that one begins with the historical tradition, Farley eschews both the scriptures and historical church teaching as a priori authorities. Rather he advocates that theology begins with concrete situations. In theology one first attends to the contemporary situation or experience of the believer in the situation, and only then to the tradition. This is followed by a hermeneutical engagement with both the situation and the tradition so as to yield an authentic faith response and in it a disclosure of God. Scheiermacher's believed that the pattern of theological study was linear, starting with the tradition and ending in an application to life. Farley, on the other hand, argues for a process that begins in concrete situations and is essentially dialectical and hermeneutical in its process. In this view of theology we see the shift that is mirrored in most understandings of theological reflection: namely that the first stage of exploration is the investigation of experience and only when experience is attended to with some seriousness can the tradition come into play as a dialogical partner.

Stimuli in the renewal of practical theology

The exploration of a relationship with the human sciences and the debate that followed Farley's seminal work were two factors in the renewal of practical theology. But there were also other impulses which combined with these. One such impulse was 'the method of correlation'. This idea, developed by Paul Tillich (Tillich 1968), is concerned with a dialogue between the Christian tradition and contemporary reality (correlation). Tillich's basic notion for relating the questions of the world to the truths of the gospel has come under criticism for making the critical engagement only one way and, therefore, being ultimately applicationist (Browning 1991: p43). In the work of David Tracy (1975; 1981) and Don Browning (1983; 1991), however, a fresh articulation of the model has been found. This is sometimes referred to as the revised or critical correlation method. At its heart is a contention that there are both implicit and explicit questions and answers in both contemporary culture and the tradition and thus that theology is a mutually critical

dialogue between the interpretations of the Christian message and interpretations of contemporary cultural experience and practices.

A second impulse has been fresh insights in hermeneutics and epistemology. Both Tracy and Browning make extensive use of Gadamer's views on hermeneutics (Gadamer 1982), in that both believe that the hermeneutical task cannot be undertaken without taking seriously the context, history and interests of the reader. The reader of a text comes with an "effective history" which means the context in which the person has developed and the events of the past that have shaped his or her present historical consciousness. Moreover, hermeneutical investigation is always at root an enquiry that has a practical outcome and this application is not just something that follows understanding but rather guides the interpretative process from the beginning, albeit often subtly. All this means that an objective description or analysis is not possible. Neither is it desirable, in that, according to Gadamer, any understanding of anything arises out of a "conversation" in which we use our prejudices and commitments to arrive at meaning. We understand things only in contrast or relation to these "fore-understandings" or "fore-concepts" and thus it is important to be aware of our fore-meanings and consciously assimilate them into the process. Understanding comes through a critical conversation that ultimately enables the merging of the horizons of the reader and the text. This approach to hermeneutics fits well with the critical correlation method and strengthens its claim to form the basis of theology.

Likewise the work of Paul Ricoeur (1987, 1991) on the relationship between textual interpretation and the interpretation of human actions has been suggestive. Ricoeur argues that intentional human actions are, in many ways, similar to texts and can, therefore, be approached by using many of the techniques normally used for the interpretation of texts. Thus a hermeneutical approach to the study of human and societal actions is possible and arguably essential. Many practical theologians have made use of this notion in their approach to their subject (e.g. see Heitink 1999 pp140-147; Browning 1991pp80-87).

Another significant influence on epistemology is the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas. Habermas (1971, 1984, 1989) has developed two major ideas that have influenced writers in practical theology. First, he argues that the nature of knowledge is driven by constituent social and material interests and that these interests determine the

nature of evidence, argument and thinking. He identifies three types of interest, the technical or scientific with an interest in control, the hermeneutical such as historical investigation with an interest in understanding or mutual illumination and the emancipatory, such as psychiatry or psychoanalysis, with an interest in the liberation from distortion. The second major concern of Habermas, which grows to some extent out of the first, is his theory of communicative action. Actions may be instrumental or strategic in their intention to affect or control the material world or people but a higher order of action is one that desires mutual understanding and truth via dialogue. The very existence of language, according to Habermas points to the possibility of rational discourse and reveals an intention to forge practical reason. A major endeavour of human beings, therefore, is to create the ideal speech situation where the social and material inequalities of particular groups or individuals are eliminated and genuine exchange and understanding can take place. Habermas has thus provided for practical theologians an approach which while accepting truth is consensus, not ontological, representative or reproductive of reality, nevertheless does not yield to nihilistic relativism. Moreover he has given legitimation to forms of investigation other than hard science and added weight to the need to develop a notion of practical wisdom as an approach to truth. Groome (1980) and Graham (1996) are significantly influenced by Habermas in their epistemology for practical theology. Arens (1996), in his setting out of practical theology, attempts to use the theory of communicative action as a vehicle for understanding the nature of the gospel as seen in the actions and speech acts of Jesus and the New Testament.

The rise of (interest in) postmodern culture may also be said to be another factor in reformation of practical theology. Postmodern culture is difficult to identify in detail and complex debates surround it. We may say that those who accept post-modernity as a way of describing culture at the beginning of the 21st century characterise it as fundamentally “a denial of a unified world as the object of our perception”. In postmodernity, grand (or meta) narratives (whether religious, political and scientific) are eschewed, and what has been accepted as knowledge in the world since the Enlightenment is viewed as the current consensus of particular communities with constitutive or even hegemonic interests. Claims to universality are viewed with suspicion and truth claims are seen as no more than linguistic constructs of particular communities in particular contexts and times. In short “the modern world view is replaced with a multiplicity of world views” and knowledge is replaced by interpretation. (Gentz 1996 p40)

A number of theologians have seen both problems and opportunities for theology within post-modernity. Graham (1996 & 2000), for example, takes seriously post-modern culture. She sees it as corrective to modernism rather than a successive age.

Postmodernity exposed the hubris of Enlightenment optimism, tempers the excesses of literalism, objectivity and humanism, and retrieves from the margins the repressed and hidden 'Others' of Western modernity. The postmodern is where modernity is called to account, where its confident assertions are put to the test,... (Graham 2000 p107)

Graham argues that postmodernity poses a challenge to Christian theology and conduct. Post-modernity denies the possibility of foundational or metaphysical truth claims, and universal narratives or notions, which provide hope or obligation. This can be illustrated well from feminism and gender theory, which destabilised key categories such as selfhood and subjectivity. Universal concepts such as truth, objective reason or human nature are no longer tenable in the post-modern culture and so are no longer available as the basis for ethics or politics. We must, therefore, re-conceive these notions within particular contexts and practices. Thus truth needs to be understood as a regularity ideal or practical wisdom (phronesis), provisional and contestable, which is implicit in the concrete practices of a community and can be excavated and evaluated by reflection on practice. Indeed, the only vocabulary available to Christian communities in articulating their truth claims is that of pastoral practice itself.

The faith-community acts as the guardian of practical wisdom by which such purposeful action gains its authenticity and credibility, and serves as the medium by which truth claims are forged and publicly articulated. (Graham 2000 p203)

Theology becomes a performative discipline, where knowledge and truth are only realisable in the pursuit of practical strategies and social relations and its unity is located in the study of the practices of the intentional faith-communities.

The praxis of the faith community constitutes the character and wisdom of theology: it is the means by which Christians purposefully inhabit the world, the vehicle through which the community itself is formed and ordered. (Graham 2000 p204)

Action therefore is not the outworking of faith but its prerequisite - practice constitutes human identity and meaning. In other words, Graham is arguing that within a post-modern context truth claims for the Christian faith are embedded in the praxis of the community of faith. They may be drawn out through reflection and thus may enable the development and refinement of practice. These truths are provisional, however, and at best open to revision by critical reflection. Indeed, her strong interest in gender studies

and feminist theology, compels her to develop notions that allow for critical openness, especially to the articulation of formerly hidden needs and experiences. Whilst Graham's work has come under strong criticism (see Biggar 1998), it is a testimony in practical theology towards a praxis-oriented approach to the discipline.

Accompanying several of these impulses has been a recovery of Aristotle's twin notions of praxis, as action in the social situation, and phronesis, as the practical wisdom from which praxis arises and which is in turn developed by praxis. Over against theoretical or technical ways of knowing and engaging with the world, praxis and its informing wisdom, phronesis, are more appropriate ways of relating to the world, argue many of the practical theologians, and consistent with Biblical notions of epistemology³². Practice, which is always 'theory laden' becomes praxis when the underlying theory is self consciously and critically reflected upon (Browning 1983: 13) and thus is capable of revealing and refining phronesis.

Finally we need to acknowledge the role of liberation theology in the re-emergence of practical theology. In the countries of Latin America there began in the mid-1960s a distinct theological movement, which assumed that the starting point of theology is the concrete situations of the poor and oppressed. Gutierrez (1973) argued that Christian commitment is to recognise and participate in God's preferential option for the poor and this liberation praxis is the way of knowing God. For Gutierrez, the first Christian act is engagement alongside the oppressed for liberation and the second act which continually informs the first is critical reflection – reflection on praxis in its social, political and economic context. This reflection on practice is the locus of theology. Assmann (1975), a Brazilian liberation theologian, makes extensive use of the term 'theological reflection' in his book on practical theology (see pp 43- 84). The term is used broadly in two ways. First, it is used as a name for theology or theological work in general. Secondly, it is intimately connected with critical reflection on historical events. Theological reflection is the search for faith in critical reflection on praxis.

³² See Groome 1980 pp152-157; for exposition of *theoria*, praxis and *poiesis* and their accompanying states of mind. Groome argues that praxis according to Aristotle needs to be informed by emotion as well as intellect and is thus able to build a bridge to the Hebrew concept of knowing related to the word *Yada*, a word which means to know a person, and is often also used as a word for sexual intercourse. For the influence of the praxis and phronesis on practical theology see Schüssler Fiorenza 1987; Lee 1998, O'Brien 2001, Graham 1996, Browning 1991 and cf van der Ven 1993 on Aquinas' notion of *prudentia* derived from Aristotle p 87.

Critical reflection on human history becomes theological to the degree that it looks for the presence of the Christian faith in historical experience; it is this that distinguishes theology from other ways of reflecting critically on the experience. If reference to faith in history is laid aside, then there is no theology. In this sense, “in the light of faith”, “in the light of revelation”, and so on – for all the questions they leave unanswered – denote the essence of theological reflection. (Assmann 1975 p 62)

Hug (1983) makes an explicit connection between the methodology of the Base Communities in Latin America and the emerging discipline of practical theology. Hennelly (1983) examines the pattern of working of various Base Christian Communities and relates this to the Hispanic Base Communities in the US and the communities involved in the Woodstock experiment. A typical pattern he says is that found in Mexico where theology begins with critical reflection on events and experiences to discover God and sin in the contemporary world. This is followed by engagement with the Word of God and this leads to a response to the love of God and commitment to action. Whilst Hennelly urges caution about assuming this as the invariable pattern – he says that sometimes the process will begin with the Bible not experience – the heart of the matter is the chemistry in the meeting of experience and tradition (Hennelly 1983 pp60-79). In the same book, Joe Holland goes further in arguing liberation theology is the approach to theology most suited to post-modern culture. He believes that underlying each successive culture there is root metaphor, which gives shape to society and in turn theology. In pre-modern culture the root metaphor is organic, the shape of society hierarchical and the nature of theology Catholic. In modernity the root metaphor is mechanistic, the orientation of society is technological and the nature of theology is basically Protestant. In the emerging post-modern culture the root metaphor is artistic, the structure of society is communitarian and the pattern of theology is that of liberation theology. In short we are seeing the development of another pattern of theology appropriate to our changing culture. This analysis is open to criticism but for our purposes we note the strong link between liberation theology and practical theology especially in the mind of practical theologians.³³

³³ A similar argument could be mounted for Feminist theology. It too has contributed to the changing nature of theology by paying attention to the experience of women and the praxis of the Christian Church as the starting points for critical reflection in theology.

Practical theology: a theological theory of action

All these movements, shifts in culture and thought have combined to make practical theology what Heitink calls “a theological theory of action”. Effectively he is saying that Practical Theology functions as a human science. Human sciences or behavioural sciences (sociology, psychology and education) are conceived or function as theories of action in that they begin with the observation of human actions and use human behaviour as the raw material for their theoretical reflections on how people relate to each other, think or learn. Each human science has a different interest and focus. Practical theology has the interest of action that is related to belief and Christian tradition. Like the human sciences it has an empirical starting point and recognises the complex relationship between theory and praxis which requires a hermeneutical approach. For Heitink, however, there are some qualifying elements to this theological theory of action. Firstly, he wants to distinguish action from behaviour. Action involves intention whereas behaviour may be determined solely by external forces. Hence actions contain a teleological element, they are directed in some way towards a goal, end or ideal. Within the Christian viewpoint actions are oriented to the ‘service of the kingdom’ and it is these actions which are the focus of practical theology. Second, Heitink distinguishes between human sciences that want to describe and explain and those which want to influence and change. A practical theology ‘theory of action’ should include a critical or strategic dimension. Just as the empirical element is needed to test theory, so critical theory is needed to review praxis, to avoid being ideologically driven and thereby simply confirming the status quo. Hence a practical theological theory of action is characterised by being an empirical, hermeneutical and critical approach to the actions of the Church, its members and its ministers³⁴.

Theological reflection and practical theology

It is not difficult to see from this survey that practical theology and theological reflection are closely related concepts. Both trace their origins to liberation theology, both draw on recent writing on hermeneutics, epistemology and practical wisdom, and both are concerned with a theological process that begins in some form in human experience and

³⁴ This understanding of practical theology argues Heitink developed in mid to late 1960s. It was introduced into Germany in 1967 by G Krause (see Mette 1978) and into the Netherlands in 1970 by Jacob Firet. During the 1970s and early 1980s the discipline developed in a number of directions with different emphases with the establishing of academic chairs and the launching of professional journals (e.g. the *Journal of Empirical Theology* 1988).

action, makes use of the perspectives of various disciplines, particularly the human sciences, and the Christian tradition in a dialectic way to find theology that informs and empowers action. It may indeed be possible to infer that theological reflection has been one way of talking about and handling the collision of the continents of theology and human sciences, which has occurred since the 1960s and practical theology has been another. This is supported, ironically by the equivocal use of the term theological reflection by major practical theologians. It clearly corresponds to the 'critical correlation method' of Tracy and Browning. It relates directly to Farley's concept of *theologia* as an extension of the natural process of reflection, particularly as the theological tradition is brought into play as a dialogical partner. However, neither Browning nor Heitink, who may arguably be the definitive writers on Practical Theology on their respective side of the Atlantic, has much use for the term theological reflection. In contrast to Kinast, who makes a claim for theological reflection to be a form of theology embracing many processes and methods using the same epistemological and philosophical base, these writers claim the same for Practical Theology and neglect the language of theological reflection. Equally, the terminology of theological reflection is used sparingly by Farley, Groome and Graham.

In some writings the term is used but with a specific reference and meaning. The British writers Ballard and Pritchard (1996) see theological reflection "at the heart and task of practical theology" (p118). Whilst "practical theology is more than theological reflection: it is both a set of disciplines and a method of taking the life and action of the Church with theological seriousness. Nevertheless the relationship between practical theology and theological reflection is close, perhaps akin to that between parent and child; the one is echoed in the other" (p124). Because they base their approach to practical theology broadly on the 'pastoral cycle' they are able to identify theological reflection as the 'third movement' in the cycle. In other words it is "the key moment of theological engagement with the experience or action under review". They then offer some methods for theological reflection drawn from various approaches to practical theology³⁵.

³⁵ These are application; critical correlation; praxis approaches; and narrative approaches. We will return to these methods later in the thesis.

In van der Ven's empirical-theological cycle for practical theology, 'theological reflection' appears twice in the cycle. In the 5-phase cycle³⁶, theological reflection is a part of phase 2 (Theological Induction) and phase 5 (Theological Evaluation). In both cases the adjective 'theological' carries the conviction at the heart of the intra-disciplinary approach that the cycle and all the phases are a theological activity. Hence the reference may mean no more than 'reflection' that takes place in an academic theological framework. Theological reflection has two conditions that he believes must be satisfied at this stage of the cycle. The first condition is that the researcher must have a synoptic knowledge of the relevant theoretical literature and the second that the researcher acquire a knowledge and understanding of the empirical literature³⁷. This means that theological reflection in this context depends on extensive knowledge of both areas. When these conditions are satisfied theological reflection can enable: (a) theological insights from the literature to be extrapolated and applied to one's own findings, (b) a more discriminating analysis of both literature insights and one's own findings, and (c) a theological and empirical evaluation of differences noted. The purpose of theological reflection here is to provide a basis on which to formulate theological questions that focus the research and to begin to design the empirical-theological research.

The second time the term is used in the empirical-theological cycle in the last phase, theological evaluation, where theological reflection is one of 3 sub-phases in the evaluation phase. (p152). The first sub-phase is entitled 'theological interpretation' and is concerned with the interpretation of the numerical results³⁸ of the testing in a theological framework. As the numbers do not in themselves provide an answer to the theological questions, attention is given to re-interpreting the results for theology by relating the concepts to broader frame and general area. At first sight, theological reflection, the next sub-phase, appears to be an extension of theological interpretation in terms of simply working out the implications. However, van der Ven argues that the theological reflection is much more. It is a dialectical process of the utmost importance, in which the empirical findings are neither definitive nor dismissible but which must now be set in the hermeneutical context of theological concepts and theories and evaluated within this context. Past and present are brought into dialogue for a 'theological hermeneutic of experience'.

³⁶ The cycle is outlined in an appendix of this paper.

³⁷ Empirical literature here means the empirical research data available on a particular subject drawn from any social or human science disciplines including previous empirical work undertaken in practical theology.

³⁸ Van der Ven favours quantitative methods for empirical research, though not exclusively.

The approach taken by van der Ven in part corresponds to Ballard and Prichard's view of theological reflection and in part contradicts it. Both see a hermeneutical moment in the end phases of a Practical Theology cycle where empirical data is considered in the light of the Christian tradition. However, van der Ven sees a role for theological reflection earlier in the process. This form of theological reflection is an initial refining process for research purposes in which an extensive knowledge of both relevant theological and empirical literature is needed. It does suggest a dialectical conversation but of a more preliminary kind as the purpose is to form a basis for specific theological empirical research, the result of which will be subject to further scrutiny and a second dialectical conversation. The intended readers of the two publications may to some extent account for the difference. Ballard & Prichard are introducing the notion of practical theology largely for clergy and churches, as their illustrations show. Van der Ven on the other hand is writing to outline and justify a certain approach to research, which may be undertaken in the university context. His illustrations are all from major practical theology research projects. This may suggest that the concept and role of theological reflection necessarily becomes more complex in formal academia.

It is possible that in the search for more sophisticated models for practical theology the notion of theological reflection becomes less useful. van der Ven in advocating an intradisciplinary model, rejects what he calls the 'two phase' model in which an empirical description provided by social science is followed by theological reflection. This he believes to have failed for a number of reasons, a central one being the "insufficiently defined methodology of theological reflection"(1993 p2.) Similarly, in his later book, *Education for Reflective Ministry* (1998), he gives only the briefest notes on the teaching of theological reflection, arguing that the subject is very confused (1998 p210). Whilst he offers some views on theological reflection in ministerial formation he is clearly more cautious than previously about using the notion and seems to suggest that its role and practice are confusing. Emmanuel Larty's (2000) review of approaches to practical theology argues that there are some particular problems in what he calls 'the process approach'. It tends to over-value method at the expense of content and runs the risk of superficiality and scavenges "in various disciplines (including theological ones) in the hope of finding appropriate themes for the reflection stage" (p131). This dis-ease with theological reflection appears to be more apparent especially as the discourse about methodology in practical theology becomes more intense through public debate. It is

possible whilst the term ‘theological reflection’ arises in the same seismic shifts which have regenerated practical theology as a distinct area of theological study, that at least some practical theologians are now cautious about the terminology and others have abandoned it as too imprecise in a discipline that is striving to articulate its methodology.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about the term ‘theological reflection’ from this survey of the recent history of the field of practical theology? Firstly, it is clear that the modern use of the term (since 1970 onwards) coincides with the renewal and development of the field of practical theology. These two terms may both have been used to describe the same approach to and process of theological investigation arising in the context of postmodernity and on the interface between theology and human sciences. Theological reflection provides a short hand term for (some of) the processes which theologians have used to relate empirical data to the Christian tradition as they have reconceived the point of departure for practical theology in practice and experience. In the search for new language and processes, claims for theological reflection may sometimes have been grand, as we saw in the previous chapter, envisioning theological reflection as the whole process that many would now recognise as practical theological investigation.

Second, some practical theologians, especially those who favour the use of the ‘pastoral cycle’ or similar models, continue to use the term and suggest that it can be best used to describe the dialectical conversation or critical correlation moment(s) in the field of practical theology. With this narrowing of the focus, it becomes possible to describe in more detail the methods and processes that can (or may) facilitate theological reflection. This of course is only possible when one uses a linear sequential process. Other models, e.g. Todd (2000), which eschew a linear movement either retain theological reflection as the description of the whole or abandon its use altogether.

Finally, we note that some practical theologians have limited use for the term theological reflection, perhaps preferring to abandon an imprecise term for more sophisticated, more philosophical based methodology. With major players in the field only using the term in very limited ways, or not at all, the confusion surrounding the term is likely to continue. It may even be possible to discern a tendency in popular literature, in theological colleges and seminaries to elevate the term whilst in more academic circles the term is dying out

of use. On the other hand, with Ballard and van der Ven continuing to use the concept the debate is far from over.

Implications for teaching and learning

As we begin to turn to the field of teaching and learning, there are a number of points to take into account from the above discussion. Firstly, we would expect the terminology to be unclear and confused, especially in relation to theological reflection and practical theology. In a field that is still emerging and where key writers use different terms, language 'on the ground' will be, almost inevitably, muddled and vague. The arguably stronger case for practical theology as the defining nomenclature is not yet finally made and thus is unlikely to have penetrated teaching establishments in a consistent and clear way. Indeed, it is likely that theological reflection continues to be used widely because as a term it has some advantages over its rival. It lends itself to a range of activities including the simple instruction to an individual or group to 'reflect theologically' on a subject for which there is no equivalent term within the vocabulary of some practical theologians. Hence, a vagueness of terminology is probable.

Nevertheless, the attention to common features, shared generating impulses and the common underlying ideas about theological reflection and practical theology allows us to be able to recognise the particular phenomenon to which these terms refer despite a vague or confused terminology. We might expect theological reflection to mean a process, a part of a process and/or the philosophical base on which some theological processes are built. Equally we might find the presence of theological reflection in courses or programmes which do not use the terminology. In programmes of learning we would expect to see theological reflection pursued in relation to epistemological and hermeneutical concerns, human sciences and practical outcomes. Finally we would expect to see structured, creative and critical use of the Christian tradition within and for this process.

The persistent call for a reform of theology associated with theological reflection and practical theology also suggests that the learning and teaching of theological reflection might not be without controversy and conflict within educational institutions.

Methodological debates are a feature of the emerging discipline of practical theology³⁹ and are likely to be mirrored in educational institutions.

Finally, the practical orientation of theological reflection and practical theology implies that what we are seeking to examine would be embodied in people, groups and processes and might thus be tested in terms of competence and collaboration as well as comprehension.

These first two chapters have allowed me to set out the basic notion of theological reflection and its discourse. We now turn in more detail to curriculum. In the next chapter we will discuss the findings of an exploratory survey on the teaching of theological reflection in the UK.

³⁹ One of the arguments within the developing discipline has been focused around the issues of relationship of the empirical and theological disciplines involved in practical theology. Cartledge (1999) identifies the development of two broad approaches: inter-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary. The first, supported by Berger, Gill, Francis & Kay, argues for rigour in each academic discipline so that any approach taken respects and satisfies the practitioners of both (or several) disciplines and the criteria appropriate to each. The other (intra-disciplinary) is the incorporation into practical theology of empirical methods and techniques in a similar way to the incorporation of the methods and techniques of literary criticism into Biblical studies, where the methods become appropriate to the enterprise and need rigour within the discipline served. This approach has been outlined and used by the Dutch Professor of Practical Theology Johannes van der Ven. The problem, with first approach, though not expressed in these terms by Cartledge, is what Heitink calls the "unique character of theological data" (p232). Gill recognises this in his view that one proceeds in sociology 'as if' there were social determinants of all human actions but in theology 'as if' there were transcendent dimension in the determinants. Theology carries by definition an assumption about the existence and possible interaction of God whilst sociology carries an assumption that there is no divine element. Van der Ven removes this problem by adopting an intra-disciplinary approach and defends his use of empirical methods by arguing that faith rather than God is the object of theology and the life and practice of the Church can be thus explored. The debate about the relationship of the disciplines continues.

Chapter 3: Teaching Theological Reflection in the UK: An Exploratory Survey

Our literature review has indicated something about the concept of theological reflection, its origins, the impulses that have shaped it, and the issues surrounding it. We recognised that some of this history and these issues would accompany the teaching and learning of theological reflection, though up to this point we have little information on the practice of teaching and learning theological reflection in educational institutions⁴⁰. In order to discover the contours of such teaching and learning I undertook an exploratory questionnaire survey in the UK in 1999. In this chapter I relate the findings of this survey.

The purpose and structure of the survey

The main purpose of the survey was to establish the extent and the nature of the teaching and learning of theological reflection in the UK, to test the understanding and use of the term in educational institutions and to extrapolate recurring or significant elements of the curricula, in order to design a second stage empirical study which would allow a more detailed examination of existing pedagogies.

The principle research questions behind the questionnaire were:

- What provisions exist for the learning of theological reflection?
- Who are the providers and for whom is it provided?
- How do providers conceive of theological reflection?
- What is the role and importance of theological reflection in their view?
- What are the intended outcomes, teaching methods and assessment criteria used?

The first two questions were to identify which institutions and students were involved in the teaching and learning of theological reflection. The next two questions were to establish to what extent educators shared concepts around theological reflection with the

⁴⁰ There are a number of writers who reflect on their experience of teaching theological reflection but the structure and nature of the teaching is implicit in their writing rather than clearly described. See Ames (1987), Gariboldi & Novotny (1987), Isaacson et al (1994), Kinast (1996), Ballard & Pritchard (1996).

literature and with each other. The final question area was intended to gather information and resources about the current teaching and learning of theological reflection in the institutions. These broad questions were translated into a series of specific questions forming a questionnaire. As the field is still uncharted, extensive use was made of open-ended questions, and these were tested for clarity and efficacy using a pilot form.

The institutions chosen were those concerned with Christian theological education in some way. The chief source of the names of these institutions was NEICE⁴¹. The list obtained was supplemented where necessary by the addition of some theological training colleges and courses⁴². In choosing institutions rather than, say, church based groups, there is, inevitably, a limiting of the scope of the survey, excluding potentially fruitful research among agencies and groups. On the other hand, institutions are, in part, familiar with the formal language and procedures of educational design, delivery and assessment and therefore comparable with each other. In total 95 institutions were approached.

The variables identified in the list of institutions were (a) type of institution and (b) denominational base or orientation. In terms of types, seven different categories were discerned according to purpose and clientele. These were: Bible College; University Theology/Religious Studies Department; Christian-based HE College; Other HE Institution; Seminary/Theological College; and Ministerial Training Course. Each of these has a particular history, role and relation to the Christian Churches and these may be factors influencing the teaching and learning of theological reflection. Where the institution did not easily fit any of the categories the category 'other' was used.

Likewise, we have seen sufficient evidence in the literature review to recognise that denominational traditions and practices may affect the understanding and therefore the teaching and learning of this subject. A simple categorisation was used indicating denomination (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist etc); ecumenical where more than one tradition is involved; and non-denominational where a secular base or foundation operates. Again institutions not fitting any of these categories were designated 'other' in the denominational identifier.

⁴¹ NEICE, The North of England Institute for Christian Education is a research based establishment concerned with Christian Education.

⁴² The NEICE listing is compiled relying on data offered by institutions desiring to be on the mailing list for research and information purposes. Six colleges and courses did not appear on the list and so were added.

Other variables or options are indicated on the questionnaire itself.

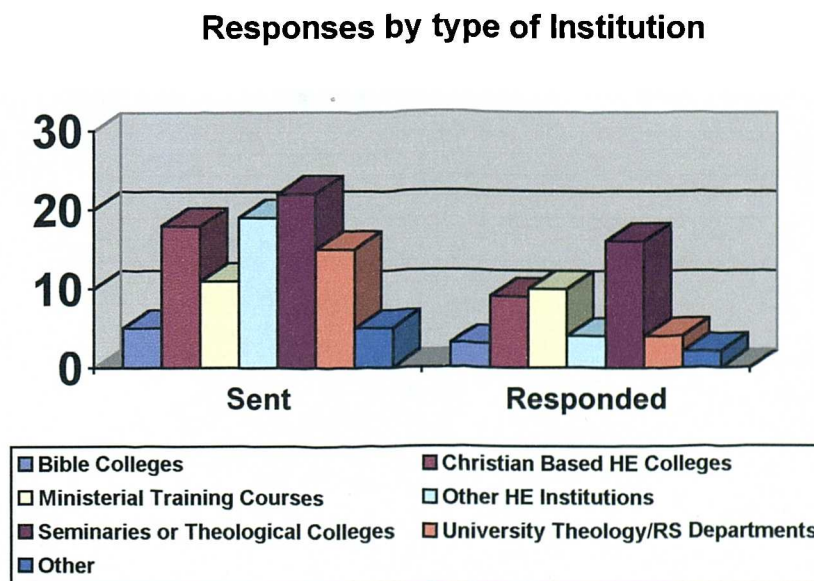
The survey was carried out largely by postal questionnaire, between May 1999 and January 2000. Six interviews based on the questionnaire, were carried out either face to face or by telephone on the request of the respondent. The results were recorded in a computer database and analysed using database analysis and other techniques. (The Questionnaire appears in Appendix 4).

Response to the questionnaire

In all 48 responses were received, a return rate of 51%. Of these, the response rate was highest for Ministerial Training courses, colleges and seminaries and lowest for ‘Other HE Institutions’ and ‘University Theology/Religious Studies departments’.

Type of Institution	Sent	Response	% response
Bible College	5	3	60%
Christian Based HE College	18	9	50%
Ministerial Training Course	11	10	91%
Other HE Institution	19	4	21%
Seminary or Theological College	22	16	73%
University Theology/RS Department	15	4	27%
Other	5	2	40%
TOTAL	95	48	51%

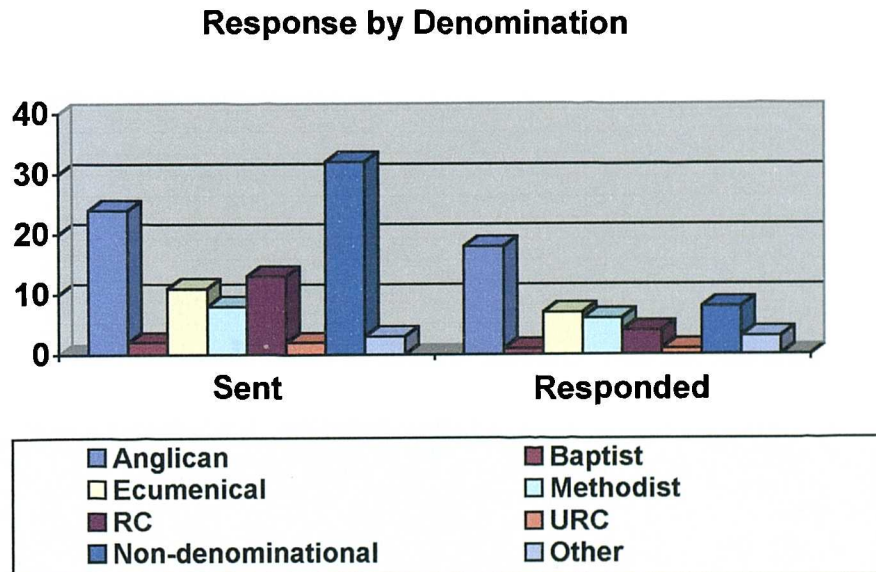
Figure 4: Responses to Questionnaire by institution type



The numbers on the denominational base vary widely and therefore percentages do not necessarily reveal a great deal in each case. We note, however, that lowest return was from the institutions with a 'non-denominational' basis, followed by those with a Roman Catholic foundation.

Denomination	Sent	Response	% response
Anglican	24	19	75%
Baptist	2	1	50%
Ecumenical	11	7	64%
Methodist	8	6	75%
RC	13	4	31%
URC	2	2	50%
Non-denominational	32	6	25%
Other	3	3	100%
TOTAL	95	48	51%

Figure 5: Responses to Questionnaire by Denomination



Key Findings

I have gathered the findings under three main headings for ease of communication.

The provision of theological reflection courses

From the survey it is possible to indicate that theological reflection is part of the educational agenda for a number of institutions. Of those responding to the questionnaire, 8 declared that they had no course on or related to theological reflection, though one did intend to develop such a course in the near future⁴³. All the others responding were running programmes on or for the nurture of theological reflection. This means that at least 40 institutions in the UK offer courses related to theological reflection. Of these, most are undergraduate level but there are also some post-graduate courses, particularly MA and MTh programmes. The total numbers involved in taking such courses is more difficult to determine from the questionnaire.

There appears to be a strong link between ordination training and theological reflection. Of those responding to the questionnaire, the largest group was institutions concerned with training for ordination. The response rate for Ministerial Training Courses was 90% and for Seminaries or Theological Colleges it was 73%, substantially higher than any other type of institution (see Figure 4). This may indicate the level of interest in the subject within these types of institutions. Furthermore, of the 40 institutions offering courses in theological reflection, 25 (62.5%) are either Ministerial Training Courses or Seminaries/ Theological Colleges (see Figure 6). As the one institution stating an intention to begin a course on theological reflection in the near future was also a Ministerial Training Course, none of the 7 not offering courses in theological reflection was from either of these categories. In other words, all Seminaries/Theological Colleges responding either had or planned to have such a programme. Institutions concerned with ministerial training appear to be most engaged in theological reflection courses.

⁴³ CBTI

Type of Institution	Institutions Responding		Institutions providing Education for TR	
	Numbers	% of total	Number	% of total
Seminary or Theological College	16	33 %	16	40 %
Ministerial Training Course	10	21 %	9	22.5 %
Christian Based HE College	11	23 %	8	20 %
University Theology/RS Dept.	4	8 %	4	10 %
Bible College	3	6 %	2	5 %
Other	2	4 %	1	2.5 %
Other HE Institution	2	4 %	0	0 %
Total	48	99% ⁴⁴	40	100%

Figure 6: Types of institution providing education for theological reflection

Responses to the ‘intended students’ for the theological reflection courses question seem to confirm this. The majority identify their student body as a mixture of those training for ordination, those training for other recognised ministries and lay people studying for their own interest (28 of 40). Of the 40 institutions offering courses, only 1 identified its intended students as lay people studying for their own interest or personal development. One identified its students as ‘other only’ – teachers in training. All others were directed towards or included training for ordained or recognised ministry (see Figure 7). The ‘other’ intended groups were identified as ‘ordained clergy involved in in-service training programmes’ and ‘teachers in training’ but these were in institutions which were also providing education for ordination, recognised ministries, lay and ‘other’ ministries.

Intended students	Institutions offering TR courses
Those training for ordination only	8
For recognised ministry only	1
Lay people (only)	1
‘Other’ (only)	1
Lay and those training for recognised ministry	1
Those training for ordination, recognised, lay or ‘other’ ministry	28
TOTAL	40

Figure 7: Intended Students for theological reflection

⁴⁴ The numbers have been presented to the nearest integer, so 1% from the total

This may suggest that the notion of theological reflection has meaning and is part of the curriculum of institutions concerned with the formation or professional development of clergy. Of interest, however, is the fact that three institutions responding to the questionnaire teach theological reflection as part of teacher training. Of these, one is a Catholic college of higher education, one is an Anglican HE College and one is a University Department of Theology in Scotland. All three institutions seem to conceptualise the formation of (Christian) teachers as similar to that of ordained ministers with a theologically informed approach to practice. Little detail was given of the way in which theological reflection relates to professional formation here, except the Catholic Institution uses assessment processes which test ‘theological literacy’, ‘knowledge and understanding of the Catholic tradition’, ‘critical reflection on our practice’ and ‘critical reflection on the role of Catholic education’. Its definition of theological reflection as “A critical view of action or thinking in the light of religious belief or teaching” places the institution within the main stream of both the literature and those responding to the questionnaire (see below) and helps to remind us in the discussion which follows that theological reflection as an element in professional formation is not entirely restricted to those training for ordination. This having been said the majority of programmes are for those training for church related ministry in some form, especially those preparing for ordination.

Concepts of theological reflection

The responses to the questionnaires included a range of definitions of theological reflection. A comparison of these definitions indicates a number of recurring points though there are also some differences of view and some questions raised.

Ten institutions saw theological reflection as involving some form of critical engagement.⁴⁵

Theological reflection is a process of critical engagement with practice
[SWMTC]

That process whereby the integration of theory and practice in the Christian witness is critically examined using the resources of the Christian tradition and other relevant disciplines... [Westminster College, Cambridge]

⁴⁵ [College of Ripon and St John] [Westminster College, Cambridge] [Trinity College, Glasgow] [SWMTC] [North Thames MTC] [Liverpool Hope University] [TISEC] [Queen’s College, Birmingham] [STETS] [Culham College].

The habit of interpreting life and experience critically with reference to faith in God. [North Thames MTC]

A critical view of action or thinking in the light of religious belief” [Digby Stuart College]

This critical engagement is variously seen as focused on ‘life’⁴⁶, ‘experience’⁴⁷, ‘practice’⁴⁸, the ‘integration of theory and practice’⁴⁹, ‘situations’⁵⁰, ‘context’⁵¹, ‘contemporary issues or events’⁵², ‘the world’s life’⁵³ or ‘God’s relation to the world’⁵⁴. The College of St Mark and St John offers a definition in their course material that attempts to include several of these.

Theological reflection is the ability, with others, to assess a text, or a social, professional or ecclesial situation in such a way that it is ‘read’ theologically, i.e. it is understood in a new light as a result of theological considerations which are brought to it.

The examination of these focal points always involves in some way the Christian tradition or scriptures. A small number appear to see the dynamic as an application of Biblical or theological ideas to life situations⁵⁵, but most imply a starting point in contemporary life and a more complex critical correlation between the tradition and the focus of reflection. The words ‘dialogue’, ‘conversation’ and ‘interaction’ appear regularly⁵⁶. Some explicitly indicate the possibility of the reform of the interpretation of Christian tradition through the process.

The capacity to re-evaluate experience and the tradition (including scripture) in the light of each other, the more fully to enter into the experience and act out of it. [York Institute]⁵⁷

One definition refers to the activity as a habit⁵⁸. Others see theological reflection as either a process⁵⁹ or a developed skill, ability or capacity⁶⁰. This apparent polarised view may

⁴⁶ [North Thames MTC]

⁴⁷ College of Ripon and St John; London Bible College; Bristol Baptist College; North Thames MTC

⁴⁸ Wycliffe Hall, Oxford; Bristol Baptist College; SWMTC.

⁴⁹ Westminster College, Cambridge

⁵⁰ St Stephen’s House, Oxford; Queen’s College, Birmingham; St Mark & St John, Plymouth; Ridley Hall, Cambridge; St Michael’s, Llandaff; STETS.

⁵¹ Queen’s College, Birmingham

⁵² All Nations College; Wesley College, Bristol; Ridley Hall, Cambridge; University of Aberdeen, Theology Moorlands College

⁵⁴ Liverpool Hope University

⁵⁵ Moorlands College; University of Aberdeen, Theology; Regents Theological College.

⁵⁶ TISEC; SEITE; WEMTC; cf College of Ripon and St John; Westminster College, Cambridge; London Bible College; STETS; York Institute.

⁵⁷ cf London Bible College, Queens College, Birmingham; SWMTC;

⁵⁸ North Thames MTC

⁵⁹ Queen’s College, Birmingham; Regents Theological College; Westminster College, Cambridge; SWMTC; STETS

⁶⁰ London Bible College; Wycliffe Hall, Oxford; SEITE; St Mark & St John, Plymouth; York Institute

not, however, represent, opposing views so much as the fact that these are educational institutions concerned about how people appropriate ideas and participate in processes. It is possible to believe that theological reflection is or refers to a process and also that within individuals or groups it designates an ability to participate in or use the dynamics at the heart of the process. This may be part of the way educational establishments operationalise the concept. It alerts us to a strong twofold reference for the term in the discourse and to the need to explore this further. In terms of what happens within individuals, although no respondent spoke explicitly in terms of a disposition, which might be close to the notion of habit, some hinted that it might be an adopted way of viewing the world⁶¹.

Surprisingly the use of human sciences as part of the critical engagement is not mentioned in the definitions, though several respondents make it clear that these figure in the way theological reflection is taught within their institutions. Some explicitly cite the 'Pastoral Cycle' as central to understanding theological reflection⁶² and others included reference to this in supporting material where it is sometimes termed the 'learning cycle'⁶³. This seems to be a common tool for understanding and introducing people to the notion.

Finally, there is cautious belief that the process has something to do with the discernment of the presence or will of God in the contemporary world. Though most prefer to speak of the refining or reforming of Christian practice or the implication for action or the worship and life of the church, there is persistence, half heard whisper, that through theological reflection some insight into God's will, mind, mission or kingdom may be apprehended.⁶⁴

If it is possible to detect some attachment and commitment to theological reflection in many of the institutions that responded, we need to note that a small number have reservations about the term and courses which purport to teach theological reflection. Queen's College, Birmingham writes "we avoid the use of the phrase, generally, choosing the expression 'theological engagement for preference'. Another respondent was extremely suspicious of courses on theological reflection and 'of the shallow romanticism

⁶¹ All Nations College; Wycliffe Hall, Oxford; St Michael's, Llandaff.

⁶² SEITE; STETS.

⁶³ Westminster College, Cambridge; WEMTC; cf Chester College of HE

⁶⁴ St Stephen's House, Oxford; Sunderland University RS Dept; Queen's College, Birmingham; St Michael's, Llandaff; St John's, Nottingham.

that is often manifest'⁶⁵. Finally, there was a pointed sentence about resisting various notions of theological reflection conceived of in individualistic terms, citing Rorty (1979) and arguing for theological reflection as always being a 'social, communal enterprise'⁶⁶.

Broadly the responses are in line with the literature. In chapter 1, I identified theological reflection as referring to a process of theology that begins in the existential encounter, proceeds through enquiry and dialectical dialogue involving the person(s), aspects of the experience and its interpretation, and the Christian tradition, leading to the possible reformulation or reinterpretation of the experience or the tradition or both and which prompts appropriate actions. This seems to be the notion that most institutions are working with and want to promote. The cautiousness about the phrase and reservations about courses on theological reflection may perhaps be indicative of the issues surrounding terminology, noted in chapter 2. Similarly the combative sentence emphasising the corporate approach to theological reflection we have met before in the literature. Overall, however, there is a surprising level of consensus around the concept in these institutions, which underlies their approach to teaching and learning.

Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment

Aims and intended outcomes

When asked to identify the intended outcomes or skills of the institution's education for theological reflection, there were six different objectives discernable. First, several stressed the nurture of basic observational skills. Bristol Baptist College, for example, aims to develop 'listening and seeing skills' as the foundation for the ability to 'relate faith content, personal and corporate experience and practice of discipleship'.

'Listening', 'attention' and 'awareness' appeared in several of the submissions and are linked with the processes of 'relating' and 'making connections'⁶⁷.

A second objective is greater personal self-awareness for the learner in the process. York Institute, for example, ranks 'awareness of self' alongside 'awareness of the theological tradition' as its twin objectives. The College of Ripon and St John also sees this as central to the objectives. This is manifest also in several other institutions' intended

⁶⁵ RELIG, Cardiff

⁶⁶ St Mark and St John, Plymouth

⁶⁷ RELIG, Cardiff; TISEC

outcomes expressed in terms of ‘ability to identify underlying issues in the field of personal experience’ [St Albans and Oxford MTC] and ‘ability to identify their own experience of theological reflection’ [St John’s, Nottingham]. In answer to the question about assessment criteria one institution asks for ‘clear expression of personal position’ to be demonstrated.⁶⁸ All this points towards courses which intend to develop students’ self awareness as agents within a hermeneutical process with an enlarged capacity to identify and describe their own ‘foreknowledge’, and to be conscious of the influences and effects of their behaviour on situations. The St Albans and Oxford MTC explicitly desires those in training to become alert to the ‘issues of role and identity as a minister’.

Third, the ability to use other disciplines for interpretation of experience is identified. Chester College of HE speaks of the ability ‘to engage with theological issues in relation to other modules in a cross disciplinary way’ and the College of Ripon and St John specifically identifies the use of sociology and psychology. Likewise RELIG, Cardiff uses the following questions in its assessment criteria: ‘Does the student reveal enough grasp of the socio-psycho-community issues involved?’ suggesting that some sociological, psychological and cultural understanding is intended and required.

Fourth, institutions aim at developing skill in the use of the Bible and theology for the interpretative dialogue. This is expressed variously as:

Applying biblical skills to contemporary situations [All Nations College]

Interpreting culture in a dialogue with theology and faith [North Thames MTC]

Ability to recognise themes in scripture and theology with which they can interpret experience and which they will allow experience to interpret [St John’s, Nottingham]

Ability to use a wide range of resources from the heritage of faith [TISEC]

Ability to make explicit connections between biblical and theological ideas and their own life experience [NOC]

It is not easy to determine whether knowledge of the Bible and theology and the various interpretative approaches to each is assumed to have been developed or is developing alongside theological reflection. One suspects also that there may be different understandings of the use of Bible and theology underpinning different quotations but one of the recurring themes in this area is that of ‘integration’. Courses are intending what

⁶⁸ All Nations College

one institution calls the ability to ‘integrate theological learning with experience and practice’⁶⁹. Some are aware of the critical and creative thinking required for this integration. Indeed one intends the nurture of creative imagination as important in the education⁷⁰.

Fifth, several institutions intend familiarity with models of theological reflection and to nurture the ability to apply them. The St Albans and Oxford MTC is looking to develop students’ ability to ‘describe more than one model of theological reflection and to use models of theological reflections to explore the issues that they have identified’.

WEMTEC explicitly identified the pastoral cycle which is taught to students so they ‘use that cycle in their reflection’ whilst SWMTC wants students ‘to become familiar with an action/reflection cycle of learning that is applicable in a wide range of situations’ and ‘to become familiar with the particular reflective model for ministers’.

The connection made with the practice of ministers by SWMTC leads to the final intended outcome, which is more of an all-embracing idea. Several, spoke of the aim of producing ‘reflective practitioners’.⁷¹ Donald Schön’s term is here understood as referring to someone who becomes familiar with the process of theological reflection to the point of internalising the process and using the pattern for continually learning from and for the development of practice. For many of those who responded it is clear that the practice of ministry is an overarching framework for the learning and teaching of theological reflection. As Queens College, Birmingham indicates, the primary intended outcome is ‘the integration of theology and experience, leading to greater confidence in applying theological insight to the practice of ministry’.

Assessment criteria

Only a few contributed to this section beyond offering general criteria for HE first or higher degree courses. A few are worthy of noting, however. All Nations College cites ‘correct exegesis; critical distance; clear expression of personal position ...competence in applying Biblical teaching to contemporary situations’ as its assessment criteria for theological reflection. Here the emphasis is on the ability to achieve some degree of objectivity and an awareness of oneself in an analysis of the situation together with the

⁶⁹ SWMTC

⁷⁰ RELIG, Cardiff

⁷¹ Westminster College, Cambridge; SEITE of NEOC

criteria of competent Biblical exegesis and application. Others seek evidence of ability to use other human sciences appropriately and competently⁷². One institution goes on to ask whether the student's theological reflection shows 'Enough grasp of real theological understanding (e.g. systematics)?' and 'is there creative, imaginative cross understanding; does action seem appropriate?'. The approach here appears to look for the presence of Systematic theology, a multi-disciplinary situational analysis and some creative work in bringing the two together. It seems less concerned about the use of Biblical skills in the work though this may be subsumed under Systematic theology.

Educational design and delivery

The most commonly used method for institutions offering a course concerned with theological reflection is placement work. 31 institutions ticked this box. A further three are MA or MTh programmes⁷³ aimed at in-service training for practitioners and drawing on current or recent work practice. One other questionnaire, which did not have the placement box ticked, contained the information that 'all students undertake a placement in Catholic schools as part of the course' in the 'other teaching methods' category. Of those not using placements, three use group projects (two with mentoring arrangements). Hence 34 institutions use some form of placement or work related methodology to develop theological reflection in students. Only one institution teaches theological reflection solely through a series of lectures on the subject⁷⁴.

Placement work is always combined with other methods, usually mentoring, tutorials or seminar work and sometimes with 'Other methods' which were identified as: personal assessment, role play, study papers, application in other courses, dissertation, and a distance learning package.

The supporting material, included by several institutions, gave a richer picture of the teaching and learning strategies. From this there are a number of patterns or practices which can be discerned.

⁷² See RELIG, Cardiff cited above in the discussion of intended outcomes

⁷³ St Mark & St John, Plymouth; Westminster College, Oxford; Chester College of HE.

⁷⁴ Liverpool Hope University

Teaching in direct preparation for placement

Typically an institution will run a short lecture or seminar course to familiarise students with the idea of theological reflection and set out a scheme wherein it is related to their forthcoming placement. For example, St Stephen's House, Oxford offers a first year Pastoral Theology course of four one-hour lectures. The first three sessions are concerned with the placement process (reports, expenses etc); the placement file; and pastoral practicalities (e.g. confidentiality, relationships with supervisors). The 4th session is on 'theological reflection' and the nature of practical theology. There is no assessment of this course as such, as the intention is that 'the course feeds into pastoral placements and that consequently the assessment of placement reports assesses this course'.

Likewise WEMTC plans for its students to tackle a 'Home Church investigation' in their first year. Theological reflection is one of the primary aims and objectives. As students study with the institution through evening meetings and a series of residential weekends whilst still based in their own home church, the investigation involved a detailed description and theological reflection on some aspects of their home church. The structure is that an introduction is made to practical theology and theological reflection in weekend 3. This forms the basis for the Home Church investigation carried out by the students between weekend 3 (December) and weekend 8 (June) at which each student makes a presentation. Prior to weekend 3 the students prepares an initial description of the home church and after it they begin research and writing up of issues identified at weekend 3. A written report is required by May. Students discuss with their tutors possible ways of making the presentation. Both the written reports and oral presentations are assessed.

Finally, St Michael's, Llandaff approaches a term time placement (2 sessions per week) through an introductory session and a regular 30-minute group session each week before students go to their placements. Theological reflection is one among 7 aims for this project and a specific objective or outcome of the placement. To achieve this the college staff set a series of questions such as 'What New Testament picture of the Church is most appropriate to your placement setting?' and 'What ethical/justice/social issues are raised in the placement and what Biblical/theological resources are available to deal with them?' Students choose one question as their exercise for the term, and after discussion in the

group over a three-week period about what the question demands, they are to prepare 'answers' to present to and discuss with the group later in the term.

Teaching the concept indirectly in preparation for placement work.

St Albans and Oxford MTC introduces theological reflection through lectures, case studies and group work based around current affairs. Its initial aims are to convey two models or processes of theological reflection: 'theological reflection working from theology into experience' and 'theological reflection deriving theology from experience.' The assessment is by written essay 'identifying issues arising from a context, describing and evaluating methods of theological reflection and applying a chosen model to the context'. This course is not explicitly related to a placement but appears to be part of a section of the course which is broadly related to placement work. It may be described as providing the tools or setting a general framework for the placement work to be undertaken later.

Internship

A more extensive use of the placement setting for developing theological reflection is undertaken by Westminster College, Cambridge. Here those who are training for URC ministry, spend one year of their training based in placement rather than the college. Each week 5 days are spent in church based ministry with one morning in the college. Theological reflection is undertaken as a systematic exercise throughout this period with a supervising minister. Students are expected to write up 9 theological reflections, approximately one per month. For each of these there is a prescribed process based on the pastoral cycle.

Each reflection will be spread over a month. It will involve:

- An initial meeting of the student and the supervisor of perhaps 1-2 hours, in which the issues will be identified and initial feelings and experiences explored.
- For the next couple of weeks or so student and supervisor will engage in the exploration phase. This may involve the student in doing some research, and both student and supervisor following some suggested Biblical, theological and other reading (yes, the supervisor will need to do some studying, but there will not be that much!)

- They will then meet two or three weeks later to reflect together on the issue in the light of their exploration, and discuss any possible responses that could be initiated. This might require a session of 1-2 hours.

The reflection is then written up as a 1500-2000 word assignment by the students and submitted to the college. This is the most structured and extensive exercise encountered in the supporting literature.

In-service training models

The in-service models are Master degree programmes which are aimed at either already ordained clergy or other church related practitioners and work in some way with the current practice or experience of the participants. The course at Chester College of HE is for (church related) adult educators. Here the explicit aim is to ‘clarify the nature of theological reflection in the context of the broader framework of a theology of adult education’⁷⁵.

St Stephen’s House, Oxford runs an MTh course, which uses a placement style encounter called here an ‘experiential project with theological reflection’. In this structure the candidate is expected to ‘offer a considered evaluation of a project’ undertaken in either a church or secular setting in which the candidate shares the concerns and experiences of those involved. Written work is based on at least 21 days contact time and should contain ‘theological reflection upon the situation using doctrinal, sociological and psychological skills acquired by the candidate’. The objectives correspond to the pastoral cycle model. The first is a critique of the experience ‘rather than an uncritical description’; the second, an analysis using sociological, psychological and doctrinal awareness; the third a theological reflection on the experience which is defined through the questions ‘What does this mean for the nature and activity of God?’ and ‘what did I learn about myself and my relation to God?’. The teaching involves four teaching sessions before the experiential project and three tutorials following the involvement.

Westminster College, Oxford’s MTh programme outline does not give sufficient detail to compare its way of working with those above. It does, however, list in its assessment criteria a criterion connected with theological reflection. ‘Does the student make use of theological literature relevant to the subject in order to engage in theological reflection?’

⁷⁵ Little is said in the questionnaire response about methodology or course structure (but see Deane-Drummond 1999).

This suggests that theological reflection is not judged directly but through the quantity and quality of the theological resources brought to bear on the problems. Most of the other assessment criteria relate to general higher degree qualities. The exception is the two criteria related to ministry. The theological reflection needs to relate to a 'specific area of ministry relevant to the student's context', and should demonstrate the ability to 'evaluate the significance of the research with regard to strategies for improvement of ministry'.

It will be clear by this stage that for a large number of the institutions responding the focus for their education for theological reflection is ecclesial and ministerial. There is another approach.

Looking at non-ecclesial life for developing theological reflection.

Ironically one of the institutions stating that it does not have a course concerned with theological reflection⁷⁶ offers some indication in the supporting material that it does. The institution teaches a theology degree to undergraduates studying for their own interest, which includes a module on Theology and Work in its first year. This is followed, in the 2nd year, by a Work Attachment for 6 weeks, which involves, according to the head of department, 'some element of theological reflection'.

SEITE asks all its students, whether training for ordination or recognised ministry and those lay people studying for their own interest, to undertake a 'Theological audit of students' secular work'. It assumes that all on their course will be in secular employment or activity and asks students to make some aspect of this life experience the focus of theological reflection.

Similarly, the St Albans and Oxford MTC includes a 'Life and Work' project in the Foundation year. In this 'students isolate an incident in their (non-ecclesiological) lives and treat it as a case study'. They are asked to provide description then analysis. This is followed by theological reflection and the reflection is presented to a small group and written up for the end of the term. In the second year this exercise is done in relation to students' parish attachments and the staff review with students how their facility for

⁷⁶ Trinity & All Saints, Leeds

reflection has developed in that time in terms of 'ability to make connections' and the 'range of resources used from the heritage of faith'.

Conclusion

This exploratory survey was not designed to elicit a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning of theological reflection, even within the UK. Its purpose was more modest, seeking to establish whether and in what ways this notion was a part of the Christian education scene, and to identify and mark some of the major contours of the curriculum. The questionnaire has allowed us to do this. From the responses we know that at least 40 institutions in the UK were offering programmes for the learning of theological reflection in 1999. With a few interesting exceptions, those involved in providing programmes appear to be those institutions preparing people for church related ministry, in that the intended students are almost all training for or already involved in ordained or recognised ministry. The learning of theological reflection seems to be related to formation for professional church work or the professional development of those working in or for the Churches.

The concept of theological reflection informing these programmes is broadly that found within the literature on theological reflection and practical theology. That is, it is concerned with the interaction of experience, practice, social and cultural issues and the Christian theological tradition, and normally assumes that the starting point for the process is the first of these. Secondly, it is concerned with a critical, hermeneutical or dialectical process often involving the use of human sciences and a dialogue with the Christian tradition. Finally it is oriented towards reformulation and reinterpretation and action to modify or change practice. In the previous chapter we identified some possible areas of confusion and disagreement deriving from the issues emerging in the discourse, not least of which was connected to the nomenclature and the struggles for status associated with language. We saw some brief signs of this in the reluctance of one institution to use the term and in the suspicions of another about the possibility of teaching theological reflection at all. This was a minor stream, however, and there was a surprising consensus about the concept across the institutions examined.

The concept is operationalised in terms of the six outcomes. Institutions aim to develop in students:

- basic observational skills;
- greater self awareness of personal agency;
- ability to use other disciplines for the interpretation of experience;
- skills for using the Bible and theology in the interpretative dialogue;
- familiarity with models of theological reflection and the ability to apply them;
- skills of action and reflection which are internalised within the student and provide a permanent way of working, expressed in Donald Schön's phrase 'the reflective practitioner'.

The design and delivery of education for these outcomes is through various structures with an experiential component. Most institutions seeking to develop theological reflection use or create a practical focus or experience for the process. This may be current or recent life experience, situations or issues encountered on placement, or events in the person's ongoing professional life whether church related or in a secular setting. The almost universally adopted custom of using a practical focus is the locus of theological reflection in these institutions. Around it are built lectures, seminars and group work. It is often facilitated by the use of the pastoral cycle or similar models, accompanied by a form of mentoring, whilst assessment is usually in the form of a written or oral presentation of theological reflection on a practical focus.

This picture of the teaching and learning of theological reflection, however, lacks the detail that is necessary to engage critically with curriculum development. We have not in this survey been able to make judgements about the influence of denomination, theological position or churchmanship on the programmes. Neither has it been possible to examine the detailed approaches and use of the theological disciplines, e.g. biblical studies, church history and systematic theology, in theological reflection nor discuss how the clashes between this approach to theology and other approaches impinge upon the curriculum. We are not in a position to comment on the appropriation and use of the human sciences nor to analyse the particular contribution of mentoring and groups. Finally, we note that the role and place of the affective dimension, which was highlighted in the literature, has not been explored in this survey.

For these reasons it was necessary for me to examine some programmes in more detail. In order to do this I carried out a case study based investigation. This multi-site case study formed the next stage and most substantial part of my research and the next chapter presents the case studies and my findings.

Chapter 4: The Case Studies:

Introduction and methodology

The exploratory survey of institutions allowed us to outline some elements of a curriculum in the UK. These findings are themselves important but they remain of the broad-brush type. Neither the literature nor the survey permits us to explore in any depth the design and structure of teaching within institutions, why and when courses were introduced, teachers' perspectives and aims alongside stated learning outcomes and, perhaps most important, learners' experience and engagement with theological reflection.

To discover more about these areas a case study approach was chosen. The case study as a means of educational research is well established. The advantages of case study as a form of research were set out by Adelman et al (1980)⁷⁷. In addition to their ability to map and reflect complex reality, case studies can be peculiarly sensitive to contextual subtlety and are capable of representing something of the discrepancies and conflict between viewpoints. As written reports they are often more publicly accessible than other forms of research which allows readers to judge the implications for themselves. Finally their descriptive nature often suggests appropriate steps for action. For our purposes the case study approach gives us a means of deepening the study of the teaching and learning of theological reflection by looking in detail at the teaching and learning in particular institutions over time⁷⁸. Three institutions were chosen and within each it was possible to give attention to the different perspectives of institutions and learners, as well as a detailed consideration of the design and practice of education in particular settings.

The three case studies chosen were Cranmer Hall, an Anglican residential Theological College in Durham; Ushaw College, a Roman Catholic Seminary 4 miles outside Durham; and the North East Oecumenical Course, a dispersed learning institution whose administrative base was at Carter House in Durham but in 2000 moved to be housed within Ushaw College. Observations and interviews began in April 1999 though the majority of the research took place between September 1999 and June 2001.

⁷⁷ Adelman's six advantages of case study research are cited in an adapted form in Cohen & Manion 1994 p123 c.f. Stake (1981) who argues that case studies are different from other (abstract) research knowledge in 4 ways: They are more concrete, more contextual, more developed by reader interpretation and based more on reference population.

⁷⁸ McMillan and Schumann 1997

Multi-site case studies are often advocated as a way of strengthening the external validity or generalisation of the findings. Evidence from several sites is often considered more compelling and more robust and therefore more capable of generalisation and, when combined with other methods, even of prediction. (Merriam 1988 p174; Yin 1984 p48). Our interest, however, lies primarily in the possibilities offered by multi-site case studies of identifying both difference and similarity between institutions and of isolating variables by comparison and contrast of approaches and contexts. As Merriam suggests:

Groups or cases should be selected for their power both to maximize and minimize differences in the phenomenon of interest (Merriam 1988 p154 c.f. Glaser and Straus 1967 p55)

The literature review indicated different roots and practices to the notion of theological reflection within the Roman Catholic Church from those in the Protestant Churches. It is possible that the nature and structure of the Roman Church may mean that the dissemination of the thinking may be more channelled and that, for example, the early North American Catholic and Jesuit writers may have more strongly influenced the teaching in Roman Catholic seminaries than in their Protestant equivalents. Different lengths and patterns of training, different traditions of spirituality and different views of ordained ministry may also influence the conceptualisation of and the nature of engagement with theological reflection. Hence a study of the two college sites, one Catholic and one Anglican, enables us to consider some variables as well as common phenomena.

Likewise NEOC offers some particular features for consideration, which may or may not impact on the teaching and learning of theological reflection. NEOC is one of the 'Courses' developed largely by the Church of England to train people for ordained ministry without the necessity of students being residential at a training institution site. The majority of NEOC students are in full time, secular, employment whilst they are in training and so have a different life experience from those in residential settings. The teaching takes place in small groups on one or more evenings per week in different locations across a region, at a series of 6 residential weekends spread throughout the year and at a two-week summer school. Whilst the denominational-mix on the course is similar to that of Cranmer Hall, being mainly Anglicans with a smaller number of Methodist trainees, there is also a presence of United Reformed Church members. The case study of NEOC as one of three institutions again allows for the consideration of additional factors that might impact on the teaching and learning of theological reflection.

In particular, we can consider the interaction of theological learning with life experiences related to ongoing secular employment, theological reflection in relation to placement experience, which tends to be different in time and structure from placements planned for students in residential training, and the place and role of theological reflection within a dispersed teaching and learning experience.

The reasons for choosing the three institutions were fourfold. The first was to do with access. From the point of view of regular and repeated visits all three were geographically close to me as a researcher based latterly in Durham. Furthermore, as a member of staff at a partner institution⁷⁹, I had easy access to all staff and students. Second, the three institutions were judged to have sufficient commonality to make comparison useful. The majority of students at all three institutions are exploring a call to or training for ordained ministry, though all institutions have a small number of students who are studying for their own interest or for some lay vocation. All have 'theological reflection' as an explicit part of the curriculum in some form and therefore offer the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of such programmes. At the same time the variations identified above make the detection of variables in the educational process achievable and allows one to explore whether and to what extent differences alter the teaching and learning dynamic and effectiveness. Finally, the three institutions together are reasonably representative of the range of theological training institutions currently within England. By including all three in the cases studies it will be possible to relate, if not transfer, findings to a range of the institutions in the survey.

The case studies sought to address the following:

- The design and practice of education for theological reflection in the institution, including delivery and assessment.
- The place and status of theological reflection within the overall curriculum and its relations to other courses, teaching or modules within the programme.
- The views and experience of teaching staff about the aims and pattern of teaching/learning for theological reflection.
- The experience of students: what concepts of theological reflection did they bring to the training institutions? In what ways did these ideas change during their time within the institution? What is the place and purpose of theological reflection as

⁷⁹ I was appointed to the post of Director of the Wesley Study Centre in April 1999 and took up the post in September 1999. The Wesley Study Centre is a partner with Cranmer Hall in its training programme. I had at this point completed the survey of institutions and was planning the case study research.

they see it? To what extent did the course(s) develop their understanding and practice of theological reflection?

Yin (1984) identified six sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. In the case studies all these sources were used. Documents are here taken to include printed information about courses, lecture handouts, study packs related to theological reflection and student course evaluation sheets. Archival records are principally the records of Management Committees, Boards of Examiners, the files of Directors of Studies and previous course outlines. The interviews were semi-structured interviews of students and teachers at various points over a three-year period. In one institution I was able to interview the same group of students four times over the two years of their training. In others I interviewed students at various stages in relation to their training and courses which relate to theological reflection. In all, I conducted 59 interviews with staff and students.

Institution	Interviews		
	Students	Staff	Total
Cranmer Hall	6 interviewed 4 times = 24	5	29
Ushaw College	9	5	14
NEOC	12	4	16
TOTAL			59

Figure 8: Number of Case Study Interviews

For direct observation I was able to observe a number of teaching sessions and seminars. I was also able to read placement reports and assessed essays related to theological reflection and in some cases discuss these with students and staff. I was also a participant observer though not in the usual sense of the term. As a new member of staff with a professional interest, as well as a research interest in theological reflection, in all three institutions, I found myself drawn into both teaching and assessing subjects connected to theological reflection. This was more in the third year of my research than the previous two and I accepted the invitations to participate self consciously seeing involvement in teaching as potentially contributing to the research. It gave opportunities for a particular perspective on the teaching and learning of theological reflection but at the same time

changed both the observer status and the nature of what I was endeavouring to observe. Though not evident to me, it is possible that this also may have influenced subsequent student interviews.⁸⁰ The balance between knowledge gained by objective distance and by intimate observation was involved here. Finally, a few artefacts connected with the courses were collected or noted. These included newspaper cuttings, photographs, pictures and Christian religious objects used in teaching sessions.

All data were recorded in some form. Observations were carefully noted in a log and/or recorded on audiotape, all interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed on word processor files, with an interview log and summary made and recorded on file. Documents, archival records and artefacts were collected and stored. Analysis employed various techniques set out by Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (1988) and Yin (1984, 1993), together with the use of search and matching features of word processors and database software. Principally, however, analysis was a considerable time spent reading, re-reading and listening to data sources until patterns, themes and insights emerged.

Before relating the details of the case studies it is wise to note the general problems and limitations of case study research noted in the literature. All research methods have strengths and weaknesses. We have noted the strengths of the case study method and why it was thought best to serve our research needs. The limitations of the methods are broadly of two types. The first is to do with the researcher and the data collection, analysis and presentation. The concern is with the credibility of the research (Sturman 1997), often referred to as 'internal validity'. Clearly researcher bias, a factor in all research, can be acute in case study research, as case studies, especially multi-site case studies, generate vast amounts of data which must be filtered and interpreted by the researcher. In this research I have attempted to set out at various places my own interest and assumptions, as well as detailing my research methods in an attempt to be as transparent as possible, so that my interpretations and findings can be discussed with these factors in mind. Even where these factors are open to scrutiny, however, the sheer size of the research data may either overwhelm the researcher or the reader, if the researcher attempts to set out too much detail in the presentation. Conversely, the presentation can be oversimplified and lead to erroneous conclusions (Merriam 1988). In

⁸⁰ My role in the institutions has been discussed earlier. See section on 'The role of the researcher' in the Introduction

order to present a concise but accurate and transparent picture I have tried to identify evidence clearly, argue for its representativeness and use multiple sources to support the interpretations and findings (triangulation). I have used strategies commonly employed for enhancing the internal validity such as member checks, peer examination and repeating observation and interviews where possible.⁸¹

The second issue is concerned with external validity and reliability. External validity or generalizability of the findings is inevitably problematic in that one selects the case study approach to study the particular in depth, not to find general truths. Nevertheless, externality validity has some meaning. Multi-case studies in particular can provide a stronger basis for generalization and case survey can yield generalizable findings. Most researchers using such qualitative methods have accepted generalization and prediction are not simply extracted from case study research. The approach taken here is that of 'naturalistic generalization' (Stake 1978), where full and thorough knowledge of one particular situation allows readers and researchers to recognize similarities of issues and objects in other contexts and vice versa. This, in many ways, leaves the generalizability to the reader or user of the research provided that a rich, 'thick' description of the case is given and efforts are made to establish the typicality of the modal category of the case.

Reliability is also problematic in qualitative research, as the fundamental concern of the search for reliability is the replication of research and results. Case studies are specific, if not unique, studies, which map the complexities of a single unit at a particular time. Exact replication is by definition not possible. Reliability can however be applied to the testing of theory (Hammersley 1985) and to instrumentation in qualitative research and here qualitative research reliability and internal validity are closely intertwined (Merriam 1988). Indeed, Guba & Lincoln (1981) contend that it is impossible to have internal validity without also producing reliability (p120). In addition to the checks on internal validity one can make use of the notion of an audit trail to show how other researchers

⁸¹ Sturman (1997) identifies a series of strategies for ensuring credibility of the highest order.

- Procedures for data collection should be explained.
- Data collection should be displayed and ready for reanalysis.
- Negative instances should be reported.
- Biases should be acknowledged.
- Fieldwork analysis needs to be documented.
- Relation between evidence and assertion clear.
- Primary and secondary evidence distinguished.
- Diaries or logs should track what was actually done.
- Methods should be devised to check quality of data.

These methods have been deployed in this research.

could use the original approach to replicate the study. In this research I have attempted to offer careful reporting of procedures and methods for this purpose.

4.1 Case Study: Cranmer Hall

Cranmer Hall is an Anglican Theological College, located within St John's College, an independent college of the University of Durham with an Anglican Evangelical foundation. It is situated in the heart of the City of Durham, close to the Cathedral. As well as training ordinands, St John's College is also a constituent college of the University of Durham with approximately 350 undergraduate and postgraduate students. Within Cranmer Hall there are approximately 65 Anglican ordinands in training each year, about 6 independent students and 30 Methodist ordinands who belong to the Wesley Study Centre, a Methodist training institution, with some accommodation provided by St John's College. St John's undergraduates read for a variety of degrees within the University and their teaching takes place with the relevant university department. Ordinands follow a number of programmes, some within the University's Department of Theology, most within Cranmer Hall itself. Cranmer Hall together with its partners, Ushaw College and the Wesley Study Centre teach various programmes in Theology and Ministry, validated by the University of Durham and leading to HE Certificate, Diploma and BA Degree awards. In addition Cranmer Hall offers a number of other non-validated courses including postgraduate study.⁸²

Course teaching takes place within a framework of worship and intentional community life involving daily worship, regular shared meals, and social as well as educational events. The College's teaching staff is a mix of ordained and lay people from variety of denominational backgrounds and commitments, but the broad orientation of its life is Anglican with an 'open evangelical' ethos.

Theological reflection at Cranmer Hall

Theological reflection has a high profile in the Cranmer Hall programme. This is obvious in four ways:

⁸² At the time of writing Cranmer Hall and its partners have launched a validated MA programme in Theology and Ministry (October 2001).

1. Within the Pastoral Studies programme

Theological reflection is cited as a key element in pastoral practice⁸³. Students are expected to engage in theological reflection as an integral part of their pastoral studies and in particular as part of their pastoral placements and pastoral studies units (PSUs). 'Placement' normally means a month spent in a parish, circuit or other ministry setting in which a student works alongside an ordained minister in a variety of tasks. There may be more than one such placement during a person's training period, but at least one of these placements must be reported on by the student in the form of a 3000-word assignment. Pastoral Studies Units (PSUs) are short courses – usually two weeks in length - of a more specialised nature e.g. Hospital Chaplaincy and Hospice work. The structure usually involves some teaching sessions combined with practical involvement in ministry. For most students at least one PSU must be written up in the form of an assignment. Both Placements and PSUs assignments are marked against a set of criteria which include the student's ability to reflect theologically. The guidelines for students indicate that the major weighting is in fact towards this factor (40% for one of four components). This element has been strengthened in recent years and according to the Director of Mission and Pastoral Studies has led to a higher standard of theological reflection, something commented on by the External Examiners in 2000⁸⁴.

The normal pattern of introducing both the notion of theological reflection and preparing people for placement work is a half or whole day session for the first year group regardless of individual course. In the sessions I observed, this involved two staff members giving a basic introduction to the concepts of theological reflection and practical theology, the pastoral cycle, and critical incident analysis. Staff modelled some patterns of theological reflection and students were asked to engage in some theological reflection on a particular personal or pastoral experience. A Placement Pack is also introduced at this point. This loose-leaf pack of about 12 pages contains a brief summary of the Pastoral Cycle, guidance on using journals, community and church profiles, and a pastoral focus sheet, as well as practical details on travel expenses and accommodation and the role and reporting of the on-site supervisor.

Following the placement, written reports are seen by staff of the college and an 'external pastoral assessor' who also meets the student to discuss the placement and gives written

⁸³ Pastoral Studies Handbook and Vacation Long Placement Pack 2000

⁸⁴ Interview with Director of Mission and Pastoral Studies, July 2001

feedback on the assignment and conversation. Pastoral Assessors are asked to look for several things: the student's ability to observe, ability to reflect theologically and the effect the placement has had on the individual and the developmental implications.

2. Within Other Taught Courses

Theological reflection also features in other taught courses, most notably the 'Church and Society' and 'Mission' courses. This is largely through incidental reference to 'the pastoral cycle' as a way of engaging in some of the issues of Church, society and mission. There are some sessions on methods and models, and using sociology but in the main the course concentrates on worked examples from history and contemporary life (e.g. William Temple and the Creation of the Welfare State, the Faith in the City report) with a number of visiting speakers, e.g. an ordained minister working on Church and Communities issues in the NE connected with the Single Regeneration Fund. The Director of Mission and Pastoral Studies describes the basic outcomes of these courses as 'having a better grasp of how to interpret events and situations', an appreciation of 'specific insights that others have found as ministers' and 'a grasp of wider events in society, recognising that they can be interpreted in a theological way'.

Assessed work for Church and Society, is in the form of two written essays. In these the course leader is looking for 'people to have a sense that big theological themes would engage with issues that they were interested in.' One way this is encouraged is to suggest that students write at least one of the essays related to their previous work experience. This is suggested because students often have 'plenty of background in relevant disciplines to the issues' and to help with the student's transition process on entering theological college. A good essay is viewed as one which contains a detailed description and analysis of issues perhaps using the pastoral cycle and then the relating to theological themes e.g. creation, incarnation, redemption⁸⁵.

3. Within the postgraduate programme

For about 10 years the programme for those who come to training already possessing a degree in theology has been the Diploma in Ministerial Studies (DMS), a non-validated course with a number of routes and constituent elements. At the heart of the DMS

⁸⁵ Interview with Director of Mission and Pastoral Studies, July 2001

programme is the Theological and Practical Reflection (TPR) seminar. This is a weekly 2-hour session led by a student on a topic of his or her choosing agreed with the course director. Regardless of the particular track and set of courses being taken by individual students, all students meet for the TPR seminars. Their stated purpose is:

To enable and assess a student's ability to introduce a topic and facilitate a group discussion demonstrating both a command of the human realities of the situation via suitable use of human sciences and expertise and also appropriate and creative theological reflection, using the full range of theological resources, and leading to informed, relevant, realistic and wise practical ministerial outcomes.⁸⁶

The Director of the DMS programme describes the TPR seminars as 'both the core activity of the DMS and the core philosophy of it' and sees its primary purpose as 'to encourage students to integrate their academic theology with serious human and social sciences and realistic ministerial outcomes.'⁸⁷

Following two or three sessions on methodology, students lead sessions and are able to tackle any subject provided that it is undertaken as indicated within the above guidelines. Topics have included 'Debt', 'Mental Health', 'Pet Funerals', 'Children and Spirituality' and 'Homosexuality'. The seminar is assessed by a member of staff according to carefully set out criteria which include: 'quality and depth of creative theological reflection'.⁸⁸

4. Within the staff and student conversations

It was clear from initial interviews and observation that the term is used and the notion is talked about. One student interviewed within the first two weeks of term, when asked whether she had heard the term theological reflection previously, said she had just come from a conversation with another student who was about to write up a pastoral assignment and who had used the term.⁸⁹ Another had heard the term in an introductory talk on the Urban Mission work connected with the college.⁹⁰ Tutorial conversations'

⁸⁶ DMS Handbook 1999/2000 p 8

⁸⁷ Interview with DMS Course Leader, August 2001

⁸⁸ There are four basic areas that are examined. Three are concerned with the presentation of the chosen issue: (a) the depiction and analysis of the human or natural condition making use of a variety of disciplines (b) quality and depth of creative theological reflection and (c) appropriate, wise and imaginative suggestions for practical action. These carry 30/150 each. The fourth area is educational method and management of the seminar (40/150) and 20 marks are discretionary. Source: DMS Handbook 1999-2000

⁸⁹ Barbara Interview 1, see Figure 9 for interviewee profiles

⁹⁰ Steve Interview 1, see Figure 9 for interviewee profiles

regularly turn to theological reflection on issues that have or are arising in the individual and/or community or in church attachments.

Staff interest and scholarship in practical theology is evident with three recently submitted doctoral theses broadly within the field of practical theology and several members of the BIAPT⁹¹. Interestingly the staff study project for one term in the academic year 1998-9 was a series of papers concerned with theological reflection and practical theology, particularly methodology. The high regard accorded to practical theology and theological reflection creates an atmosphere in which the implicit as well as the explicit curriculum is concerned with theological reflection and the notion may be the more influential for that. In the last two years Cranmer Hall has been in the process of revising its undergraduate programme and moving to a modular form in which theological reflection is given an even higher status. Its BA programme is to have a compulsory level 2 module, entitled 'Theological and Practical Reflection'⁹² which in fact is to be taught over the first two years of the programme and seen as a key point in integrating the theological and ministerial studies.⁹³ In its newly launched MA programme⁹⁴ 'Theological and Practical Reflection' is the core compulsory module of the programme.

Student experience

In Cranmer Hall I was able to complete a longitudinal study of six students who began their training in September 1999. The study period was two years over which I conducted 4 interviews with each student: one within the first few weeks of their training, a second at the end of the first year, a third in the autumn of 2000 when each had completed one or more summer placements and written at least one placement report, and the final interview at the end of two years. For three students the two years was in fact the end of their initial ministerial training. The remaining three had one further year to complete. In addition to conducting the interviews, I was given permission by the students to read their written placement reports and comments made by those marking these reports.

⁹¹ The British and Irish Association of Practical Theology

⁹² The title is a revised and compromised title attempting in part to bridge the divide between theological reflection and practical theology and reflects in itself the problems of terminology evident in the literature (See Chapter 2)

⁹³ Cranmer Hall Revalidation Document 1999

⁹⁴ The MA took its first cohort in October 2001

The longitudinal form of study with these students allowed me to explore changes in perception and practice of the students over a period of time, and how students related these perceptions and practices to the training programme.

The interviews were taped and transcribed into a written text and/or interview log and stored in a text retrieval system. The interviews were semi-structured and the key questions for each appear in Appendix 3.

Interviewees Profiles

All the interviewees have been given pseudonyms to preserve anonymity but to allow the reader to have a sense of a person and of continuity in the unfolding stories and contributions.

Pseudonym	Gender	Dob	Denomination	Training for	Course
Barbara	Female	19/07/67	Methodist	Ordination	2 year Diploma
Adrian	Male	20/1/76	Church of England	Ordination	3 year Degree
Steve	Male	31/07/67	Church of England (Diocese of Europe)	Ordination	3 year Degree & postgraduate work
Paul	Male	8/11/56	Church of England	Ordination	2 year Diploma
Vanessa	Female	30/03/74	Church in Wales	Ordination	DMS/Postgraduate
Colin	Male	12/12/69	Church of England	Ordination	3 year Degree
Average age at end of interviews = 35 (Range 25-45)					

Figure 9: Students interviewed at Cranmer Hall

Findings

Interview 1: At the beginning of training

Of the six students only one claimed to have heard the term theological reflection before coming to Cranmer Hall. Vanessa, a theology graduate, was familiar with the term and

could give an outline of its meaning including mention of the 'hermeneutical circle'. She described theological reflection as 'reflecting on how God impacts on your life and how this is used to form your life, which is in turn impacted by God again.' She had heard the term used extensively in college in the short time since her arrival both in connection with her course and her planned placement but thought that any explanation of the term in the College had not added to her understanding. Indeed if anything this had only served to confuse her. Vanessa gave three examples of theological reflection. The first was of the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel third world debt. This was theological reflection because it was informed by the notion of Jubilee in the Bible and involved taking action. Her own participation in Jubilee 2000 had been developed by writing poetry, which was for her a form of theological reflection. The second example was to do with labels attached to people in a Theological College - evangelical, liberal, charismatic etc - which had caused her some concern. Again she had made sense of it by writing. Her third example was to do with a clash of understandings she had had with her fiancé over the nature of worship. This had caused the two of them to look at the Bible and talk together about the subject, gradually developing new understanding informed by the Bible and experience. In all these examples, a 'problem' had caused a re-assessment using the resources of the Bible, conversation and, in two out of three cases, the writing of poetry.

Of the five others one had encountered the term for the first time in the College prospectus or accompanying literature, and three had heard the term used in the College within the first few days of their arrival. One claimed not to have heard the term theological reflection used before the interview⁹⁵.

All made attempts to describe what they thought it might mean in terms of previous experience, study or understanding. For example, Steve, who had studied political science at postgraduate level, had picked up a reference to theological reflection in the first week of the term in connection with work at the Urban Mission Centre in Gateshead and made connections with Marxist ideas of praxis and relating the practice of ministry to the academic study of theology. Colin associated theological reflection with the idea of spiritual retreats to which he had been introduced at the university where he had been an undergraduate. Hence he saw silence and prayer as key elements in theological reflection and mentioned Quaker meetings by way of illustration. His own example was of a personal experience of retreat which had helped him come to terms with an issue.

⁹⁵ Colin

Paul saw the word reflection as a form of standing back and considering a familiar idea or view critically in order to discern the way God actually works in the world.

Adrian had heard of what he called a 'Christian Reflection' group in his recent university days. Though he had not attended this group he did not think that the reflection involved was theological reflection because he believed that theological reflection would involve 'taking a key issue and looking at it from the point of view of the Bible, Christian writing and forming an opinion'. When asked for examples he offered two ethical issues, Abortion and Euthanasia.

Barbara, an established Methodist local preacher, saw theological reflection as 'taking an ordinary situation in life and being able to see how that reflects on God's part and God's working in the world in situations' and 'a normal situation with a God attachment'. Her examples by contrast to Adrian's concrete ethical issues were largely metaphors, seeing the garden she had left in the care of her daughter whilst she and her husband worked away from home as a parable of God trusting people with creation. A second example was the safety glass used in the Cathedral that acts as an early warning system for structural problems as a metaphor for the signs of underlying problems in human lives.

This attempt, like the other four here, can be understood in terms of Piaget's notion of assimilation or to use another terminology the extension of mental maps where a new idea or experience will be linked to previous experience, understanding and patterns of thinking and working. This is not in itself surprising but we will later note the continuing influence of first associations after the teaching programme has had opportunity to affect thinking.

Interview 2: At the end of first year of training

The second interview concentrated on 3 areas:

- Their understanding of the term theological reflection at this stage;
- What they had learned about theological reflection from the college curriculum;
- What role, if any, had been played by the attachment/placement programme in relation to theological reflection.

There were three striking features of these conversations. The first was the perceived lack of direct impact of the teaching programme on the development of understanding of theological reflection. All interviewees could recall some reference to theological reflection in lectures and seminars but none with any detail. Paul, for example, thought that theological reflection had been referred to in two courses, 'Church and Society' and 'Mission and Evangelism' but without any explanation that helped illuminate the concept. He had also heard the term in relation to attachments and placement work, in particular in relation to work at the Urban Mission Centre in Gateshead. None of these had, however, provided an understanding for him. Likewise, Barbara recalled the half-day seminar in December but with mixed feelings.

I don't think it has been particularly explored and taught. I do remember one of the last sessions that we had in December ... that was about theological reflection. I didn't find it awfully helpful. I didn't find it helped me tremendously to get my head around it. I sort of understood when we were doing it on the day but it wasn't enough to set in my mind, I do remember that.
[Barbara Interview 2]

This feeling of not having been taught or grasping the notion of theological reflection was in sharp contrast to the confident way that all students were able to cite examples of theological reflection and offer their own definitions. Paul, for example, said that theological reflection was 'analyzing some of my experiences, in term of placements and in terms of thinking – things I have heard – trying to process that and see where God fits in', and went on to give three examples with full description of the situation and the processes. Paul had no knowledge of theological reflection before the beginning of the college year but was now handling the notion in practice but at the same time feeling unsure what it was he was doing. This was typical, in that no students had hesitation or difficulty in offering examples of theological reflection or a working definition.

A clue to this paradox lies in what Barbara said about tutorials. She spoke slightly resentfully of being expected to reflect theologically in tutorial conversations without clear teaching or understanding about what theological reflection means. She was asked regularly to reflect theologically on issues and church situations by her tutor and had had several conversations in which she had spoken in theological terms of some experience or event. This appears to be the case for others students. Tutors customarily asked students about events and activities in their church attachments and actively encouraged them to discuss these in theological terms. One person had been encouraged by her tutor to keep a journal and to use this as a starting point for theological reflection. Hence tutorials

appeared to have been the place where students were inducted into a process of theological reflection. Vanessa, the postgraduate student, had led a seminar connected with the notion of theological reflection in as much as she had organised a TPR seminar on 'inter-faith dialogue' modelling a pattern of theological reflection. For the other five the main opportunity to actively explore theological reflection was in tutorial conversation and it was here that the notion took shape.

Barbara's comments on the formal teaching at this point are perceptive

Maybe it is something that cannot be explained easily, like trying to ride a bike. They say what you do, you sit on the bike and turn the pedals and point the handlebars and you will cycle. It is not true. You fall off. And then there comes that magic moment when you suddenly cycle down that road and your Dad's left behind not holding on to the seat any more. Perhaps theological reflection is a bit like that. You go through all the right motions of achieving this and then one day it clicks. It could be that.⁹⁶

A second feature of the interviews was a noticeable shift in the types of examples cited. In the first interview students offered many different types of examples of theological reflection ranging from metaphors, to personal experiences, to ethical issues, to approaches to prayer. By the time of the second interview most examples were drawn from the field of ministerial practice, e.g. a church's baptismal policy, visiting parishioners, ministers working in communities with members of other faiths. Other types of example were not wholly absent. Barbara, who had offered a range of metaphors in the first interviews, did offer a metaphor based on an experience of the countryside in which a flower and a tree reminded her of the vulnerability and strength of God respectively but her main example was taken from a Chaplaincy context where she had worked alongside a hospital chaplain. Two people spoke about the importance of poetry in their theological reflection and this was repeated in later interviews. There was nevertheless a much stronger emphasis on ministerial practice as the source of experience for theological reflection and thus some evidence of theological reflection connected with the gradual socialisation or professionalisation of those training for ordained ministry.

Finally, the question in the interview asking about how they might set about helping others learn theological reflection was answered by all in terms of developing conversations, interviews and listening to others. This may in part be a consequence of the first point that the main way of coming to an understanding of theological reflection

⁹⁶ This may be what Polanyi 1967 understands by tacit knowledge.

for all had been through tutorial conversation and discussion and for one through involvement in a seminar where she and others had modelled a pattern of theological reflection. It may also indicate the conviction held by them that teaching about theological reflection is insufficient and that it ultimately can only be learned through practice.

Interview 3: After long placement

The third set of interviews were characterised by a sense of excitement on the part of students. For all six students interviews followed and were focused on their placement experience and it was clear that the excitement was generated by these experiences. These placements take place for Cranmer Hall students during the summer after the third academic term in July and/or September before the beginning of the next academic year. They are one of two types: a Pastoral Studies Unit (PSU) or a 'long placement' for a month in a church setting⁹⁷. All the students interviewed had in fact taken both a PSU and a 'long placement'. As indicated earlier these placements are written up in the form of reports, which are assessed. Each student is asked to choose a focus from within the placement for deeper examination in the report and a key criteria in the assessment of the written work is the ability of the student to reflect theologically.

We have seen from the survey in chapter 3 the importance placed by institutions on these work experiences for theological reflection. The purpose of this interview therefore was to explore in detail how the placement related to the development of theological reflection. The key questions asked students to:

- Describe their placement(s)
- Outline the chosen focus for their written report and why it was chosen
- Indicate what reflection had taken place and the process(es) involved
- Evaluate the designed process, outline any other elements (not designed by the college) that featured in the process and identify elements that might have enhanced or further developed their learning and reflection.

Because I think that these interviews were perhaps the most significant of the four, I attempt to outline the conversations with each student before drawing conclusions.

⁹⁷ For more detail see introduction to this case study.

Barbara had chosen the 'Care of bereaved parents of children who had died or had experienced miscarriage'. This has arisen in a PSU on Health & Healing and it had 'touched on personal experience of miscarriage'⁹⁸ earlier in life. This affective starting point had led to a number of conversations with bereaved parents, the hospital chaplain and staff and a number of funeral directors. She had pursued the question later that summer in her 4-week placement when visiting a hospital in another part of the country. The questions it had raised were concerned primarily with the feelings of the bereaved parents and how to respond to them and what kind of services people found most helpful. In order to examine these she had attended several memorial services. The questions appeared to be principally practical rather than theological. Her key reading had been from the 'Nursing Times' and she made no reference at the interview to Biblical or Christian material⁹⁹. She did, however, speak of God's presence in the situation of death, though this appeared to be more by way of conviction than on anything she could identify in the experience. The interview, following the submission of the written assignment, had been helpful in giving the opportunity to express thoughts and had suggested ways that the writing could be developed. She would have liked to return to writing afterwards, but other commitments had not allowed this to happen.

Adrian, who had been attached for 4 weeks to a hospital in Shrewsbury, chose the topic of 'suffering and death' and had pursued a theological reflection on theodicy. This had arisen due in part to direct involvement with several people who died during this period, including a set of newborn triplets all of whom died within an 8-day period. The involvement with an intensive therapy unit had also brought back memories of his own father dying in this setting and at the same time his niece had gone into hospital for a serious operation¹⁰⁰. The experience had raised questions concerned with whether and how God intervenes in the world, how one could reconcile a God of love and the experience of death; how death fits in with God's plan; and whether God plays with human beings. The experience had been a significant challenge he said to his previous conviction that God can and does intervene in the world. The initial parts of the process were in conversation with his placement supervisor with whom there had been a daily

⁹⁸ In the written report Barbara speaks of two stillbirths she had experienced earlier in her life. Whilst watching a video on the subject of neonatal and stillbirth pregnancies in the PSU she experienced 'uncontrollable pain and grief' and was unable to respond in the chapel prayers afterwards.

⁹⁹ In the written report there are several quotes from Kubler Ross E (1997) *On Children and Death* largely to support Barbara's view that listening is an important part of the healing process. There were no quotes from or reference to scripture in this section.

¹⁰⁰ In the written report Adrian says that at the time of the visit to the ITU his feelings of grief for his father had not been prevalent but afterwards on reflection he realised that 'the wounds were found to still be weeping'.

conversation lasting about an hour discussing the experiences of the day. This had been accompanied by prayer, which Adrian considered to be of major importance in the process of reflecting theologically. Coincidentally, the writing up of the report had been going on during the first few weeks of the autumn term at the same time as a series of lectures on the book of Job in which a discussion of God and suffering had been a prominent part. Adrian used this extensively in his reflection process and the written report contains a number of references to the story. He spoke of the process as not being linear but more like a patchwork quilt or jigsaw in which different questions derived from his placement were worked through as Job was studied and then finally brought together into a whole picture. The interview had been helpful in that the assessor had raised some points, mainly for clarification, which Adrian was able to answer. It had also given him an opportunity to engage in a critical discussion of Chaplaincy.

Steve chose the subject of 'Baptismal Policy for still born and neo natal death' for the focus in his report. Like the previous two this was in part because of previous personal experience. In this case it was a connection with a couple known well to him recently having a miscarriage. Whilst this may not have been the primary reason, in that he conveyed the impression that the newness of the issue, the seriousness of the pastoral situations and the unique approach adopted by the chaplaincy team had been the key factors, the personal emotional involvement was present. The process followed by Steve was similar to the way he had tackled research previously. Namely, he had identified questions about the nature and practice of baptism, read extensively in the New Testament and early church fathers, especially Augustine, and the writing process had helped him 'objectify the issues and develop his own position'. It had been frustrating in not allowing him to write as extensively as he desired but had been useful nevertheless. The interview was especially helpful because the interviewer had appropriate experience and Steve found the interview situation more analogous to a pastoral situation in the nature of the dialogue and discussion than the essay. The interview had extended his thinking and he hoped to return to writing afterwards, but had not yet done so. Two further elements were identified as potentially helpful: group discussion or seminar; and some conversation with parents of stillborn children. He confessed to reading primarily theological literature in his research but had read a limited amount about the psychology of stillbirth, mainly from the Chaplaincy perspective. The process as a whole helped to form a pattern for working, which he sketched as 'meeting a situation with no obvious response or policy, followed by exploration of Christian tradition and this helped in

forming a discipline of reflection'. Steve believed the whole process to be about theological reflection but having become familiar with the 'pastoral cycle' felt that it was not possible to describe the process in these terms. He rather thought that:

In reality one is confronted by a real experience and forced to think about it. I am driven by the nature of the problem that crops up and then that gives me a way to deal with the problem.

For Paul the Health & Healing PSU had caused him to focus on 'the care of the mentally ill'. The starting point for choosing this theme was a visit to a psychiatric hospital but he had also been strongly influenced by his own experience of several friends and relatives with mental illness. These included a school friend who had eventually committed suicide after some years of depressive illness, a church friend, and his own grandfather who had spent some years in a psychiatric hospital later in his life. The day visit to a psychiatric hospital in the first week of the PSU had touched on these experiences and so when asked to make a short presentation about some aspect of health and healing to his PSU group, he had chosen the topic that eventually had become the focus of his report. Following the first conversations with the mental health chaplains he explored the topic initially through reading a report on 'Promoting Mental Health: The Role of Faith Communities – Jewish and Christian Perspectives'¹⁰¹. This had alerted him to both positive and negative responses to the mentally ill made by churches past and present and helped to sharpen his question to being 'what can churches do in response to those with mental illness with credibility and integrity?'. In preparing the theological reflection he had turned to the Bible and focused much of his thinking on the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15). In particular he looked at the reaction of the two sons to the father's love. Both had difficulty in accepting the love but there is a 'rigidity' of the older son's response, which may, he believed, be paralleled in the church's response to people who are 'different from us'. 'It is, in part, fear of what we don't know that keeps us from helping.' In addition to this Biblical material, Paul had used the Psalms of Lament to underline the idea that honesty about the experience is central to facing mental illness on the part of the church and the individual with the illness. He reflected that he would have liked to think further about the idea of 'the image of God' in each person, but had not been able to include this in his written report. The thinking had gone on and he spoke at length about how difficult it may be for those suffering from mental illness to see themselves as made in the image of God but that the church's response in being alongside suffering individuals is to affirm by its presence that people in this vulnerable position are

¹⁰¹ Health Education Authority 1999

made in the image of God. After the writing but before the interview there had been an open college lecture on the subject of 'Caring for those with severe mental illness' and this had 'fired him up for the interview' itself. The interview had not particularly developed his thinking but gave him opportunity to express his thoughts and explore orally some of the issues. He did not want to return to the writing after the interview but had already begun to read further, naming a series of books he was now reading. In general the process had been helpful and 'progressive' and the only thing he believed might have helped further would have been an opportunity to talk again with chaplains at a later stage in the thinking and writing process.

Interestingly, Paul's definition of theological reflection was outlined in terms of 'making links'

Making links – I am wanting to make links between what I am seeing and what's there in the Bible - not just in the Bible but in Christian thinking. Partly that has come about because of the question I asked myself about mental health: what is the Christian response? You are faced with fear, frustration, confusion, and so what is the response? That is what is working in me – wanting to look and to think – by observing first and then going back to Biblical material.

Whilst he still felt a slight reservation about the term, he liked what theological reflection was doing for him, he said, in raising questions and giving him a way of making links between his college experience and what he sees and encounters outside.

Vanessa, the postgraduate student, did not choose her focus, 'Management of Change' related to her parish placement in Wales for the more apparent personal reasons which had influenced others. It was rather, she said, that this was the most salient feature of her placement experience. The parish was undergoing very significant changes and so everyone was talking about it and thus it seemed the obvious focus for the report. The process began in a series of conversations in the parish and Vanessa had written two poems during her time there that were, she said, theological reflections on the experience. After the placement she did some sociological study, looked at literature on the management of change and also examined Biblical characters looking for where God had guided people through periods of change. The key figure was Moses and the leading of the people of Israel out of Egypt, but she had also looked at Abraham, Nehemiah and Jesus. She attempted to bring the three strands of study together but she considered her main submission for the assignment was the poetry, with some accompanying background information. For Vanessa the placement has been 'excellent' but she did not

feel that the structured process had been helpful to her. Neither the writing nor the interview had developed her thinking or her theological reflection beyond the initial response in the poetry. She felt it might have been helpful to talk further with the parish priest but there were practical and pastoral difficulties attached to this. As in previous interviews Vanessa gave the impression that most college requirements were not necessary for her and were generally unhelpful. She simply needed to 'get on with the job'. Despite this she did, however, define theological reflection in terms of interacting with God, the world, the scriptures and other resources – the very process she had gone through. In defining theological reflection in this way she distinguished between Biblical Reflection and Theological Reflection.¹⁰² The former involves reading and studying scripture and interacting with one's view of God but theological reflection is a fuller process involving self, and the world, as well as God and the scriptures.

Finally, Colin had chosen a focus of 'Reclaiming the Streets' which arose from the section in the 'Health & Healing' PSU on Preventative Health Care in local Communities. By 'Reclaiming the Streets' he meant the reduction in the use of motor vehicles as a preventative and proactive measure for health. His reasons for choosing this were straightforward. It related to his earlier political campaigning work 'against car culture'. Thus as he put it, 'it allowed me to indulge in a passion'. In the written report he also declares an interest and recounts something of his experience of moving to live close to the M25 where his younger brother and sister and a third of the children at his local school developed breathing problems.

The process of work began with social and political analysis and then moved to a trawl of the biblical material 'to find an ecological approach', and the reading of secondary literature especially from liberation and feminist theologians and finally to devising strategies for addressing the issues in church. Social and political analysis was largely knowledge from previous existence (e.g. being a candidate for the Green Party in local elections) but the Biblical material was new, as was some of the reading. All this eventually led him to discover a new insight, namely that the 'church has a part to play in the process of reclaiming the streets'. The placement report structure had provided a way of doing this but the writing had been more important than the interview. The interviewer

¹⁰² Vanessa's written report presents reflection only in terms of the qualities of biblical characters experiencing or leading through times of change. The written feedback of the marker asks her to seek to understand more the difference between theological reflection and biblical reflection. It is possible that her comments to me were in response to this remark.

had suggested that his presentation was one-sided and this had caused him to defend his position and to reconsider it. Equally important was the coincidental conversations he had with individuals and in groups unconnected with college or placement. He also said he was influenced in his reflection by the information from the forthcoming international conference on environmental issues at the time as writing. The theological reflection was helped by 'prayer, praxis and passion' and clearly for him there was a burst of excited energy in this process. He described it as:

a moment when the gospel becomes real, when you get an insight into how you feel – and I really got an insight into how I imagined heaven would be when I was doing stuff on Green theology and what I was actually working towards... How I would like the world to be at the end of time – I saw a vision of something almost revelatory – like a vision from the book of Revelation – a new earth - and that was quite special...

Despite the fact that Colin drew heavily on liberation theology and offered a classic 'pastoral cycle' description of the theological reflection, he was nevertheless uncomfortable with the term and said that if asked to describe it he would not be able to but would 'want to go away and write a poem' as theological reflection could only be expressed in poetry.

Main points to emerge from Interview 3

There are a number of interesting points to emerge from the third interview. First, in each placement the student chose a focus in which there was a perceived problem to be solved or resolved. These problems were practical in terms of developing ministerial or church policy and practice, but they were also intellectual in that they required some theological coherence, integrity and consistency. At the same time, for most, there were emotional dimensions that required some resolution of personal questions or experiences. In 5 out of the 6 cases there were strong personal and emotional reasons for the choice of focus. Some of these were concerned with painful personal experience – a miscarriage (Barbara), a father's death (Adrian) or a grandfather's hospitalisation for psychiatric treatment (Paul). Others were less tragic but still emotive. Steve was largely motivated by the 'the seriousness of the pastoral situations and the unique approach adopted by the chaplaincy team' but also by his friends' sad loss. Colin's choice of focus was driven by an opportunity to 'indulge a passion' and according to the written report also by his family's negative experience of the pollution. These three features, namely a problem posing situation, a desire for intellectual integrity and an emotional motivation are all aspects of or driving forces in theological reflection. The variety of activities within the

placement experience and the choice over the focus for theological reflection in the written report allowed for the convergence of two or three of these factors and thus gave momentum to the exploration and reflection.

Second, the placement and the educational process for its reporting were generally perceived as being helpful though there were differing views as to which elements in the process were most helpful and considerable variety in the approach adopted by the individual students. There was some consensus that conversation on site with a supervisor and other 'experts' was valuable. This either generated the focus or allowed the learner to pursue a line of exploration. Conversation was also a factor in the development of thinking, often away from the original context and outside the structured process. It is interesting to note that when asked for suggestions of additional elements that might enhance the process, 4 of the 6 believed that more conversation with either the original contact or key figures in consideration e.g. bereaved parents, would have developed thinking. One person valued having to make a presentation to other students at the time of the PSU and 2 would have liked more group discussion of their topic with peers. This high regard for conversation in the process may be linked to the second interview where most felt that they had learned theological reflection mainly via tutorial conversations. Again conversation is believed to be a significant factor in reflection.

The reading and writing process was felt in the main to be helpful, though one had felt constrained in his thinking by the word limit and another felt that little had been added by the written exercise. For most the process had helped 'objectify' the issues and forced them to work through a concern in a structured way. No one explicitly commented on the fact that the written work was assessed but there were several references to the fact that they had to include certain things in their reports, as demanded by the guidelines. The somewhat prescriptive structure for the writing of the assignment and the explicit criteria for its assessment were used by all students in preparing their written work. It would suggest, therefore, that the guidelines and assessment criteria implicitly structured the reading and writing process and so reinforced a certain approach. The only possible exception to this was Vanessa who had written two poems for her theological reflection submission, composed whilst on placement, but even she submitted accompanying material 'to satisfy the requirements'. As Roundtree (1987) has put it 'The spirit and style of student assessment defines the de facto curriculum.'

The choice and use of biblical and theological material in the reflection was hugely varied. Whilst the study of baptismal policy led one person naturally to a study of the views of baptism in the New Testament and early church writings, for most people the choice of what material to use for their theological reflection was free and unconfined, one might even say random. The parable of the Prodigal Son would not necessarily at first glance seem to be related to the issue of mental illness, nor the figure of Moses to the contemporary notion of the Management of Change. The story of Job is clearly related to the issue of suffering but the student appears to have chosen this Biblical material because coincidentally there was a series of lectures on the book at the time he was writing the report. It would appear that the guidelines oblige people to make connections between their chosen focus and the Christian tradition but give no guidance on how to approach this or what constitutes good practice. Students, therefore, appear to see this as an entirely personal choice and this may encourage the perception that theological reflection is an interior or 'spiritual' matter and thus account to some extent for the reluctance of some to define theological reflection other than through highly personal notions expressed, for example, in poetry.

The interview was generally thought to be useful though views varied on its role in developing thinking. For Barbara the interview had suggested ways in which the thinking could be developed though she had not followed these ideas up. Similarly Steve spoke of the importance of the interview because the interviewer had appropriate experience and thus had extended his thinking. It was he also who thought that the interview situation was more analogous to the initial exploration of the pastoral problem and thus saw conversation at this point as an ongoing part of the process. For the others, however, the principal value of the interview seems to have been in being able to defend the view taken in the written report or to clarify points for the assessor. Again conversation was affirmed, though here its worth was for the opportunity provided to give an account of a newly developed position rather than advancing the thinking further. In this way it is perhaps generally perceived as something that occurs after the process is finished not as part of the thinking process.

These elements of the process almost always combined with prior knowledge and coincidental learning and the reflection worked itself out in different ways. There was a sense among all the students that the theological reflection process was not linear or sequential but less predictable like a 'patchwork quilt' or 'jigsaw' [Adrian] and there was

a desire to distance themselves from models that appear to suggest a neat development such as the 'pastoral cycle' [Steve].

Third, we note the importance of authority figures in the process. It was evident from several of the third interviews that supervisors or other key personnel such as chaplains had spoken with the students about theological reflection. Moreover, frequently time was set aside, up to an hour per day, for joint reflection on the student's experience and questions. Clearly this was valued and several would have liked to return to these conversations later in the thinking process. This may be interpreted as a strong signal from those already established as priests or ministers and may well have increased the sense that theological reflection was a professional tool, disposition or attitude for those preparing for ordained ministry.

Finally, we mention the continuing discomfort with the term theological reflection among students. If anything, there was a small but noticeable change from interview 2 only 3 months earlier. At that point all offered working definitions and some examples. At interview 3 there was a tendency to offer shorter definitions such as 'thought', 'making links' or 'where is God'. Only one offered a careful definition of 'being forced to think through experience using theological resources' [Steve] and I sensed in general a reluctance to define theological reflection. Colin even declined to offer a definition saying that he would need to write a poem to respond. This caution is surprising on one level because there is little doubt that all had a stronger working notion of the nature of theological reflection than at the earlier interviews. Three possible explanations are offered at this point.

Firstly, there is the difficulty of describing in a model or definition a complex pattern of the development of thinking and understanding. It is clear that from a problem posed in the context of a placement many elements come into play. These involve people at an emotional as well as an intellectual and practical level. Past (often painful) experiences and unresolved questions meet the need for consistency of thinking and practice and these are required to make sense within a perception of God, using the resources of scripture and Christian tradition. The individuals share a common structured process but in fact work at the task in highly individual ways. The variables of perception of problem, past experience, emotional involvement, conversation partners, coincidental learning and theological resources mean that the mental process that one is seeking to describe is too

complex in any one person and it is even more difficult to find a common description that fits all. It does not signify that the term means nothing but when explored in practice it is too involved to describe in any detail or with any precision. At this point, however, students may be gradually becoming aware of this complexity and are reluctant to define the concept for fear of over simplification.

Second, the ways of engaging and using the Christian tradition are wide open and uncontrolled. Thus it is possible on several issues to raid the tradition at any number of likely or unlikely points and use these in the developmental process, in a kind of bricolage. Because there are no norms or guidance, students make personal choices based on a mixture of the level of the knowledge of the tradition and the particular devotional practice and resources that have shaped them to date. When one adds to this the common conviction that prayer plays a part in the process one can see that students locate the centre of theological reflection somewhere in their inner spiritual life. This inner life may find easier external expression in poetry, than in definitions or models.

Finally, it may be argued that with a more deeply embedded working practice, models which were held up to introduce theological reflection become less necessary and increasingly inaccurate in the individual's experience. The scaffolding is removed. Now they can do theological reflection, they do not need to define it!

Interview 4: After two years

The fourth interview was an attempt to identify changes over the two years of training for students. The questions were concentrated around their feelings towards training, their perception of their own changes and growth, how they now viewed theological reflection and its place in their future ministry¹⁰³. Three of the six students were leaving the college for parish or circuit appointments at around the point of the interview, whilst the other three were continuing in a third year of training. In two cases the interviews with leavers were conducted after they had moved into their new appointments.

The fourth interviews did not add significantly to the findings of the first three but there was confirmation of certain elements and they provided some additional nuances to ideas and views already encountered in the previous interviews.

¹⁰³ The list of questions used appears in Appendix 3

All Cranmer students felt positive about their experience of training but thought that there had been losses and omissions, as well as gains in their programme. Half the group mentioned problems in their 'devotional life' during the two years and that whilst they had found new possibilities for prayer and worship they were not yet in a pattern that felt fully satisfying. All but one spoke of developing their thinking and extending their view or understanding of God. Thinking was now 'more systematic' or 'analytical' or had 'strengthened reasoning ability'. All felt they had grappled with 'difficult' theological and ethical issues in training. Two specifically spoke in terms of becoming aware of how much they 'didn't know' and one said she was now more able to accept paradoxes and apparent contradictions in thinking about God without it being a crisis. They all believed they had changed in some way and that their ideas about God had broadened and matured. This change of patterns of thinking and the discontinuity of patterns of spirituality appeared to be linked in people's minds.

In terms of theological reflection, all carried some kind of view of theological reflection and appeared to value it as part of their ministry development and life. The definitions centred on linking experience, the Christian tradition and belief in God, in line with the views previously expressed by each. They believed that they had grown in this area so that it was now more natural to them. The college programme had nurtured theological reflection implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly in the nature of the life of community (Paul), particularly living close to others and being exposed to the theological views of others, and explicitly in certain teaching or learning structures. Amongst these the postgraduate student spoke highly of the TPR postgraduate seminars and gave an example of exploring homosexuality in such a seminar as one of the most helpful learning experiences of her two years. Three spoke of the value of seminars where they had prepared work and had to discuss it in some detail with others and one spoke of the importance of a peer discussion group that had organised itself and regularly met for lunch and discussion. Theological reflection was a feature of this group's gatherings. The group intended to continue to meet after college training was complete in order to support each other in ministry.

All six highlighted the role of placements. These were valued greatly. Two of the six said that placements had been the high spots of the programme. Paul spoke again about the PSU on health and healing at the end of his first year, about which he had spoken at

length in the previous interview. He said that this had been a key moment in his training when he had felt that 'things were coming together'. Adrian also responded immediately when asked about the high point of training with 'placements' and then went on to talk about the three placements in which he had worked. Of these his prison placement had been the most important, in part because it was a wholly new area for him and in part because the supervisor had spend considerable time in conversation, helping him reflect on the experience and apply it to parish life. Others mentioned placements as being significant in some way or drew heavily on the placement experience to give examples of theological reflection.

Indeed when asked for examples of theological reflection most offered ministry related stories. These included working on placement with asylum seekers, in prison, in an intensive care ward of a hospital, in a mental health hospital, with old people in a Baptist church, and with a confirmation class. The two who had recently begun ministry as a curate and probationer minister also offered examples from current work connected either with their church(es) or their own ministerial activities. One of these did point to a community project for young people which was not a church initiative nor something in which he had any significant role but which he had interpreted in theological terms saying that it carried fundamental Christian values such as being alongside the poor and marginalized and expressing respect for people. He was, however, prompted to do this because some people in his church community could not see that this had anything to do with Christian faith and he was trying to persuade them of its value and gain church support for the project.

Again it was observable that for all theological reflection was a way of approaching a problematic issue that needed some sort of resolution. Steve put it like this:

it arises out of problems we see. For me, I am aware of my need to reflect theologically when I see specific cases of challenging things that come up in my experience. I'll reflect theologically as a result of that.

This explanation came after relating three problematic situations where he saw theological reflection at work. Two of the problems were connected with placements and one with a conflict between himself and his wife connected to prayer. In all the placement examples given by students there was some problem to resolve and theological reflection was the name given to the resolution process using theological resources.

The desire to continue to nurture theological reflection in ministry was shared by all. The ways people anticipated doing this varied substantially. For one person it would be through continuing to use poetry (Vanessa), for another by taking time to observe what was going on around him (Paul), by walking around his parish and for another it would be through addressing the problems that arose. Most saw some connection with their devotional life and the nurture of their own spirituality and the majority saw the role of others in helping them.

No one had given much thought to nurturing theological reflection in others, not even those in ministry at the time of interview. It was felt that preaching, teaching, Bible study, spiritual direction and personal conversations would be a part but no structured or planned ideas were offered at all.

Conclusion

Over the two years of following these six students one can see the gradual pattern of their adopting and developing a concept and practice of theological reflection. At entry, 5 out of 6 had not heard of the notion of theological reflection, though most were conscious by the first interview that this was a 'college phrase'. By the end of the two years all had some understanding of the term and believed themselves to practice theological reflection. All tried at the initial stage to link this new term to their previous experience in some meaningful way and offered examples based on their individual perceptions, but over the period of two years the examples they offered were increasingly drawn from ministerial practice so that theological reflection became a notion associated with their training for and practice of ministry. A key stage in this development is the long summer placement at the end of the first year. At this point the encounter with new and challenging situations in which they can envisage themselves in the near future, combines with a college requirement to write a report, the assessment of which is highly structured to shape the response in terms of theological reflection. The students, strongly motivated for the placement work, take hold of theological reflection and believe themselves to have engaged with it at a significant level. Their grasp of theological reflection in practice becomes central and they become more aware of the complexity of the process. Thus their explanations and definitions are more tentative but their confidence in the nature of theological reflection is greater than before. There is, in other words, a professional

appropriation of theological reflection as a tool for the practice of ordained ministry which students have established after approximately one year.

This professional tool is essentially a means for the resolution of problems using theological resources. As we saw strongly in the third interviews the problems often contain both cognitive and emotional dimensions. Indeed the unresolved personal and affective elements may be a primary driving force in the choosing of a particular focus for theological reflection. By the process of making new meaning using theology, individuals developed new frameworks for understanding or exploring questions and addressing continuing emotionally-linked concerns from their own previous experience. The practice of theological reflection is varied and idiosyncratic, probably connected with personality, temperament, faith experience and established strategies for problem-solving. It is nevertheless sufficiently located around theological themes to have a common label. Theological reflection, in this case study, is a form of thinking oriented towards problem-resolution arising out of and professionally associated with the practice of Christian ministry.

The nurture of theological reflection at Cranmer Hall is initially achieved by conversations. Of these the most important in the early stages appears to be the tutorial conversation in which students are asked to reflect theologically on something that has happened or is happening. This conversational dialogue acts as both a means for meaning making and as a signal of the importance of theological reflection in the institution. A positive value for theological reflection can be reinforced or strengthened by other significant figures, e.g. other tutors or supervisors in attachment and placement setting. In the cases of those interviewed, the significant others generally strengthened the value students attached to theological reflection and were major conversation partners for theological reflection with students. Subsequently, seminar opportunities and peer discussions are important but probably only after students have recognised the concept as important. Placements are nevertheless the single most important element in this programme. It is here that students have a degree of ministerial experience independent of direct college supervision. Students also have a choice about the issue that they will make the focus of reflection but the structure for reporting demanded by the college shapes the kind of response that will be made and ensures that theological reflection is tackled as a central activity. Students develop a degree of ownership and practice of theological reflection through this significant placement and thereafter continue to focus

primarily on their own ministry. They have started to become (theologically) reflective practitioners.

This is a successful structure for nurture of theological reflection but it has particular difficulties. First, in terms of design it leaves much to the tutorial conversation. This assumes that tutors will own and nurture theological reflection and that there is sufficient common consensus to ensure a consistent picture. Though the high commitment on the part of staff seems apparent, as evidenced by the shared staff study programme on theological reflection and practical theology, some early comments of students suggest that there is an inconsistent picture of what they are being asked to do and perhaps different understandings and levels of commitment to the concept and its practice. The role of tutors in the nurture of theological reflection would need to be a regular part of this particular community of practice's conversation.

Second, in the teaching programme, whilst the initial teaching on theological reflection is not greatly valued or in some cases not even noticed, the TPR postgraduate seminar is highly regarded by the postgraduate group.¹⁰⁴ The one postgraduate in our six consistently rated this as the high point of her training and the one in which she learned most about theological reflection. No such opportunity is available to undergraduates in the training programme. Any seminars they lead are in primarily classical subjects of study such as church history. The success of the postgraduate TPR seminars does not seem to lie at the level of study. Rather it is considered valuable by participants because the topic and approach is student chosen, student led and a corporate student and staff exercise in which theological questions and solutions emerge from the shared experience. This opportunity could be extended to undergraduates, though in a slightly different form. This might also, as one member of staff suggested, address the issue of the seemingly random methods for engagement with the Bible and Christian tradition¹⁰⁵.

Finally, the high dependence on the placement reinforces the idea that theological reflection is a professional tool for the clergy. Students in this context gradually move away from a wider range of examples in their experience to a narrowly focused ministerial form of theological reflection in their own training and whilst they value this and desire to nurture it beyond their college training, they give little thought to what

¹⁰⁴ Source of information: Student Course Evaluation forms for TPR

¹⁰⁵ Director of Mission and Pastoral Studies, Cranmer Hall, interview July 2001

theological reflection might mean when practiced by members of the churches in their care. An undergraduate form of the TPR seminar might widen the scope of issues which become the focus for theological reflection but there might need to be new thought given as to how ministers become facilitators of theological reflection in other contexts.



4.2 Case Study: Ushaw College

Ushaw College is one of four Roman Catholic seminaries located in England¹⁰⁶. It has been established in the NE of England for approximately 200 years¹⁰⁷ and for a number of years included a junior seminary with education for children aged 11-18. The junior seminary closed in 1972. Now it is home to about 39 seminarians¹⁰⁸ mostly exploring a vocation and preparing for the ordained priesthood, though a small number of lay students are encouraged to study at the college.¹⁰⁹

The programme for those exploring a vocation to priesthood is six years in length. The first year is broadly a foundational and formational year, which precedes the degree programme and concentrates largely on providing an introduction to theology, scripture & philosophy and the nature of formation.

The second year for most students is the first year of a three year degree programme the validation of which is shared with Cranmer Hall and The Wesley Study Centre though in reality until the end of the academic year 2000-2001 the courses followed by RC students were different from those at the other two institutions and taught at Ushaw College. After completing the degree, students follow a programme that is oriented towards parish work. In year five, students undertake an extended placement in parish for several months with a preparatory period in college beforehand and a reflection period afterwards. In the sixth year, students serve as deacons in a parish, returning to Ushaw for short periods of reflection and study.

Theological Reflection in the Ushaw Programme

Theological reflection has been a part of the curriculum since the mid-1990s. The main vehicle for teaching theological reflection is a one-term course consisting of 8 sessions of 90 minutes. The course is entitled 'Theological Reflection and Social Analysis'¹¹⁰ and is

¹⁰⁶ The others are at Womersley, Guildford; Allen Hall, London; and Oscott, Birmingham. British seminarians may also be sent to train to the Venerable English College in Rome; Beda College, Rome; or to St Alban's College, Valladolid, Spain.

¹⁰⁷ Moved to its present site in 1808. Prior to that the seminary was based at Crook Hall, in Consett

¹⁰⁸ 39 2001-2002, 37 2000-2001

¹⁰⁹ In 2001-2002 there were 4. The number has in the previous 3 years varied between 3-6.

¹¹⁰ This title was popular for conferences and seminars held in the 1980s. See Elwood 1987

taken by seminarians in their second year at Ushaw and in the first year for lay students and thus for both in the first year of their undergraduate studies. The course was introduced in 1995 by a member of the pastoral staff at Ushaw College at the time and taught for the first two years by him. The course had two new course leaders, one teaching for the period 1997 to 1999 and one 1999 to 2001. The course is assessed in two parts. Part 1 is a short individual presentation and discussion on a topic of the student's choice with two members of staff. Part 2 is a written assignment on one of two given topics.

In addition, theological reflection is seen as part of the pastoral studies programme particularly through student reflection on placement work. Placement work at Ushaw College is strongly structured with a set placement for each of the six years for seminarians and three for lay students.¹¹¹ The reflection on these experiences is organised through student seminars based around a critical incident approach. Students are asked to submit a short written statement describing the incident prior to the seminar, which is circulated to all class members. The presenter is allowed 5 minutes at the beginning of a 35 minute session to clarify the written submission. He or she is then asked not to speak during the next part of the session which is given over to the rest of the class for discussion, divided approximately into 15 minutes for analysis and 10 minutes for evaluation. At the end the presenter has 5 minutes to feed back to the group on the discussion.

I was able to observe and/or record the teaching sessions of the Social Analysis and Theological Reflection course in 1999-2000, read assessed assignments and student course evaluation sheets. In 2000-2001 I acted as second marker for the oral and written work and interviewed students from several different years, including some in Year 5 who had taken the taught course 3 years previously. I was also able to interview several members of staff including the original designer of the course, no longer a member of staff, and the two subsequent lecturers and I was give additional information by the President and Vice-President of Ushaw College.

¹¹¹ Year 1: Half day per week visiting in residential nursing home; Year 2: One day per week in a Catholic Primary School; Years 3 & 4: Half day per week in medical or prison setting; Year 5: four month block placement in student's own parish; Year 6: Parish placement as a deacon in blocks before and after Christmas.

Teaching theological reflection

The taught course at Ushaw College, TRSA, is of particular interest for several reasons. First, it is the only one of the three institutions studied to devote an extensive classroom based teaching course to the subject of theological reflection. Second, the course is assessed and therefore offers a particular insight into this view of theological reflection. Finally, during the two years of my research the college decided to abandon this course in the new modular structure for its degree, beginning in the autumn of 2001. Given that many courses were modified but survived into the new structure without fundamental change, it seemed interesting to explore why the College had decided to discontinue this course.

The introduction of the course was in 1995, following a quinquennial validation inspection carried out by the University of Durham. The originator's main purpose in adding this course was to help lay students make links between the pastoral and academic components of the course. As lay students do not have the foundation year followed by seminarians, they were coming to the degree without the benefit of seeing the study in the wider context of formation and ministry and thus this course would serve, he thought, as an introduction to the pastoral courses, indicating the connection between them and the academic courses and formalising for seminarians what they had 'picked up in their first year'. The course was inspired by and drew heavily on two sources. First, the originator's own experience working as priest in a parish in Africa where he was influenced by a development education programme, which produced a series of books under the broad title of 'Training for Transformation'.¹¹² The second source was Jesuit spirituality particularly as expressed in Holland & Herriot (1980) and which was strongly influenced by a discourse about theological reflection in this period as we noted in chapter 1. Theological reflection was not new in the curriculum at that point. There was work on the reflection cycle of David Kolb in some classes and reference made to theological reflection in the third year pastoral studies course. The new course, however, was the first course to be organised around the notion of theological reflection¹¹³. The second course teacher thought that the course he inherited was about three things: Methods of theological reflection; Social Analysis; and Missiology. He altered the course to 'down play the missiology' as he believed this was covered elsewhere in the curriculum but retained using the theological reflection methods in 'Training for

¹¹² 3 volumes 1984 *Training for Transformation*, Orbis

¹¹³ Interview with course designer and first teachers, 28 August 2001

Transformation' books. The third teacher of the course made only minor differences to the course on taking over in 1999, and a few modifications for the second year of his teaching of the course.

The teaching staff broadly shared a view of theological reflection that was articulated by one of the course teachers as:

Links between faith and life. Taking your experience and thinking about it in the light of faith. Trying to see what light the gospel and religious faith shed on it... using theology to interpret the meaning of the experience.

The social analysis dimension of TRSA was seen as 'expanding the issue of experience. Not just using your personal experience but looking at the causes of, for example, homelessness.'¹¹⁴ These were the core elements of the course in the minds of the staff.

Observation of the taught course: TRSA

I observed the teaching of this course in the academic year 1999-2000.

The approach to teaching taken was set in a devotional framework. This could be said of several, if not all courses at Ushaw College in as much as the daily rhythm of study is framed by morning and evening worship and prayers are often said at the beginning of a teaching session. But in TRSA the explicit devotional focus was further evident in the regular use of a worship focus to the room. In the first session, for example, as students came into the room, there was already a visual focus with a Bible laid on the floor, open at the set gospel lesson for the day, with an adjacent candle and surrounded by newspapers. This linking of the Bible and contemporary life was thus conveyed symbolically and the opening exercise in this session invited students to listen to the Bible passage read aloud and then to take and read one or more of the newspapers and make connections between the gospel reading and a news story. In several subsequent sessions the daily Bible lesson was read and used in relation to the topic being explored. For the last session, students working in two groups were asked to prepare 'para-liturgies' as a way of demonstrating theological reflection. These were short acts of worship involving songs, prayers, taped music, readings from the Bible and from other sources and simple acts of commitment. Far more than either Cranmer or NEOC this course at

¹¹⁴ Interview with second course teacher, 12 May 2001

Ushaw College demonstrated an emphasis on the link between worship and theological reflection.

The content of the course was much based on Ballard and Pritchard 1996. This was particularly evident in the sessions on Gospel Reflection and the Apostolic Pastoral Cycle (Session 3), Learning from Experience (Session 4), Methods of Theological Reflection (Session 6), and From Method to Action (Session 7), which were largely taken from the text, uncritically, with personal illustrations from the lecturer. Some material on social analysis was taken from Holland & Henriot 1980 and, interestingly, a session was devoted to the 'See, Judge, Act' approach of the Roman Catholic Priest Joseph Cardijn¹¹⁵ (Session 2). The first session was an introduction and the last of the eight sessions was given over to student presentations. Session 5 was entitled 'Theological Reflection and Youth Work' and was led by an outside speaker, the national chaplain to the Scout movement, who shared with students about the Scout movement and youth work in general but, apart from occasional passing comment, offered little to the students by way of theological reflection or on how the subject related to the course. Of the two basic models outlined, 'See, Judge, Act' and the Pastoral Cycle, the latter was the pattern most referred to in subsequent lectures, implicitly reinforced by the heavy use of Ballard and Pritchard. This gave the basic structure of the larger part of the course, in providing, in effect, 5 of the 8 sessions: the first an introduction to the cycle and 4 sessions corresponding broadly to the four phases of the pastoral cycle¹¹⁶. The substance was, however, what the course syllabus describes as 'principles and methods of describing and recording pastoral experience, reflection and planning' in that the course offered a number of techniques for identifying, codifying, presenting and responding to issues and experience. For example, the session on 'Learning from Experience' contained information on a number of ways of journaling and this input was followed by a brief exercise using one or more of the approaches. In this way, students were given material on practical methods of engaging with personal and public issues and a small degree of practice. The experiential focus was, however, drawn from the range of experiences available in the classroom and therefore was not systematised. No one issue or

¹¹⁵ Fr Joseph Cardijn 1882-1967 developed a method for social action whilst working with a laywomen in Laeken, Belgium. This has been widely used by the Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement and adopted as a model for theological reflection. See Appendix 1 and see Langdale 1955, Fievez & Meert 1974, Hanley 1985 and Cardijn 1964.

¹¹⁶ The 4 phases being: experience, exploration or analysis, theological reflection, and action. In fact some of phase 2 was covered in two separated sessions.

experience received more than a few minutes' attention and the practice of techniques was very limited in time.

The main style of the teaching was informal lecturing. As the class size was 7 students, the course leader spoke in a casual, relaxed way inviting regular response from the students and welcoming interruptions for questions and comments. Handouts and OHP slides listed the main points and these provided the framework of the talks. Several sessions included small group work exercises and occasionally individual exercises, largely for trying out techniques explored in the input. There were frequent invitations to students to share personal and placement experience though these were inevitably short snap-shots rather than discursive explorations. Class discussions were few and mainly arose out of sharing of personal experience by students. I have already described something of the devotional orientation of the course. In addition, the course leader made regular use of poetry. His illustrations were mostly personal and revealed much about his own life, ministry and political commitments, though he also drew on recent shared activities within the college, such as the lectures of visiting speakers and sermons in college chapel. There was little critical appraisal of theological reflection methods or ideas and virtually no reference to secondary literature. This was, to some extent, reflected in student work. Although a short booklist was provided for the course there was little evidence in either the written work or oral examination of any use of the literature beyond the course notes and no critical engagement with the underlying ideas.

Assessment for this course was in two parts. Two thirds of the way through the course individual students had to offer an oral presentation to two examiners based on 'a particular incident or issue in his/her own experience' and discuss the subject with them¹¹⁷. The presentation and discussion were to demonstrate a student's 'grasp of the principles of theological reflection and its application in their lives'. This assessed exercise took approximately 20 minutes. At the end of the course a 1500 word essay was submitted on a 'Christian Response to a Social Issue', students being given a choice of whether to take a public issue (the examples given to help students decide were 'education', and 'development aid') or one that had arisen on their current pastoral placement. The oral and written parts each carried 50% of the final mark for the course.

¹¹⁷ The examiners were the course leader and a member of the teaching staff at Cranmer Hall. In 1999-2000 this was a colleague and in 2000-2001 it was myself.

The marking criteria for the oral was in four parts:

- Clarity of communication (10 marks)
- Level of self-awareness (10 marks)
- Competence in using method(s) of theological reflection (20 marks)
- Relevance of application to his/her own life (10 marks)

A similar set was used for marking the essay¹¹⁸. The criteria suggest that whilst awareness and use of methods for theological reflection carry the majority of the marks (30), the examiners are looking for a clearly understood and articulated link into the person's own life. Criteria 2 and 4 are both about this and together carry the same proportion of marks as the competence in using theological reflection methods. Criterion 1 is a generic skill. In fact, in both the written and oral examinations, most students chose topics that might be described as major public issues (e.g. Drug abuse, homelessness, 3rd world debt) and had little problem demonstrating their own passion and involvement in the issues. Unsurprisingly, most used the pastoral cycle as their chosen method but in an elementary way. The examiner's comments suggest that the consistent weaknesses they perceived were (a) limited analysis of the issues in terms of social, historical and global contexts (b) elementary or simplistic theological reflection that borders on a proof text approach¹¹⁹, though the Church's social teaching (Magisterium) and the Bible were used almost equally and (c) a weakness in linking the various parts of the cycle, especially in demonstrating how the proposed action arose out of the theology. In most cases the cycle acted as a way of justifying a position already held. All these criticisms reflect the nature of the taught course, in that there were no sustained case studies within the classroom setting, neither as a demonstration by the course leader nor as a class or individual exercise. The tendency to offer short illustrations and anecdotes provides no model for a thorough and coherent piece of work, and tends to the superficial without critical appraisal of the method, the scriptures or Church teaching.

¹¹⁸ As well as these four key factors, there were also generic criteria used for the marking of essays which were born in mind, though seen here as secondary.

¹¹⁹ Proof text is the use of a single authoritative text to support an argument without critical appraisal and/or without considering other texts within the corpus cited which might not support the position.

Student Experience

I was able to conduct nine interviews with students from Ushaw College, six third year students and three students in their 5th year. The third year students¹²⁰ had all followed the course in TRSA in the previous year¹²¹, the fifth years followed the same course three years previously. The interviews were conducted at the beginning of the calendar year 2001. Their purpose was to explore the understanding of theological reflection held by students, their experience of the course, the importance and development of theological reflection in others parts of the curriculum and the relation of the TRSA course to other parts of the programme. Whilst there was access to fourth year students, I chose to interview fifth year students for two reasons. Firstly, the longer time gap between the course TRSA and the interview would allow me to see what lasting impact this course had had on them and how they had related this to a further two years of training. Secondly, these students are clearly oriented towards leaving the college. They had just returned from their 4-month parish placements and were about to write their reflection in preparation for the scrutiny for and move to diaconal ordination. Their next year would be parish based with some visits to the college and at the end of that year they would be ordained priest. This seemed a good moment to test the understanding of theological reflection and its role within their current and prospective ministries.

As with the other case studies, the students have been given pseudonyms.

Pseudonym	Year	Gender	Age	Status
Mark	3 rd	Male	25	Seminarian
Peter	3 rd	Male	24	Seminarian
Martin	3 rd	Male	32	Seminarian
Mary	2 nd	Female	56	Lay
Kelly	2 nd	Female	22	Lay
Derek	3 rd	Male	30	Seminarian
Dennis	5 th	Male	27	Seminarian
Craig	5 th	Male	29	Seminarian
Francis	5 th	Male	47	Seminarian
Average age = 32				

Figure 10: Students interviewed at Ushaw College

¹²⁰ I am using 'third year' as a designation here for the student cohort. In fact of the 6, 4 seminarians were in their third year at Ushaw College, the two lay students only in second year.

¹²¹ 7 students had taken the course that I observed in 1999-2000, 5 seminarians and 2 lay students. One of the seminarians had decided to leave the college at the end of his second year.

Findings

Of the nine students interviewed, only two had heard the term theological reflection before coming to College. One had been a lay chaplain to a university and had encountered the term in catholic student council conferences, which were often based on the See, Judge, Act method. The other had been an active member of the Young Christian Workers (YCW), the organisation set up by Joseph Cardijn. The other seven had not encountered the term before coming to college and whilst two seminarians thought the term might have been used within the college in their first year none had any concrete memory of the term before the TRSA course.

Definitions, associations and examples

Definitions varied widely. Mary, a 2nd year lay person in her mid 50s, said she had done the course but did not understand the term. When she had gone into the oral assessment, she had not known what she was supposed to do and she hadn't done very well. She had subsequently tried to read two books on theological reflection but concluded that it meant different things to different people. In terms of college, she was forced to conclude that it meant cramming your essays with quotes from the Bible.

The only view I can have in my mind is that when you are trying to do an essay you have got to try and put in as many quotes and verses from scripture etc that you can push into an essay and to me that seems to be what theological reflection is. [Mary]

However, she thought there might be another meaning

But there is another side that you are on retreats where you have a theological reflection where you just reflect on the passage.

What this meant for her was:

Sitting down with a group of people reading a passage and sitting and contemplating on the passage and trying to think what it means for you and what you can think about it and the people that are in the passage – what they might have been thinking or doing.'

All the others from both years had some sort of working definition of theological reflection. Kelly, the other female lay student, felt that theological reflection was reflecting 'on a particular situation you have been in but with a theological background as it were. Being able to relate it to God and things'. Derek saw it as 'trying to live a Christ-centred life' and Martin as 'reflecting on what God is calling us to do'. All except Mary saw it in terms of relating your life or situations you were encountering to the will of God

expressed either in terms of prayer, discernment, applying Christian values or taking action to demonstrate your belief. Here are two typical statements:

- something about seeing an everyday situation, but then taking time to try and look at that everyday experience in the light of gospel values and see if anything needs to be done. [Francis]

Taking into prayer, to discernment and discussion with others the things that are going on around me immediately and on a wider level I suppose from becoming more informed about other issues and maybe further away physically and reflecting on those in the light of the beliefs of my faith tradition in terms of scripture and particularly some of the courses that are going on around here. [Mark]

Most saw theological reflection as a label for something that they had been doing unconsciously before they came to college, indeed a process that was intuitive or natural to at least all Christians, if not all human beings. Francis, for example, felt that one of the values of the course was in bringing the process to consciousness.

The examples of theological reflection they offered were of three types: some major social issues such as unemployment and famine; some pastoral placement experiences, for example, on hospital visiting; and some personal experiences such as 'failing A levels' and discerning vocation. Setting on one side Mary's example from the retreat context, a simple pattern was discernable in all the examples given. All began with, either a problematic experience or issue, which was resolved within the person either by a new way of thinking about the situation and/or new action to respond to the perceived problem. Kelly's experience of failing A levels, for example, had been resolved retrospectively by seeing the crisis as God's way of guiding her into her current training situation. Derek recalled a student conference from his chaplaincy days where they had sought to face the issue of refugee experience by hearing from a number of the refugees, looking at current legislation and ending the conference by sending letters on behalf of a particular refugee at the conference. Mark related working with a person with problems in his primary school placement. The concern was knowing what to say or do in response to the person and it was resolved by him being able to remain supportive without necessarily knowing 'the answers'. This he put down to a growth in his self-understanding resulting from a growing understanding of the nature of God. For two other students the examples they gave involved a degree of personal cost. Peter spoke of reflecting on the adoption of a pro-abortion policy by the University he was attending prior to coming to Ushaw College. After prayer, considering various scriptures and a discussion with his spiritual director he had decided to leave the National Union of

Students (NUS) and this had made life difficult especially when registering for each year of his course. Martin had, at the time of the interview, recently become concerned about Pro-Life issues, had joined SPUC¹²² and taken part in a prayer vigil outside an abortion clinic. He was at pains to say what a major step this had been, and that it had come about through self-conscious theological reflection.

The role and nature of theology in the theological reflection was not always clear in the examples, which often moved from problem to resolution in the narrative with little reference to either theological or biblical ideas. When I asked the students 'where was the theology in that example?', there were different responses. Derek, giving a second example of the change of policy in the Ushaw Tuck Shop to stop selling Nestle products, said he didn't know where the theology was! Others when pressed did have a rationale in theological terms. Dennis' example of responding to a famine in India by giving through CAFOD was, he said, a response based on Christian values. Other (non Christian) values would say 'why bother' or that there were other priorities, but the Christian response was one of compassion. Compassion and other Christian values, he believed, were nurtured in individuals by 'attention to our Lord and prayer'. In effect he was arguing for a form of Christian virtue ethics, in which the problem is addressed by a person formed in certain virtues rather than through rational ethical thought processes. Craig, seemed to favour underlying theological themes as giving direction to the theological reflection. Discussing the issue of unemployment, he spoke in terms of 'gospel values such as the dignity of the human person' prompting both exploration and action to oppose 'anything that gets in the way of that dignity that stops a person flourishing'. Martin, on the other hand, when asked about his examples about not buying Nestle products and the Jubilee 2000 campaign, said that the theology was in the '10 commandments'. Just as 'Thou shalt not kill' is a pro-life theology, so 'Thou shalt not steal' can be seen as a challenge to the West to cancel 3rd world debt. This seemed to be a proof text approach, at first, though Michael went on to talk about the role of the conscience having an innate sense of right and wrong. This was common, he argued, to all human beings and was one of the ways in which we are made in the image of God. The 10 Commandments, the scriptures and the teachings of the Church feed the conscience, he thought, and the conscience leads people to a sense of unease at certain situations, which would in turn prompt a re-examination of the scriptures and research in order to find the right response. Hence while using the scriptures and the Church's

¹²² The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children.

teaching as a form of rationale or support for his thought and action, there was for him a prior prompting in which God was involved.

All these responses were elicited by way of probing rather than evident in the initial story. Hence there was often much below the surface in terms of theology, which was not present in the example given. There was a strong leaning towards established Church teaching or key theological themes alongside scriptures as a guide to action and an emphasis on the inner formation of either the conscience or the Christian virtues in individuals. There was little by way of critical assessment of the tradition or the scriptures as part of the process.

With the exception of Mary, all could recall and relate their own views and examples to the models of See, Judge, Act and/or the Pastoral Cycle. Some were aware of other models, such as the Study Prayer Action model of Pax Justicia and the 5th years had clearly been introduced to the work of Paulo Friere as part of their TRSA course, as all three mention this¹²³ independently and unprompted. The 5th year students seemed generally more comfortable with the models than the third year students, two of whom were keen to distance themselves from the models and slightly afraid that focusing on the term theological reflection and the models might detract from the real process which was an intuitive process rooted and animated in the spiritual life. Peter argued that if theological reflection is an intuitive process then it does not need to be 'rammed down people's throats'. More important for him was the prayerful reflection on the world around him.

my relationship with others and with God as I pray through that and work my way through events that have happened - that I think for me is the deepest level of theological reflection you can have.

It is difficult to interpret this difference between the two groups. It may be that whilst the third years were still coming to grips with the new terminology and the feeling threatened by the almost mechanistic models of action, the fifth year students no longer thought the models were a threat or had integrated the utility of the models within a wide range of subjects and a longer-term formation process. On the other hand it might be simply the two particular groups of students have reacted differently to the material.

¹²³ One had clearly found Friere's work very helpful. What had been a significant discovery for him was the view that 'the world is not an objective reality, it is what you make of it and the idea is then that you transform the world around you using Christian values.' Cf Friere (1972)

Theological reflection & spirituality

A strong feature of several students' views was the link to spiritual direction and retreat experiences. We have noted Mary's view of the 'other idea' of theological reflection being in reading and reflecting on scriptures on retreat. Three of the four 3rd year seminarians linked theological reflection in some way with spiritual direction, an obligatory and regular part of their training and discernment process. Derek, who had come across theological reflection within the Student Christian Council, also associated it with the writings of Ignatius of Loyola. He spoke of theological reflection being a regular part of his meeting with his Spiritual Director. Mark, likewise, affirmed the importance of theological reflection in spiritual direction, declaring that he 'became aware of the need to reflect on things theologically largely out of the context of spiritual direction'. Peter too felt that spiritual direction was a key part of his theological reflection, as evidenced in his decision to leave the NUS. Likewise, all three fifth year students mentioned the importance of prayer in theological reflection and two of them also explicitly related it to spiritual direction. Only Kelly, one of the two third year lay students did not relate theological reflection to spirituality.

This connection with spirituality in general and spiritual direction in particular was clearly an important strand of the interviews at Ushaw. In addition to the evidence above, several referred to the Ignatian practice of the 'Review of conscience'. A phrase which recurred in student comments in the TRSA sessions and reappeared in some of the interviews was that of 'a contemplative in action'. This phrase emanated from the President of the College in a lecture given to the whole community, and presents the idea of the Christian disciple or minister as a person whose prayer and contemplation is fixed on and in God who acts in the world to create and demonstrate Christian values. Clearly this had for some at least been a way of making best sense of the notion of theological reflection and integrating it within their self understanding and training. It is a reminder here that the wider context and values in which the education is situated is a vital factor in learning.

The Course

As the student evaluation forms over several years show, this was not the most popular course offered at Ushaw. Like most other courses, there were some who believed that

they gained much and others little. In the interviews there was some appreciation of the time given to journaling techniques. All the seminarians had some experience of journaling before the TRSA course but felt that there was helpful material to take this further and all students, lay as well as seminarians, had been encouraged to keep journals during their pastoral placements. Journaling had been a source of (theological) reflection on some occasion for all and most could differentiate different types or purposes of journaling.

Of the third years, 3 made reference to the exercises involving newspapers and the Bible¹²⁴. This clearly had made a visual impact on them and there was some appreciation of the symbolism. Derek thought it would be a good way to work with parishioners on theological reflection but whilst Martin appreciated the exercises he felt that his thinking had moved on. He considered that the news itself is filtered by capitalist/consumer needs and one must, therefore, be on the look out for what was not popular news as well and to read newspapers with a critical eye.

Eight out of nine mentioned the See, Judge, Act model that they had met in the course and appeared to have used this model beyond the course as a way of approaching or understanding their intuitive approach to situations and experiences. The apparent lack of sophistication when compared to other approaches or models appears not to matter, as it is perceived as only a model of a more complex process and is more straightforward to apply.

There were some reservations about the course particularly from third year students, the two lay people confessing to being most confused, and one seminarian strongly critical of the approach for other reasons. Mark argued that whilst there was much in the course on social analysis, justice issues were not underlined with theology. It was, he said, very dependent on the Pastoral Cycle and the See Judge Act models and that these kept cropping up in slightly more embellished forms. The model of 'See, Judge, Act' is too simplistic, confining the informing of our practice by church teaching or scripture to the 'Judging' element but neglecting the reality that a Christ centred approach would affect how we 'See', and how we 'Act' also. Finally he thought that the course was in too tight a timeframe – 10 weeks being too short. He also would have preferred it to be taught in

¹²⁴ Derek, Martin, Kelly. No fifth years made mention of this. As far as I can ascertain this was introduced into the course in 1999-2000 when the teacher of the course changed.

conjunction with Systematics lectures so that it was rooted firmly in theology. A consequence of the current approach is that the course can easily start with ('picking out of the air') a social justice issue rather than from within a contemplative perspective where relationship with God is central.

Assessed work

In general the students of both years related that the course had been assessed by an oral and a written task without question or comment, though I observed some anxiety on the course when the oral was outlined. One person had opted out of the assessed work (Kelly) and one did not know what she 'was supposed to do' (Mary). Martin clearly found the written assessment very valuable. He spoke at length about the topic he chose on drugs. As a former drug user he had not had time before to stand back from his own experience and work through the issues from a Christian perspective. He had used the fourfold structure of the pastoral cycle to examine the topic, and he believed he had achieved an objectivity about it. It was all part of what he called 'bringing reason to faith'. Overall, however, the assessed work did not feature in their recollections of the course greatly.

Theological reflection and pastoral studies

We have noted above the strong link most Ushaw students made to spiritual direction. The other connection students made was with the pastoral placements, though in many ways this was not as direct as I expected. For example, when asked whether featured in other parts of the curriculum, Dennis said he could not think of links other than with spiritual direction, but later he cited placement experiences in examples. Likewise Mary could only see links into other essay writing activities but came closest to demonstrating ability in theological reflection when talking about her imminent hospice placement report. Martin was quite clear that 'pastoral courses are theologically the weakest...theological reflection is not really part of it'. In such a strong statement, however, he was alone. Most (Francis, Craig, Mark, Peter, Kelly & Derek) saw theological reflection as involved or connected with placement work and reporting. Francis, for example, said that theological reflection did not really come up in other parts of the curriculum but that the 'end of year reflections' were probably meant to include theological reflection. Kelly saw some theological reflection in placement work in being asked to write about the background and the history of the situation you have been in and

then relate that in some way to God, theology and the Bible. Peter opined that Pastoral Courses do implicitly ask for theological reflection.

It would seem that the majority (of both year 3 and 5) thought that pastoral placement work was vaguely connected with theological reflection but preferred to talk of reflection in general rather than theological reflection. Whilst they could see parallels between pastoral case studies and the ideas and models of the TRSA course, they did not recognise any structured relationship between them. No one seemed to have grasped what staff had articulated, namely that the case studies and the end of year reflections were exercises in theological reflection, building on, and using the models introduced in the TRSA course. The pastoral staff were quite clear that placement work, the reports and the case studies are a key part of developing theological reflection. Students appear to have failed to grasp this.

The reason for this seems to be related to the assessment criteria. The assessment criteria for the case studies do not speak of theological reflection but simply of 'reflection'. Reflection is in fact the weightiest element of the 5 assessment criteria carrying 40% of the marks, but it is not overtly associated with theology. The description of 'reflection' given speaks of 'insights gained from the group's analysis and evaluation of the incident and your performance as a minister during it'. Theology is not explicitly mentioned. Indeed the only mention of theology appears in the descriptions in the assessment criteria associated with the analysis part of the discussion, where students are encouraged to explore a variety of perspectives including the Bible, theology, sociology, and psychology. Reflection here might be said to include theological reflection but the basic use and meaning of the term is clearly wider than theological reflection and thus different from the way in which it is used in the TRSA course. The connection is there but it is not obvious to students through the published assessment criteria.

In some ways this is rendered more confusing by the assessment criteria used by supervisors. By contrast to the case study assessment criteria, the report from the on site placement supervisor requires some judgement about the student's ability in 'Pastoral and Theological Reflection'. In this 10% of the marks are allocated to this element, and a series of questions are offered for the supervisor to ponder as he or she responds to the section. The supervisor is asked to comment on the student's:

- understanding of the mission of the church in the setting

- willingness to engage in reflection
- recognition of God's presence in pastoral encounters
- acknowledgement of reflection as a part of personal and pastoral development
- ability to make connections between life and faith

The sense of vagueness that characterised students' comments about the place and role of theological reflection in pastoral placement work reflects this ambiguous and perhaps inconsistent use of terms in pastoral studies as set out in the assessment criteria.

Theological reflection and preaching

In addition to spiritual direction and pastoral studies there was only one other link made to other parts of the training. This was made by one of the fifth year students, who, when asked about whether theological reflection figured in other parts of the curriculum, spoke spontaneously about preaching. In his recent 4-month parish placement he had had to preach for the first time:

Now I have begun writing homilies, I realise that theological reflection plays a big part in that ...now when I come to pray through the readings for the homily, that is one of the first things – What strikes me about this? What's happened in my own life, you know? Without consciously doing it you might pray through the gospels and something will strike you that happened just last week in hospital or visiting someone who is house bound and it all seems to fit in really. And that's theological reflection. [Craig]

The tone with which this was conveyed was one which often accompanies a surprising discovery. Catholic seminarians, unlike Methodists or Anglicans, do not begin to preach until their fifth year of training. Hence, whilst the tradition of spiritual direction may be stronger for Catholics and therefore is a natural place to relate or locate theological reflection, preaching may be neglected as a medium for developing theological reflection.

Conclusion

We note in this case, as with Cranmer Hall, that the majority of students had not encountered the term theological reflection before their ministerial training or seminary experience. It is evident, however, that within the Catholic Church in the UK some groupings, for example young people in the YCW, are also exposed to the term and students with a background in YCW bring this understanding with them to the seminary.

Most, however, develop an understanding of the term within the context of the seminary's teaching and training.

Like students at Cranmer Hall, the understanding of theological reflection for Ushaw students has a problem-solving dimension in that it allows individuals to review and reconstruct experience using theology in some way to resolve cognitive or affective difficulties or incongruities. That can be seen from the examples outlined above. The nature of theological reflection to emerge among students has a distinctiveness, however, characterised by two things: first, an interest in 'big issues' with a need to take action and second, an emphasis on spirituality and inner formation. By 'big issues' I mean social, political and ethical issues, which might be described as campaigning issues, for example homelessness, abortion and ethical trading. These appeared consistently in the paraliturgies, the oral presentations, the assessed written work and the examples given in interviews. By spirituality and inner formation I refer to extensive links made with spiritual direction, retreats and spiritual exercises. Whilst the core definitions of theological reflection are not substantially different from those given by Cranmer or NEOC students, the examples given and the ways of talking about theological reflection reveal these particular features. These, I suggest, arise in part from the teaching structure, and in part from the wider context of Roman Catholic ecclesiology and spirituality within a seminary.

Teaching structure

The institution's approach is broadly to introduce the notion through a taught course and then to practice theological reflection within the context of pastoral placements, particularly through the pastoral seminars. These are intended to work together but how well does it succeed?

The attempt to teach theological reflection in a classroom-based course was unique in these cases studies and perhaps some of the reasons that other institutions have avoided this approach and the reason that Ushaw have now ceased using this method are evident in our observations. The teaching-led approach that I observed used the main contact time for the communication of information primarily about methods and models. The style was informal but the main emphasis was on the comprehension of key models with some interest in the application of various techniques. Detailed worked examples were not used, and there was never more than a few minutes in any session for participants to

work on their own experience or shared concerns in a detailed or systematic way. The one visiting speaker, who could have offered a worked example of theological reflection on ministry with young people in Scouting, did not make any links with the main structure and content of the course nor any reference to the two principal models used. Whilst both entertaining and engaging well with students, he was not able to make the connections necessary for this to be seen as an integral part of the course. Consequently, students neither saw an extended worked example of theological reflection nor were they given space to develop their own. This may be one reason why in both the written and oral submission, there was a tendency towards simplistic and shallow arguments and the use of proof texts to bolster action to which individuals were already committed. In the examples offered by students in the interviews the same tendency to move from concern to action without careful or critical consideration of theological dimensions was evident.

On the other hand there was evidence that some learning was affected. Almost all those interviewed could relate the See, Judge, Act model and the Pastoral Cycle, some 3 years after their course, and a number had used these to develop their own thinking or practice. The overt link between worship and theological reflection used in the course was remembered and this related for many to the idea of integrating spirituality, worship and action. The Cardijn model was used only in this teaching programme. It was wholly absent from the other two case studies. Moreover, it was the model that the majority of students made use of and, as far as can be judged, continued with them beyond the course, in that all the fifth year students offered this model as the key model for their practice of theological reflection. The attention to 'big issues' as the focus of theological reflection may have been encouraged implicitly by the examples given by the lecturer in the course of the teaching, which were often drawn from his own campaigning commitments and also by the use of the 'See, Judge Act' model. Action is obviously central to the Cardijn approach, especially as used in some YCWs activities, and would be more resonant with Catholic social theology. The assessment structure connected with the course was another significant factor in that it oriented students towards a 'Christian Response to a Social Issue' and thus implicitly shaped the learning outcome and process.

The pastoral seminars have been evolving and changing in recent years and the current pattern seemed to be appreciated by students. The students interviewed did not, however, perceive the link between the taught course and the placement seminars. A few hazarded a view that they were or ought to be connected and some offered examples of theological

reflection taken from placement experience, but generally the connections were not made and these were seen as separate and discrete studies. This also resonates with a sense among students that the pastoral programme is distinct from the academic programme and that the overall educational coherence is difficult to discern.

As a structure for nurturing theological reflection in students the approach taken by Ushaw College seems to be potentially fruitful but in practice this is not realised. Most students develop a notion of theological reflection but do not particularly perceive this as developing in or being sustained by either the taught course or the pastoral programme. The importance attached to the role of the spiritual director and Ignatian spirituality for theological reflection is much stronger than these connections. Spiritual direction is an important formational structure in seminary life at Ushaw and provides a relationship in which conversation, theology, lifestyle and prayer come together. In the other case studies spiritual direction was seen by some as a way for sustaining theological reflection in future ministry, but it was not referred to as a significant contribution in the present and it was not a requirement of the programmes. Here, however, especially for seminarians, it is required on a fortnightly basis and thus is a natural place for many of the different parts of a person's life to come together. Spiritual direction is not required for lay students and it may be significant that the two lay people interviewed had most difficulty in relation to theological reflection. One felt she had failed to grasp it altogether, the other had opted out of the oral examination and was the only person not to refer at all to spirituality or spiritual direction in the interview. In the absence of other structures the relationship with a spiritual director becomes for seminarians the key to theological reflection. As for Cranmer students theological reflection is learned primarily in conversation outside the formal structure for learning and teaching theological reflection. For Cranmer students it is the role of the personal tutor that is a key relationship. This person is not normally the spiritual director for the student, though may sometimes legitimately cover some of this territory. For Ushaw students, the spiritual director is the key relationship in the formation of theological reflection. This relationship is not explicitly part of the nurture of theological reflection and attempts might be made to integrate it into the educational design, even if it is only to recognise its importance in the process. In the same way that one fifth-year student discovered preaching to be a form of theological reflection, so spiritual direction is another, and the educational design might utilise this by making the links and using this pattern in its programme.

The wider context

To some extent the location of theological reflection in the area of spirituality indicated other factors that need to be taken into account in the teaching and learning of theological reflection. The importance attached to the concept by students may reflect in some way how theological reflection relates to the core values operating within the institution as a whole. For seminarians formation as priest was strongly related to spiritual direction, a high priority within the institution to which substantial resources are devoted. The metaphor of a 'contemplative in action' used by the President of the College had lodged in the minds of several seminarians and was clearly a strong interpretive image through which they understood themselves. It also resonates with much current Catholic teaching about the nature of priesthood. The way that theological reflection might relate to this metaphor was most obviously via spiritual direction. This also relates to the emphasis on virtue ethics presented by several seminarians where action flows not so much from rational and systematic theological thinking but from the inner formation of a person who then acts theologically, as if by instinct. The lack of critical engagement with either the models of theological reflection or the theological tradition from which students drew, may in part be because of the modest exposure to theology and critical thinking at this stage in their development¹²⁵ but may also be due to a higher institutional value deriving from the seminary and the wider Catholic Church. Again we note that the two lay students in this context had the most difficulty in getting to grips with theological reflection. This is likely to continue for other lay students whilst the theological reflection is firmly linked to priestly formation, a feature which does not come from within the educational design but from the total context of this learning environment.

In this context, as in Cranmer Hall, theological reflection is a term which has strong professional associations. It is encountered by most within, not prior to, the seminary. Most seminarians incorporate it as part of the ministerial formation and see it as important in future ministry. The concept is perceived as a problem-solving pattern of thinking in which cognitive, affective and conative issues connected with faith are resolved, and it is principally learned through conversation. At Ushaw the primary conversation partner is the spiritual director. The taught course and pastoral placement seminars have some influence: the TRSA course to offer models and to encourage reflection on social issues; the placement seminars to encourage reflection on incidents

¹²⁵ This was the third course teacher's reason for the lack of criticality. He suggested that theological reflection should be tackled again in later years when students had studied more theology.

and experiences encountered on placement. The total programme remains disparate, however, rather than co-ordinated. Critical theological thinking is not a strong product of the process. It does not generally help lay people to develop theological reflection and it gives little attention to how lay or ordained may help parishioners to use and develop theological reflection.

4.3 Case Study: The North East Oecumenical Course (NEOC)

The North East Oecumenical Course (NEOC) was founded in 1976¹²⁶ under the name The North East Ordination Course. Its original purpose, as its name suggests, was to offer training for ordination for Anglicans, particularly for those who were training for non-stipendiary ministry (NSM) and others for whom training for ordination would have to fit alongside full-time or part-time secular paid employment. Its approach is to offer training in a dispersed model where students study at home, come together in groups for weeknight teaching sessions, for a certain number of weekends and a summer school each year. Its name was changed in 1994, after a gradual embracing of the training of ordinands for the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and opening its doors to independent students. The new name was intended to reflect the wider scope of its training work. It is also a partner sharing some courses with the Readers Training Schemes of Newcastle & Durham Diocese and the Newcastle Ordained Local Ministry Scheme.

The numbers on the course are a little over 40 of which between 30 and 35 are from the Church of England and the remaining a combination of Methodist and URC sponsored candidates and independent students. One or two each year are training as lay people but most are preparing for ordained ministry with a gender balance of 60% women to 40% men¹²⁷. There are four core staff at NEOC¹²⁸ and extensive use is made of part-time tutors for tutoring module materials, as well as mentors, regional and local supervisors for placements, and external assessors.

At NEOC all students follow a single track through three years of training and formation¹²⁹. Broadly this consists of three strands of study: Traditional Theology, Practical Theology and Formational Theology. The first involves 6 semester modules, 2

¹²⁶ NEOC Student Handbook 2000

¹²⁷ 1999-2000 the breakdown was CoE 36; URC 1; Methodist 4; Other 1; Male 17; Female 25; Training for Ordination 41; Lay 1. In 2000-2001 CoE 33; URC 3; Methodist 4; Other 1; Male 17; Female 24; Training for Ordination 39; Lay 2.

¹²⁸ Three full-time equivalents. There is also a course administrator.

¹²⁹ There are exemptions granted to some modules but the importance of student interaction at the weekends and summer schools means that students still attend sessions even where they have previously covered the work.

per year, covering Old Testament, New Testament, Liturgy, Ethics and Doctrine¹³⁰.

These are taught in weeknight small group teaching and weekend lectures and involve assessed written assignments. Practical Theology is pursued through a series of projects, a placement and seminars with written assignments, whereas the Formational Theology is largely work with a personal tutor and assessed through self-assessment exercises, reports and presentations. There are additional block studies and an annual 5000-word end of year assignment, which is designed to help the students draw together the various strands in each year and integrate their learning.

Theological reflection at NEOC

Theological reflection is seen as central to the whole programme at NEOC. It is explicitly identified in the Practical Theology Handbook as fundamental to this part of the programme but features in some way in all parts of the programme and in the basic aims of the course. The Student Handbook states that the course aims to make students into theologians. These theologians have three dimensions to their work. They are to be: 'reflective theologians, liturgical theologians and practical theologians'. Reflective theologians are

people able to bring together what are often separated worlds of academic learning and pastoral practice not simply by applying learnt theology to actual situations ... but by discovering the theology which is always woven into the fabric of existence or hidden within the story of actual happenings. A reflective theologian is not a theological expert but a person able and willing to think through experience and reflect on practice using those theological resources which are constantly being developed by prayer and study.

This notion of discovering theology implicit in life and practice is emphasised in the Practical Theology Handbook also where various ideas of practical theology are discussed and the course's own approach outlined as 'Theology which is discovered in practice' (p3). Theological reflection is thus expressed in the type of person to be formed by the process. In the Formational Handbook one of the course objectives, used by students for self assessment purposes, is D3: 'At the conclusion of the course, candidates should have developed basic skills of interpretation, so as to be able to make connections between their own life experience and the Christian tradition of faith, and to think theologically about their own context'¹³¹.

¹³⁰ 2 modules are on Doctrine.

¹³¹ NEOC Formational Handbook 1998/99 p24

The other two dimensions or types of theologian are similarly marked by reflective practice. A liturgical theologian is defined as someone who ‘by preaching, teaching and example can enable the powerful interplay between contemporary events and trends and the biblical story and the church’s story’ and a practical theologian is a person who can be involved in the many diverse activities of their situation but be ‘someone with the ability to give guidance and provide vision for the church, and who can embody and live the vision in creative, imaginative and self-involving ways.’

Theological reflection is defined in the NEOC literature as ‘making use of our own theology in actual situations’¹³², ‘coming to see our experience in the light of our Christian faith’ and ‘developing our understanding of Christian Faith in the light of our experience’¹³³. This, it suggests, is something that most Christians are doing unconsciously much of the time. It is the role of training, however, to seek to make this habitual process conscious because there is often a gap between knowing and using theology. The process to achieve this consciousness involves beginning ‘‘practically’ from the life situations, questions, issues and decisions which life and ministry constantly throw up’ and looking at them ‘in the light of Christian tradition which we are also, at the same time, studying and encountering – scripture, doctrine, history, liturgy, ethics’. This, as the introduction suggests, may have an effect also on the way the Christian tradition is understood. ‘This process in turn promotes a fuller grasp of the tradition itself – indeed scripture, history and tradition may begin to come alive in new ways when used in this way’

The nurturing of theological reflection in the programme is primarily through the practical theology strand in the form of three basic projects that students undertake. The first is called the ‘**Life and Work Project**’ and involves the students in their first year identifying a past experience or ongoing issue in their lives and working on this over a period of months with the help of a mentor. The final product is a short (1000 word) assessed project report. The student may choose to look at either ‘some area in their own employment’ or, for those who are not at work, ‘a significant area of their day to day concerns, outside a specific church context’. Three steps are outlined in the material for the process. Step 1 is the identification of the question, issue or topic. Step 2 is the exploration of the topic using any appropriate methods and the identification of ‘the best

¹³² NEOC Practical Theology Handbook 1998/99 p2

¹³³ Life and Work Project: ‘A Note on Theological Reflection’, Practical Theology Handbook p12.

kinds of questions to ask'. The final step entails addressing such theological questions as 'Where is the presence and activity of God in this situation' or 'In what respects does this situation need redemption?'. As they work through these stages the mentor, a person usually chosen because he or she has experience in the particular topic area, meets regularly with the student asking questions and suggesting reading and ways of taking the exploration further. Time is also programmed into the residential weekend during this period for students to discuss the project with tutors and students including making brief presentations on the project's progress. When the assignment is submitted it is sent to a Pastoral Assessor. This person interviews the candidates about the project and certifies completion of the Project or identifies further work to be done. The assessment is on a pass/fail basis but a distinction can be awarded for work considered to be outstanding. The Director of Practical Theology sees this as a key exercise in theological reflection.¹³⁴

Perhaps because of the dispersed nature of the learning, written guidelines are provided on several aspects of the process of the project. In addition to the material on the stages of the project, and a 'Note on Theological Reflection', a six-page, step-by-step guide/questionnaire is provided for pursuing the study. This is a series of starter questions to consider in order to help people identify and consider the issue or experience. The first step is for a student to outline on paper the basic story of an experience or incident and then examine in more detail their own roles, the changes that occurred, the issues that were raised - ethically, practically, personally, pastorally or socially - and the guiding principles concerns or motives that were operating. The next step offers the option of two routes for taking the exploration deeper. Route 1 is described as the thinking-reflecting route, where students are helped, again through a series of suggestions and questions to begin to lay alongside the experience, biblical and theological material. Route 2 might be described as the affective route because it stresses the personal involvement of the student and encourages him or her to concentrate on the 'feelings which may as yet be unresolved'. Again a structure of questions and suggestions is provided to facilitate a further consideration of the emotions attached to the incident both at the time and now. Then students are asked to consider the effect of the experience on prayer, worship, Christian commitment and understanding and whether and in what ways the Bible and Christian tradition were a 'help' or a 'block' to working through the experience. Finally they are asked to search for images of God or biblical incidents that capture the heart of the experience. Whichever route is taken the student is helped with a

¹³⁴ Interview with Director of Practical Theology, 10 August 2001

final series of questions to move towards the learning outcomes for this exercise and a set of further questions are supplied to reflect on.

Overall considerable resources and time are allocated to this exercise and in many ways the project is perceived by both staff and students as the backbone of the first year.

The second 'project' is a 15-month **placement** beginning in the second year and being completed early in the third year¹³⁵. The placement normally involves two sessions per week, one of which is a Sunday service. Over against what the course sees as students' most obvious perception of the placement as a contextual opportunity to learn ministerial skills, the main purpose of the placement is stated as 'an opportunity for theological reflection'¹³⁶. The task is to look at the practice of ministry in a setting some distance from the student's own experience, context and church tradition and ask what understanding of God is operating and what helps and hinders ministry in this context. In order to achieve this students are only allowed, for the first four months of the placement, to observe and must write a description and analysis of the context and life of the church, parish or chaplaincy to be discussed with the regional tutor before beginning to participate in the life of the church or other placement. The second stage is a period of analysis when the student, as a participant observer, looks in more detail at the life and ministry of the placement and examines its theological, personal and ministerial implications. From this a written final report is composed and like the initial report is submitted in draft form to the regional tutor before final submission and interview by the external assessor. As part of the preparation students are asked to take a particular 'focus' which will relate in some way to the placement work done by the students but not simply to be a task or topic but rather 'a lens through which to clarify the student's observations as a whole'.

Unlike the Life and Work Project there is no external mentor, though each student is in touch with a regional tutor to whom reports are submitted and is supervised by a minister in the placement setting. The role of Supervisor does not explicitly include theological reflection. Much of the guidelines to supervisors is about keeping an eye on boundaries and tasks undertaken and monitoring the student's feelings but they do note the supervisor's role in 'listening to the student's observations and comments, clarifying facts

¹³⁵ The written work must be submitted by the 1st week in January of the student's third year and an assessment interview takes place in February or March.

¹³⁶ Practical Theology Handbook p24

and challenging interpretations'. Theological reflection is more (deliberately) the responsibility of the student in this project. This is perhaps because the supervisor is to some extent the subject of the reflection. The student is also perceived to need to take more responsibility for their own learning and the nurturing of theological reflection at this stage. There are, however, sessions at the residential weekends set aside for students to consider and discuss aspects of their placements. The Director of Practical Theology particularly drew my attention to the session on models of ministry at which, after considering a variety of models of ministry, students reflect in small groups on the models operating in their placement context.¹³⁷ Again students are encouraged to make short presentations of their own analysis and reflection as part of the preparation for the final written assignment.

Again written materials are provided for helping students particularly in the first stage of the placement including a church profile sheet and a social audit questionnaire with information on where data can be obtained. There is also a list of questions expected to be covered in the final placement report.

The final 'project' is the '**Looking Forward to Ministry**' project undertaken by students in their final year between the ending of the placement in January and the June prior to the final summer school. The aim is to produce a theological statement 'highlighting some of the key principles perceived as foundational at the commencement of your ministry' and for this students largely work on their own as an exercise in 'self-managed learning', though staff are available to consult. The method outlined in the Handbook¹³⁸ is for the student to identify with the regional tutor two or three key experiences from the training period which will be used to focus reflection. They are asked to use these experiences to begin to answer key questions e.g. 'Given these experiences, what is my understanding of the nature of God?' and 'How do I now understand salvation?' The draft or interim statement is shared with the personal tutor and is presented to other students at one of the residential weekends for their critique. In the light of these discussions the student revises and finalises the statement and submits it for assessment. Progression is clearly intended in this exercise in as much as students are encouraged to draw and build on methodology as well as the content of their Life and Work Project and their placement and other aspects and incidents in their training but to work with an

¹³⁷ Interview with the Director of Practical Theology, August 2001

¹³⁸ NEOC Practical Theology Handbook 1998/99 p66

increased independence, without mentor or supervisor, to present orally and, to some extent, to defend their statement to peers, as well as submit a final written submission.

Of particular note in the NEOC structure is the role of the External Practical Theology Assessors¹³⁹ and the assessment criteria used. The intention is to have an assessor seeing all three pieces of work¹⁴⁰ by the same student with a view to making judgements about the person's 'development'. This means more than judging the written work and thus interviews are conducted following the submission of each piece to ascertain whether and in what ways a person has developed 'doing a piece of work' and 'between one piece of work and another'. Development is undefined except in the broadest terms of the candidate's ability to communicate, the effect of the piece of work on the candidate and the match between the written work and the person's oral discussion of the issue. There is probably an implicit idea about the person's suitability for (ordained) ministry and their development towards that but this is not explicit. What is explicit in the assessment criteria are the key recurring features of theological reflection. There are eight criteria by which all pastoral theology exercises are assessed. An additional three that are brought to bear on Life and Work projects and an additional six for examining the placement reports. Of the eight generic criteria, six are about the relationship between experience and theology. No. 1, for example, is evidence of the student's ability to 'describe, define and analyse their experience as the starting point for theological reflection', no. 2 is evidence of making 'meaningful connections between life experiences and the historic truth claims of the Christian community', no 3 is the ability to 'articulate clearly their own synthesis of faith tradition and the particular experience under consideration' and no.4 is evidence of ability to 'use Scripture and tradition to illuminate and interrogate their interpretation of experience (and vice versa)'.¹⁴¹ Additional criteria for the specific pieces of work relate directly to the steps or routes for the project and press home the importance of theological reflection. For example, in the Life and Work project assessors are to look for the student's ability to 'formulate/uncover the questions which lead to theological reflection'.

¹³⁹ There are several names for these assessors in the NEOC literature including External Assessor, Pastoral Studies Assessor and Practical Theology Assessors.

¹⁴⁰ The three are the Life and Work Project, the mid-course Summer School report and the Placement report. The 'Looking Forward to Ministry' submission is assessed by course NEOC staff.

¹⁴¹ The three which are not explicitly concerned with theological reflection are no. 6 which is about bibliography and secondary reading, no. 5 which asks for awareness of the methods they are using and no. 7 concerned with the use of human science as an aid to reflection.

The Practical Theology assignments are judged on a pass or fail basis and the students considered not to pass must revisit the work to re-submit the report, undergo a second interview and in extreme cases undertake another project or placement. The dominance of the theological reflection criteria within this exercise and the pass/fail assessment suggests that the assessors are making judgements about a level of competency in theological reflection on the part of students.

Whilst the Practical Theology programme is designed to carry the bulk of the work in nurturing theological reflection it is important to note the views of staff that the underlying approach to their whole programme is the intention to produce Reflective Theologians and that other key elements such as the end of year (5000 word) assignments reinforce and develop theological reflection skills.

Student Experience

I conducted twelve interviews with NEOC students, four from each of the three years of study, deliberately choosing a mixture of genders and denominations, and including two whose training was not in the first instance for ordination.

Pseudonym	Gen der	Ye ar	Denomin- ation	Training for:	Age	Employment
Terry	M	1st	Anglican	Ordained (NSM)	50	Lecturer
Lorraine	F	1st	Anglican	Lay ministry	63	Volunteer in Cathedral
Moira	F	1 st	URC	Ordained (NSM)	51	School Teacher
Irene	F	1 st	URC	Ordained	56	Child Protection Officer
Ivan	M	2 nd	Anglican	Ordained (NSM)	49	School Teacher
James	M	2 nd	Methodist	Ordained (Itinerant)	41	Accountant
Diana	F	2 nd	Methodist	Ordained (Itinerant)	39	Quality Officer NHS
Jane	F	2 nd	Anglican	Ordained (Sector)	42	Lecturer
Jeffrey	M	3 rd	Metropolitan	Leadership/ordination	35	Social worker
Doreen	F	3 rd	Anglican	Ordained (NSM)	49	Packaging client manager
Sarah	F	3 rd	Methodist	Ordained (MLA)	42	Not employed
Sylvia	F	3 rd	Anglican	Ordained (Sector)	49	Teacher
Average age: 44 years						

Figure 11: NEOC students interviewed

All the interviews were conducted face to face, some at St John's College, but most in interviewee's homes. A number of subsequent telephone conversations took place in order for me to ask further questions on analysis of the transcripts and students allowed me to read their Practical Theology project work and in some cases other assignments they thought were significant for the development of theological reflection. I was also able to interview the core staff of NEOC and the Practical Theology Assessors. All the interviews took place in the academic year 2000/2001 mainly between May and September 2001.

Findings

The first and most obvious feature of the interviews with this group of students was enthusiasm: enthusiasm for the NEOC course in general and for the notion of theological reflection in particular. Of the twelve people interviewed, eleven were familiar and comfortable with theological reflection and spoke positively about it. Of these, only three people claimed to have encountered the term before beginning NEOC yet all could offer a ready definition and examples. These students believed that they had come to understand the term and develop practice through their NEOC studies and it was even claimed by some that theological reflection went to the heart of the NEOC approach to learning. More than in the other two case studies, ownership and eagerness were palpable.

The three who had heard the term before had come across it in the context of theological study or formation. One had heard the term used when he was in a Roman Catholic Junior seminary as a boy, one had encountered the notion on an Anglican Reader's course, which had preceded NEOC, and the other had met it on a Bishop's Faith and Life course. Two others said they thought they might have heard the term before but were not sure and even if they had, they had not given it any meaning prior to NEOC, they said. One person claimed not to have met the term at all either before or on the NEOC programme. 'It is not a phrase that I know' she said and whilst she could talk about reflection and to some extent about theology¹⁴², she showed no sign of a concept of theological reflection of any kind. This seemed strange in view of the fact that all the others interviewed had a strong familiarity with the notion and located the source as the course itself, claiming that it was one of the most salient features of the programme. The student in question had, at the time of the interview, just completed the first year of NEOC and though still in the early stages of the programme, would have been exposed to

¹⁴² This was the only person to claim that personal theology or faith had not changed during the course.

considerable work on the topic. Staff were perplexed that anyone might come to the end of the year with no notion of theological reflection¹⁴³. The only explanation that I can offer was that the person spoke in the interview of particular personal problems that had occurred during the first year and in the interview itself was considerably preoccupied with these issues. It is possible that these issues had interfered with the studies and had become a dominating focus during this period. In part the interview offered the person a way of talking about these problems, ironically trying to make sense of some experiences without the term used by many to describe this meaning-making process. This exception was in sharp contrast to the other eleven who appeared familiar and confident with the term. Several believed that they have been 'doing theological reflection' for many years without knowing it but were convinced that recognising the term had added to or developed their ability.

Definitions of theological reflection

One person saw theological reflection as 'a reflection on the theological input of what I do, a reflection on what I read and a reflection on what I hear'¹⁴⁴. By this she appeared to mean that there was something to be learned about the nature of God from these different dimensions of her life or external stimuli, a distilling or extrapolation of theology from life experiences. This resonates with the most common definition of the term among the NEOC students, which was connected with the idea of asking the question 'where is God in this situation or experience?'¹⁴⁵ One person saw theological reflection as discerning the presence of God in her working life:

its looking at ... the work I do now (which as I have said I have always felt called by God to do) so in a sense there is a theological reflection in part of doing what I do. I don't see it as me going out to do anything ... underpinning that is 'where is God in this?' [Irene]

Another said something similar in general terms:

Theological reflection is an attempt to find the immanent and the living God at work in the world that he has created. [Ivan]

¹⁴³ I shared this response with staff without indicating a name or even gender to staff in one of the feedback sessions.

¹⁴⁴ Lorraine

¹⁴⁵ This question is posed in the guidelines for the Life and Work Project about which all spoke positively. It was used by students independently of conversation about the Life and Work Project showing a degree of personal ownership even if the guidelines were the original source.

Others expressed the same conviction that theological reflection was driven by this key question:

taking time to stand back and reflect on something that has happened during the course of the last week, month or even year and seeing God at work in that, because God is present everywhere. [James]

it is about meeting a particular situation or place and trying to unpick it a bit more and maybe see where God is in there and where I am in there and where the relationships are - to stand back and reflect. [Jeffrey]

I think it is about asking first of all where is God in this situation, where do I see God at work, where would other people see God at work. [Sylvia]

The other major approach to theological reflection seems to be that of setting faith and theology alongside life experiences and making links and connections:

bringing faith and your belief into your everyday living and how you perceive that and how you bring your faith into contact with where you are now. [Doreen]

The way in which the understanding of God, the nature of your faith, is put alongside ... a range of knowledge ... and then being actually engaged in looking at the relationship between your faith, your knowledge and the incidents in your life and indeed in the lives of others that you may be involved with. [Terry]

It is a bit about stopping and putting all the bits on the table and seeing how the jigsaw fits together and looking to see whether there are any bits that are missing. [Jane]

These two broad definitions, by no means exclusive of one another, highlight a problem-solving dynamic of theological reflection. It is a process or form of thinking that allows individuals on the one hand to discern the presence of a God whom they believe to be active in the midst of the world and therefore within their own lives but not necessarily obvious or apparent to them or to others. Similarly it is a way of harmonising or, at least addressing the disparate nature of, various parts of a person's experience with a view to integrating it into a whole or larger and more coherent picture.

Examples

The examples of theological reflection offered by interviewees fell into three basic types: personal, work related, and church or placement focused. Of these the largest number were work related. One of the schoolteachers, Ivan, spoke about the biblical idea of covenant as a way of understanding and responding to his school's structure and relationships. Here he conceived of the school's management team in a covenant with the rest of the staff and the teaching staff in covenant with pupils. As an ordained person

who following training would work in that situation, he saw himself as a prophet calling attention to the importance of covenant in the school's life and also to the breaching of covenant that occasionally occurred. Irene, a child protection officer, related her work in removing children and finding homes for often badly damaged children to biblical images and ideas. In recalling a recent successful adoption of a mentally handicapped and abused child she spoke about 'rebirth' and 'new creation' following evil and destruction. James, an accountant, gave the example of conflict in making business decisions, and another teacher, Moira, spoke of the tension between the pressure of the system on her to achieve results in school and her own intuition about individual children's readiness for particular developments and activities. She had not resolved this dilemma but had found help in recasting the tension in terms of the theological idea of incarnation - God's willingness to work within but not be determined by the limitations of the world. Several others spoke in similar ways relating their work or particular aspects of their work to biblical or theological ideas. Three others who gave another type of example as their immediate response also referred to work based examples later in the interview, meaning that 10 from 12 gave examples that were connected with their paid employment. This tendency is even stronger when we recognise that one of the two that didn't give such an example is retired and her main occupation is now working in a voluntary capacity in a Cathedral, about which she did give an example. The other who offered no examples is the one who did not recognise the term theological reflection.

Some of these work-related examples had been the focus of the 'Life and Work Project' undertaken in the first year. Indeed it was significant that when asked for an example of theological reflection some students immediately told the story of their project. These people had spent several months exploring an issue and had been able to consider a number of ways of interpreting it and developing their thoughts. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should think of this as an immediate example. On the other hand, even where the focus of the project had not been their work, for example one person had looked at her experience of 'singleness', the approach seems conducive and transferable to work experiences and issues. The examples given above by Ivan and Irene, had not come from their Life and Work Projects but they nevertheless felt confident about interpreting their work life in theological terms.

The second largest number of examples was of personal experiences. One person talked about coming to grips with a serious car accident, which had had a permanent effect on

his wife's health and mobility¹⁴⁶. This had made him consider 'the way God works in the world, and increasingly recently reflecting on it in terms of what it might mean in understanding God as both a God of goodness and a God who is actually involved in a world where there is evil'. He had looked again at the notion of 'the devil', a concept he had always had difficulty believing in, he said, and through exploring the work of biblical scholars had come to a new understanding of how perceived evils can be a source of growth and development. Another person gave the example of her Life and Work Project in which she had reflected on her experience of singleness¹⁴⁷ and how that was perceived in church and society. In the interview it was apparent that this had been stimulated by some comments and reactions from friends and family that she had experienced as hurtful and that exploring this issue had been part of resolving some of the emotional issues surrounding the experience. She had eventually found meaning and value through the exploration of an Icon and in considering the 'notion of relatedness' at the heart of the concept of God as Trinity. It was not altogether clear to me how this addressed singleness but it was clear that it had had a profound effect on the person. She said 'It was really positive in that it made me feel really valued'. A third example given by another person was about making sense of a period of redundancy and a reflection on the value of human beings within and outside paid employment.

The third cluster of examples was about church or church-placement experiences. Second and third year students had by the interview stage between 9 and 15 months of church placement experience and some offered these as examples of theological reflection. One spoke of being on placement in the unfamiliar environment of a rural community and gave a particular example of a 'race night' organised by the church, which involved attending a local pub and betting on horses in videos of horse racing. She had been prompted by her supervisor, the incumbent, to go away and think why they were doing this as a church. She had thought of a number of different reasons in terms of 'the church going to be where the people are at' and 'the conversations she had with people in the pub' with village people who were not members of the church.

Another striking example of this type was given by a member and former lay leader of the Metropolitan Church in Newcastle upon Tyne. This denomination, whose origin lies in the United States, is openly welcoming to gay and lesbian Christians. Because the

¹⁴⁶ Terry

¹⁴⁷ Diana

church draws people from across a wide region there are mid-week satellite meetings in different areas, often taking the form of a meal followed by Bible study and prayer. One of these meetings had been in a room at the centre where the person works as a social worker and whilst the meal was taking place, two local prostitutes had entered the room seeking supplies of condoms. As convenor of the meeting and local social worker he had obtained these and passed them on, quickly dismissing the women to return to the meeting. The food that was laid out had obviously interested the women and after they had left the group members found themselves discussing what they should do in this situation. The next two or three meetings were given over to looking at hospitality in the Bible and their own experiences of being unwelcome in some churches because they were gay. This was discussed in relation to their purpose for meeting, that is for prayer and fellowship as Christians. Ultimately they resolved that should a similar situation arise again, food and welcome should be offered but also the purpose of the gathering should be communicated so that prayer could take place as intended. The resolve was in fact tested when a man who had been drinking turned up at the next meeting. He was offered and shared food and left when the group began to pray, though returned later. This, the person concluded had been a theological reflection on inclusivity.

Like the definitions, the examples pointed to the problem-resolving nature of theological reflection. In the personal examples there were both cognitive and emotional problems to be addressed in order to make sense of an experience; in the work related examples the individuals were seeking a framework in which to understand their dilemmas and difficulties in a way that was informed by Christian belief and which helped them to cope. The church/placement examples pointed to new or problematic situations, about which sense needed to be made and in the last example there was a need to develop new practice based on Christian conviction.

What was missing from the examples was any major social or political issue. Unlike the Catholic students at Ushaw there were no 'big issues' except where they touched individuals in their work, personal or church lives. The teacher struggling with the pressures affecting schools and teachers was dealing with it on the level of personal theological resolution of the tensions not in terms of political or social action informed by theology.

Elements nurturing theological reflection in the NEOC programme

In the conversations with the interviewees about what in the NEOC programme developed theological reflection a number of factors were identified. Many stressed the implicit and pervasive presence of theological reflection in the programme. 'It is an integral part of everything we do' said Lorraine. Irene described it as 'implicit' and 'underpinning the whole programme', whilst Diana said 'we are always being encouraged to reflect on things - in first year it is a joke.' Students saw it as built into the structure of their gatherings at weekends, ('In virtually everything on at the weekends you are encouraged to reflect theologically' [Doreen]) and their weekly sessions where much of the teaching input is given ('in both modules so far we are explicitly challenged to exercise a degree of theological reflection' [Terry]).

The single most cited element that students saw contributing to the nurture of theological reflection, however, was the Life & Work Project. Students spoke of this exercise in the most glowing terms:

That was superb. I loved doing that and I got so much out of it [Irene]

That was quite difficult but I really enjoyed doing it [Diana]

Found out a lot more than I expected [Doreen]

I really got my teeth into that and really, really enjoyed it because I was able to look at something and go through a whole process of looking at a particular situation and then reflecting on it, writing down those feelings and reflecting on my own and looking at where those feelings brought me and what traditions in the past those had been affirmed in or challenged. [Jeffrey]

That I found very beneficial. It taught me a great deal about reflection: away from the situation trying to think it through at a pace that you decided and allowing yourself to be yourself with God and seeing what that disclosed to you. It illuminated the situation, the historic situation, but it also told you a lot about yourself, which is very important. [James]

Sarah spoke about the project pulling together various disparate threads of her life at a particular time and helping her to see it as a whole, whilst Jane saw her work situation 'entirely differently' through the exercise. The enthusiasm for this part of the programme was not confined to the first year students, who had recently finished the exercise. Students from all three years referred to the L&W project with warmth and immediacy and third years in particular referred to the placement work and in one case the 'Looking Forward to Ministry' project as building on the L&W process.

The success of the L&W project seems to be connected to several elements in the perception of the participants. First, they chose an issue or experience that affected them strongly¹⁴⁸. Many used the 'critical incident'¹⁴⁹ approach to begin their exploration methods highlighting both the affective and cognitive challenges posed. Second, each person was allocated a personal mentor chosen according to the subject and this person gave considerable time as well as expertise over several months. In all cases the role of the mentor and particularly the conversations were highly rated, above other aspects of the exercise such as the writing of the final report and the conversation with the assessor. Mentors had listened to the story, asked probing questions, suggested appropriate reading, and participated with the person in a search for meaning through the process. A third factor in the success of this project was the opportunity to share aspects of their exploration with peers on the weekends which reinforced its significance and also occasionally provided new ways of thinking about the subject. Finally, the sheer amount of time given to the exercise – a six month period – was perceived to allow for various lines of exploration to be used, thoughts to germinate and develop and for reflection to mature. The L&W project both modelled a process for students and signalled its value by the quantity of resources involved in the exercise. Students felt personally valued by having their own mentor and with this person they had time and confidence to explore in detail an issue or experience important to them and to engage with it from a theological vantage point.

The L&W project and the sense of the implicit nature of theological reflection in the NEOC programme combined to convey to the students that theological reflection was a core value at NEOC. This impression of a systemic orientation towards theological reflection is perhaps also connected to the strong commitment to theological reflection of the core staff, and the part-time tutors and mentors used by the programme. Students are in fact involved with a wide range of tutorial staff (more staff than students in the programme according to the Principal) and there appears to be a consistent message from all staff about the value and use of theological reflection. This is clearly true of those employed for the purpose of the Life and Work project. Moreover, all staff interviewed and observed exhibited a conviction that theological reflection was central to their own lives and ministries. It is likely that this goes beyond professed philosophy. Students

¹⁴⁸ Issues chosen included: The experience of redundancy; Singleness; Promotion and power at work; Ethics and Conflict in business; Listening to children as a way of understanding prayer; Coping with conflict in the classroom; Failure to support a church member; a period of life in unemployment and unsatisfying work;

¹⁴⁹ See Chadwick & Tovey (2000). Critical Incident Analysis is used in both for training and learning purposes in both nursing and teaching. See Flanagan 1954; Cormack 1996; and Tripp 1994

were discerning and able to distinguish between espoused theory and theory in operation. Over issues such as denominational bias the espoused theory is one of equality and ecumenism but most students did not think this was in reality so, especially the non-Anglicans. By contrast, students perceived a consistency of message about theological reflection, which was then internalised by them.

The next most frequently mentioned element was the 'spirituality groups' used at the weekends. These are small groups of about 7 or 8, made up of people from all three years, which remain together throughout the year and are used as discussion, reflection and worship groups at the residential weekends and summer school. The instruction or encouragement 'to reflect' on something presented or encountered in the programme is often the key task for the group in any session and as people feel confident with their group, the sharing moves to deep levels. These groups were also cited as the place where ideas about the L&W projects or placement work were explored.

Other factors were identified also though these were more diverse and often only mentioned by one or two people. Two people mentioned the retreats organised as part of the NEOC programme, a couple spoke of the role of their personal tutor in conversations, whilst another mentioned the writing of a spiritual biography that she had completed as her first task at NEOC and which had prompted the Principal to comment that 'theological reflection was natural to her'. One person talked a lot about using a journal as a source for theological reflection and another spoke of the traditional theology course as a major resource for theological reflection. This suggests that whilst the overall framework was productive for the ownership of theological reflection, particular elements within the programme were helpful to some individuals but not all.

There was virtually no mention of particular models, methods or books that had been useful for theological reflection. When pressed a couple said that there had been introductory sessions early in the year at NEOC in which models were offered but as one of them put it 'none had taken up residence'. Another person referred to the pastoral cycle and said that she had bought some books on the subject but couldn't remember off hand any titles or authors. These comments were not offered in any dismissive way or, as occasionally one detected in the college based programmes, as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the institution. Rather they were matter of fact comments from people

who had discovered the worth of theological reflection and their own way for pursuing it. One person's comment reflects the words and feelings of several.

It seems to be that it is very hard to pin down. I mean, I've said what I think it is about because that is how it works for me, but you might ask someone else who would say something completely different. And we found that people who came to talk to us about theological reflection actually said all kinds of different things and we couldn't get a grasp of it. And I think it might be the kind of thing you learn by doing, probably in discussion and consultation with a group or somebody else. I'm not sure that it is easy to teach as a discrete discipline, I don't think you can. [Sylvia]

Importance for ministry and the future

When questioned about the role of theological reflection in future ministry there was almost universal agreement that this was important. Terms used to convey how people felt about theological reflection in their future ministry included 'lifeblood' [Doreen], 'vital' [James], 'The bread of my ministry' [Sylvia], and 'quite critical' [Terry]. One person saw it as necessary because of the particular pattern of ministry she would be following as an ordained person in a secular setting.

I hope I will make the time to do it because in some ways what I am doing is treading a path that nobody else has trod because nobody else is in the position I am in. In parish ministry, I know they are all different, but there are certain aspects which when you move from parish to parish are there... where I am there are no lines, no boundaries really ... so in some ways it is developing things as I go. [Jane]

Others related it to their work in parish, church or circuit ministry and there was a widespread conviction that theological reflection would be a key part of professional ministry. This was so as to be able to fulfil their own personal role and calling and for which they would need an ongoing means of sustaining themselves. Questioned about how this might be, students suggested a variety of answers. One felt that it would continue for her through regular theological reflection within the team in which she would work, another through continued theological reading, whilst another hoped that the strong bonds build between NEOC students would continue to exist after the course as a network and support group in which theological reflection would be a regular part. One made a strong case for theological reflection to be part of the church community's activities in which he would share because he passionately believed this was primarily a corporate not an individual activity. Clearly from some of the other suggestions above, this view of theological reflection as a corporate activity was shared by several. More

than one felt that a vital ingredient was taking time to stand back and reflect and this might entail quiet days or retreats planned into the timetable. Three individuals spoke explicitly of the role of a spiritual director in their own sustaining and development of theological reflection. Whilst these last two suggestions might be seen as individualistic the underlying conviction was probably the opposite: that theological reflection cannot be done easily on one's own. As one person put it in her view of the importance of a spiritual director, 'I've got used to being prompted'¹⁵⁰.

Most believed that there is a role for the ordained and other church leaders in helping parishioners and church members in this area though most had either not given much thought as to how this might happen or were unsure what methods would be appropriate. There was some caution about introducing the term theological reflection in parishes or churches. Diana said it would be a 'disaster', fearing perhaps a negative reaction to the terminology. Most talked in terms of the church's regular activities of Bible study, study groups, preaching and teaching from the pulpit or about informal conversations they might have with individuals and groups. The idea of accompanying people on their individual journeys emerged several times and there were echoes of the role of the mentor on the L&W project.

The former lay-leader of the Metropolitan Church whose story of the prostitutes interrupting the prayer meeting I recorded above, made the case for communities being engaged together with particular issue and concerns.

My hope would be that the role of theological reflection is to engage the people of God in our histories, in not fearing what's gone before us and using that to help us interpret today and the future because that is essential. It is no good just depending on somebody else's thought...it has got to be made real for us. And it is not just an individual thing it is a corporate thing, it's a community thing and that has a response in terms of reflection. [Jeffrey]

Overall there were a few ideas about how to enable others but these were vague and lacking in concrete detail. It is possible to argue at this point that at the time of the interviews it was not an urgent pressing issue for most students, though for third years ministry was either imminent or had already begun. On the other hand, as we shall argue in the next chapter, it is possible, as the NEOC case study shows, to devise an educational structure from which people emerge with a high personal regard for theological reflection and a developed personal practice but still leave them without the skills to facilitate

¹⁵⁰ Diana

theological reflection in others. For this most courses appear to lack the appropriate educational scaffolding.

Conclusion

Of the three case studies the NEOC programme appears to be the most successful in terms of the familiarity, ownership and confidence in theological reflection demonstrated by almost all its students. Its expressed objective of creating reflective theologians is realised in its students, at least in their self-perception. Its success appears to lie in a number of well-devised elements within a structure and in a staff team which consistently values and promotes practical theology.

At the centre of the educational structure is the Life and Work project. By the end of the first year students have a positive regard for what is to most of them a new and strange term and a worked example of the concept in action. They have been encouraged to choose a subject that has impinged directly on their life or work and have explored this with expert support to find meaning in theological terms. It is important to note the cost in terms of resources to NEOC. First, there is a considerable amount of written material provided to guide people through the exercise, well structured in terms of steps and questions provided for particular stages of the process. Second, there is time and care involved in the selection of a mentor for each person individually. Third, the mentors give significantly of their time and expertise to the individuals and in so doing affirm both the person and his or her search for understanding. Fourth, the weekends and spirituality groups are brought into the equation with time allotted for individuals to share their exploration and learn from other students. In other words a significant amount of precious contact time is deliberately allocated to this one project. Finally, the time scale of the project allows for fermentation and maturation and the product is valued both in terms of being assessed and by being the subject of conversation with a significant figure in the NEOC structure. This substantial investment of resources in the project does, however, pay dividends. Not only do students feel positively towards the notion, they have a powerful worked example that appears to be transferred into placements and other work where gradually mentor and tutor resources are withdrawn and replaced by the growing self confidence and autonomy of the learner who uses peers and draws on resources for theological reflection as needed. Participants emerge from the programme not simply as

individuals that have acquired skill in theological reflection but as practitioners who also recognise and value the need for others in the process and who wish to continue this interdependency model for their professional lives and for their continued practice of theological reflection.

It is not the only factor in the success of this model and there may be reasons why this exercise will not work in other contexts. The nature of the course with a single structure and small core staff means that shared core values have the potential to exhibit a powerful effect on the programme. This appears to be the case over practical theology as an approach to the preparation for and the practice of ministry. The extension of staff by using a large number of tutors, mentors and assessors seems to be managed so that new members of the extended staff team are either well inducted into the ethos or are chosen because they already demonstrate a commitment to these values. Students are in no doubt what value is placed on theological reflection within this programme and this consistent, though often subliminal, message is central to the success.

The age and gender balance may also be favourable to the nurture of theological reflection. Compared with the students in the other case studies, these students are older, with a mean age of 44 compared with 32 in Ushaw College and 35 at Cranmer Hall. According to Fowler's faith development stages (Fowler 1981) it is likely that NEOC contains more people in Stage 5 (Conjunctive Faith), which is characterised by a more dialectical thought pattern and a drive to find the unity of symbolic, conceptual and other beliefs¹⁵¹. Equally the slight dominance of women in the programme as a whole (60%) may also be significant. Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg (Gilligan 1982) and subsequent work by Belenky et al (1986) have argued that women's ways of developing and knowing have some distinct features. In particular they stress the relational and the integrative dynamics of women's thinking which may make theological reflection more amenable to them. These points cannot be argued in detail here, for I have not structured the investigation sufficiently to differentiate on age or gender grounds. They are noted, however, to indicate other possible explanations and lines of research.

Of course a singular factor in the success of the L&W project and its production of a disposition towards, and competence in theological reflection, is that almost all

¹⁵¹ A number of theories of development recognise the transition of thought and self awareness at the beginning of middle years see Fowler 1984, Erikson 1980; Levinson 1978; Kohlberg 1981.

participants are placed on the course primarily because they are in full-time employment and are not available to train in other ways. They are thus often living in two distinct and demanding worlds: the world of their secular employment and the world of theological education occupying at least 15 hours per week, many of their weekends and some of their summer holidays. The sharp juxtaposition of these two worlds lends itself to moments of dissonance and discontinuity and demands that either people work at the integration of their experience or compartmentalise it with very strong borders. The course sets itself to address integration, using theology as the larger framework for achieving this integration. Those in college or seminary are not as some suggest living apart from 'the real world' but the pressure for integration is rarely as intense as on courses such as NEOC where it is optimised and can be operationalised for precisely the kind of education outlined above. For example, the Cranmer Hall first year option to explore previous work as a focus for theological education does not appear to be as effective as the same exercise in NEOC. This may be explained at least in part because the pressure the two worlds are putting on each other is not as acute in the former as in the latter.

There are three weaknesses of this programme, however, which need to be highlighted. The first is that theological reflection becomes located primarily in issues that impinge upon individuals. As we noted earlier there were no 'big issues' given in the examples offered by this group of students. I do not mean that all the examples were personal and private. Many of them arose from the structural, social and political settings in which the students live and earn their living but they were resolved largely in the sphere of fresh personal understanding or individual action. Tackling structural problems or campaigning for social justice was not a salient feature of these examples. Thus it may be that beginning with the intersection of the world of work and theology within the person as this course does, effectively means that the issue of transfer is problematic, here as with the other case studies though in a different direction. Whilst NEOC students are able to build on the L&W model for their placement work and the 'Looking forward to Ministry' projects, they may have situated the process in personal, professional practice and are not easily able to make the transfer to other forms of practical theology and theological reflection.

A second problem also connected with transfer is the issue of the role of the ordained in facilitating churches and individual Christians in the integration of faith and life. Most

people were confident about their own ability in the areas but had little to offer beyond general ideas for how this would be a part of their ministry. Whitehead (1980) and Green (1990) argued for facilitators of theological reflection to be generated through training institutions. Whilst it would be unfair to make judgements about the effectiveness of these particular individuals in that aspect of their role especially when most have not yet begun, it highlights an area in the training programme which might benefit from further attention. Evidence from other research in Christian Education suggests that the ordained reproduce in churches patterns that have been used as part of their own training¹⁵². This might be hopeful in the case of NEOC students, if it were not for the imbalance of resources between this training institution and most churches. It is difficult to imagine the substantial resources used for one person to explore the L&W project being available, let alone used, in most parishes or churches. Hence, the institution may need to address how students make this transition and begin to address this part of their role.

Failure to address this second problem may result in the hardening of the third area of weakness, which we may call the professional reflective practitioner. NEOC though uncomfortable with the word 'professional' in fact is very successful in producing people who have a sense of their ministerial competence located more in theological reflection than ministerial skills (e.g. liturgical or pastoral). Without attention to transfer it is likely that this may become the defining professional characteristic of the minister and thereby exclude those who are not part of this professional group.

We must now turn to examine what we have learned from the three case studies together.

¹⁵² MTh Thesis at Westminster College, Oxford on Christian Education in the work of URC ministers came to this conclusion after studying all the work of ministers in one URC province.

4.4 Comparison and Conclusion to Case Studies

The three case studies are intriguing in that they demonstrate a number of common traits about theological reflection and its teaching and learning in these institutions, as well as exhibiting distinctive features and particular strengths and weaknesses. The common themes are fourfold.

A professional competence

In all three institutions most students arrive with no previous knowledge of the term. When familiar with the meaning generally given to theological reflection almost all acknowledge that this is in part an intuitive process that is natural to most, if not all, Christians and perhaps all human beings, and with which they have been unconsciously familiar. They nevertheless gradually adopt the language and connect the practice of theological reflection to their own formation as ministers or priests and to their professional practice of ministry. The ways in which the ordinands integrate theological reflection within their lives and ministry vary. With Ushaw students theological reflection relates strongly to personal spirituality, in Cranmer it is firmly attached to ministerial practice through placement experiences whilst for NEOC students it links work and faith where these different worlds meet in the individual. Despite these different patterns, for all it is an element in their formation for ministry and thus is part of a pattern of professionalisation. The fact that the terminology of reflective practitioner is frequently linked to theological reflection and the formation of ministers in these contexts reinforces this view.

A problem-solving pattern of thinking

Close attention to the examples given by students interviewed is very revealing. On the one hand the frequency of certain types of examples is different in each case. The majority of examples for NEOC students were drawn from the interface of secular work and faith, whereas for Ushaw students the most frequently used examples were 'big issues' and for Cranmer students most examples were from placements experiences. On the other hand, the narratives of the examples were often remarkably similar. These consistently began with a problem, or experience which raised a problematic issue,

followed by a process of exploration and reconstruction and the resolution of the problem by a new found coherence, a better emotional equilibrium or a fresh commitment to action. The resources for this resolution are theological, that is, the resources of the Bible, church history and Christian writings. These resources create the problem, in part, for in one form or another they exist and live within the worldview of the individual and within this individual they clash with particular experience. At the same time they are also the resources which are used for resolution of the problem, in that the individuals seek a deeper level of coherence and consistency based on their theological worldview as the highest and thus ordering principle of their commitments. It is through these, sometimes reconstructed, theological ideas that they find resolution and harmony, albeit temporarily, between their worldview and their particular experiences.

The role of conversation

Consistent also has been the role of conversation in the formation of theological reflection. In all three institutions theological reflection is initially learned and sustained in dialogue. In Cranmer the conversation partner initially is the tutor, in Ushaw it is the spiritual director whereas in NEOC it is the mentor in the Life and Work project. For all students the learning of theological reflection is through meaning-making in dialogue with an individual who is perceived to have some Christian authority and experience. This 'significant other' signals the importance of theological reflection by the time and attention given to it, as well as modelling theological reflection in his or her conversations and enabling theological reflection in the students by probing and prompting, posing questions which demand theologically-related responses, guiding towards resources, and engaging in conversations in which the students attempt to construct meaning. Without this pattern of dialogue the effectiveness of placement work or Life and Work projects would be in jeopardy. In most cases, others outside the core staff of the institution, such as supervisors, take the role of being a conversation partner over time and peer conversation also is valued.

The role of institutional and organisational values

We have noted in different ways how the overarching values of the institutions affect the teaching and learning of theological reflection. Within NEOC especially, there is a strong and consistent message about the importance of theological reflection which is evident in

the staff conversations and teaching, the literature produced, the educational ethos and structure of the programme. The recurring jokes about reflection that staff and first year students shared with me, on the one hand, and the frequent comment of NEOC students that theological reflection is an 'integral part of everything we do' and that it 'underpins the whole programme' on the other hand, make clear the commitment to and value placed on this notion. Likewise the presence on the Cranmer staff of a number of people involved in practical theology and the commitment of staff to study theological reflection together and place this at the centre of the teaching and assessment structure, conveys itself to students. At Ushaw the shaping and locating of theological reflection in the direction of spirituality is evidence of the influence of strong traditions of certain styles of spirituality in Roman Catholicism, the particular emphasis of the current staff and President and the wider ecclesiology and theology of priesthood.

Strength and weakness of programmes

In the process of the investigation, as well as identifying common factors in the teaching and learning of theological reflection, I have also inevitably evaluated the effectiveness of particular approaches and programmes. Whilst particular activities or structures can only be judged properly in relation to the integrity of the programme as a whole, there are some pointers to effective educational design in these programmes, which need to be noted.

1. **The use of assessment as an integrated part of the educational design.** This is particularly evident in the success of the Cranmer structure for placement reports. The assessment criteria and guidelines were used by all the students not simply for presenting their reports but in shaping the approach taken and the proportion of time allocated to theological reflection. The judgement by the external examiner that the quality of work had significantly improved with the change of assessment criteria and guidelines is an independent witness to the importance of this element. Likewise the structure of the assessment in the Ushaw TRSA programme directs people towards major social issues and thus shapes students' responses. NEOC assessment criteria are diverse but are presented to students undertaking the L&W projects as part of the step by step structure suggested for the project and, therefore, are very influential on the process as well as the outcome.

2. **The importance of supported autonomy for students.** The L&W project (NEOC) and the long placement structure (Cranmer) are pivotal in the development of theological reflection for the respective students. In both cases students have a focus within their own control and a degree of freedom as to how this is explored and developed. The structure requires learners to take responsibility for their own practice of theological reflection in a sphere where the institution cannot directly control or validate the work. Whilst accountable, the student exercises control over content and process. This degree of autonomy appears to be a major factor in owning and practicing theological reflection. At the same time support is offered to students via mentors, supervisors and course staff. The NEOC course design provides substantial support for the student in the first of the three projects and reduces this support with the second and third projects, gradually transferring the responsibility to the student for making use of the resources available. This combination of autonomy and support appears to be effective for learning.
3. **Progression.** Again the outstanding example of this is the three-stage practical theology programme of NEOC. The first stage, the L&W project, is supported by substantial resources including an individual mentor, a long period of time for development, together with teaching and reflection space during the regular weekends. In the second and third stages responsibility for theological reflection is increasingly placed in the hands of the learner and he or she is required to utilise resources as needed. The demand to be able to defend a position to peers is added at the third stage, promoting more independent thinking and a critical evaluation. The other two case study programmes attempt to integrate various elements of the teaching and learning of theological reflection but progression is more difficult to discern.
4. **The need for different focal points for theological reflection for transfer to occur.** It is clear that the subjects or focii of theological reflection arise from the structure and orientation of the programmes. Ushaw produces theological reflection largely focused on social and political issues, NEOC is effective in enabling theological reflection on work/life issues and Cranmer produces learners that draw their examples mainly from Church placement experiences. The learning seems to be strongly associated with the types of examples encountered. Staff have assumed that students will transfer the skills to other situations but the evidence does not support this assumption. Where there is more than one focus, such as the NEOC programme where theological reflection is used first in connection with the

L&W project, and then in the placement, there appears to be more chance of transfer.

It is interesting to note that the role of models and methods for theological reflection is ambiguous in the programmes. At Ushaw students continue to relate their understanding of theological reflection to the See, Judge, Act approach two and three years after their exposure to it, though most see models as a tool or an approximation. At Cranmer, students are aware of the pastoral cycle but need it less as they become confident with theological reflection and become more sceptical of the models in general as time goes on. At NEOC models are hardly noticed in the process.

There are three recurring problems of all programmes.

- 1. The lack of structure, guidelines or received wisdom for engagement with the Christian tradition.** The way this is tackled by students is varied and inconsistent within and between institutions. Only NEOC produces guidelines or ways into this part of theological reflection, and all institutions rely on the conversation partners to give pointers without any consensus or discussion of this. In written work and interviews, engagement with the Christian tradition includes proof texts taken from the Bible or the Magisterium; an immediate connection with biblical material drawn from teaching coinciding with the writing process, random choice of biblical stories, systematic exploration of an issue in Church writings and sophisticated discussion, mutual criticism of theology and other perspectives that approximate to the 'critical correlation' idea of David Tracy. Institutions need to address this licence for a seemingly free or random use of the tradition, for the sake of academic credibility and student progression.
- 2. Criticality.** In some ways this links to the previous point. The lack of critical thought, very often in relation to both the presenting issue and the use of the Christian tradition, is evident in the early and sometimes later stages of these programmes. The Cranmer postgraduate programme demonstrates critical consciousness and it would be easy to conclude that this is a feature of postgraduate learning. I have argued earlier that other factors in this programme are important in its success including seminar leadership, peer conversation and assessment. Furthermore, addressing the issue of engagement with the Christian tradition by teaching staff and curriculum developers may also affect this area substantially.

3. **Transfer.** This is in part the issue of needing different types of focal point built into a programme. Transfer from one type of focus to another appears to be difficult for learners. But equally important are the issues of transfer to parish and circuit and the enabling of others in this practice. Because of the strong element of professional competence associated with theological reflection in all students of these programmes, learners are in danger of retaining theological reflection within this professional sphere. No programme has any design for developing the facilitators of theological reflection, argued for by Green, Whitehead et al. Transfer will not necessarily happen, however much learners value the practice. Different focal points may help but it is likely that more attention needs to be devoted to the issue in order for it to be built into educational design.

The next chapter examines the first two of these issues further by describing and analysing how students from these institutions engage with the Bible and theological tradition in written and oral presentations containing theological reflection. These together with other aspects of the findings are then discussed in an educational framework in chapter 6.

Chapter 5: The Bible and Christian Tradition in Theological Reflection¹⁵³

Over the period of the case studies I read almost 200 assignments and reports written by students attempting to express in writing their theological reflections. These were drawn from all three institutions and comprised pastoral placement (Cranmer and NEOC), and pastoral studies unit assignments (Cranmer), supervised pastoral placement reports (Ushaw), life and work project reports (NEOC), looking forward to ministry papers (NEOC) and assessed work for the Theological Reflection and Social Analysis course (Ushaw). The corpus also included work offered to me by students that I interviewed originally written for subjects or tasks other than those identified but which the students considered to include theological reflection. For example, one person offered me a paper written for an ethics assignment.¹⁵⁴ In addition I observed 26 student-led seminars connected with theological reflection and read the papers submitted following those seminars.

The general differences and similarities between the three institutions in relation to institutional setting, teaching structure and assessment as well as student experience of theological reflection are outlined in the case study accounts. The written assignments generally reflect these differences. In all institutions, however, the paucity, or absence of, guidelines on how the Bible and Christian tradition are to be used in theological reflection, was striking. This appeared to sanction any approach, gave students considerable freedom and sometimes resulted in a seemingly arbitrary use of these sources. In this section I am using the range of presented material to outline the way students choose and use material from the Bible and the Christian tradition for theological reflection tasks. My study of the written papers and seminars suggests that there are several recurring patterns that

¹⁵³ This chapter forms the basis of an article accepted for publication by the *British Journal of Theological Education*, Autumn 2002.

¹⁵⁴ The number is not exact because in addition to the assignments connected with the courses related to theological reflection, which students gave me permission to read and additional ones that were offered to me, I read other essays as a marker and personal tutor in which students indicated they were involved in theological reflection. I have not kept records or quoted from this last category but they have inevitably influenced my thinking in the analysis. The proportions of assignments from each institution are Cranmer 60% (circa 120), Ushaw 19% (circa 36) and NEOC 21% (circa 40). The proportions are broadly in line with the sizes of student bodies at the institutions.

are used. I hope that by attempting to describe these there may be a better understanding of what students do and thus it may be possible to test these categories more widely, offer the patterns as the basis for developing better guidelines and encourage a more creative and critical engagement with scripture and tradition in theological reflection.

Using the Bible and the Tradition

Kelsey (1975) demonstrated that the Bible is not used in any consistent way by theologians. His study of seven major 20th century theologians suggests that all look to the Bible for authority, but that each construes the nature of authority and thus uses the Bible to support theological argument in individual ways, shaped to a large extent by the way the individual theologian perceives the scriptures in the life of the Church and God's presence among his people¹⁵⁵. Dulles (1983) described five different ways in which the Bible is perceived and used according to the model of revelation held. Both writers recognise that the way in which the Bible is used is inter-related with theological and ecclesiological positions.¹⁵⁶ In other words, no one way of using the Bible in theology is likely to be agreed upon. Typologies have been identified for describing how the Bible is used in Ethics (Curran 1971, Deidun 1998), though none as yet have emerged on the use of the Bible in practical theology. The typology of Deidun in particular has proved useful in thinking through the nature of typologies and I indicate where there is some correspondence between categorisations. The types identified here, however, emerge from and are particular to this study. This is partly because we are not simply considering how people use the Bible, but how they move from experience and practice, often with an analysis provided by other disciplines, to engagement with the broad Christian tradition which includes the Bible, but also 2000 years of other writing, art, poetry, hymnology, liturgies and rituals and buildings. If there is no agreement as to how one perceives and uses the Bible in theological thinking, it is even less likely that there is any agreement of the 'proper' way to engage with the Christian tradition as a whole for theology. Moreover, the concern in this study has been to seek to understand the particularity of these institutions in their settings and a desire to

¹⁵⁵ Kelsey op. cit p205

¹⁵⁶ For a flavour of the ongoing debate about the interpretation and use of the Bible see Nineham (1976); Houlden (1993).

discern the patterns that emerge rather than use categories that have arisen from a different context and literature.

A typology

In the study I found seven distinct types or ways in which students used the Bible and the Christian tradition.

1. Links and Associations

This is where people make an instant, often single, connection between an experience and a scriptural passage or an idea in Christian writing. Words such as 'this reminded me of ...' or 'this is like when Jesus ...' often indicate the connection being made. For example, when one third-year Ushaw student was reporting on a pastoral incident which involved sitting with a family whilst they waited for the death of their young child in hospital, he wrote 'this reminded me of the Emmaus Road story', likening the family to the two disciples who had made their journey at a time of death and loss and himself to Jesus who walked with them, listening and sharing the pain. No more is made of the story than this. It simply indicates the student attempting to locate his difficult experience somehow within the pattern of the ministry of Jesus, at a point where he sees parallels. Likewise a Cranmer student on a month long placement in a parish outlines the role of the minister he observed in setting up, facilitating and serving at a fellowship meal designed for newcomers as 'like Jesus washing the disciples' feet', whilst a first year NEOC student saw her experience of voluntary redundancy and the feelings of loss and despair which followed in terms of the sense of loss and bewilderment expressed by the people of Israel after their flight from Egypt (Exodus 16).

These links seem to be a regular feature of the Ushaw Supervised Pastoral Assignments, especially in the first year. Members of the peer group seminar to which students present a short pastoral incident from their ongoing placement for analysis and theological reflection, often suggest stories or biblical images for the person or the situation described. One woman was surprised and delighted when her reported handling of conflict in a group of young girls in a community project

was seen by the seminar group in terms of 'peacemaking' (Mt 5: 9) and 'Jesus as a friend'. Another who had been involved in a discipline incident with a child in the playground on his school placement argued against some of his seminar group that kneeling down to talk to the child was not an undermining of his authority but, as others in the group saw it, 'a proper incarnational' response. These links were made by the group after the event and thus after it has been filtered and interpreted by the student's presentation. Some of the links might be seen as fanciful, but it is clear that these are not unnatural links to make in terms of setting the person's developing personal and professional self-understanding within a theological, often Christological, framework. This style of seminar encourages and promotes this type of simple connection-making.

A link is often with a biblical story or image but not always so. One Cranmer student on placement in a town where there was an ancient priory when the tragedy of September 11 took place, made a connection between the original role of the priory in its calling to prayer for the world and the response of the local churches, including the priory, to be open for prayer and support of people after the tragedy. A NEOC student exploring an incident in his own work where he had failed to give support to a marginalized person made connections with Christian art work of various kinds to relate his feelings and thoughts and explore alternative responses.

The making of these simple links appears to function in two ways. First, it acts as a kind of orientation, legitimation or reassurance. It relates the person to the tradition in which she or he stands and in which the person is being formed to serve in some way, thereby signalling a continuity of that tradition or presenting some challenge to the person to move to a response which would be more in keeping with the tradition. It thus relates the values of the tradition to the experience and, at the same time, this simple linking reinforces the importance of the tradition as a touchstone for behaviour and action. Secondly, the link gives some kind of distance by seeing the incident as a type that has been encountered before and thus allowing for the possibility of reconsidering one's response. Sometimes the Bible or tradition story is pressed for more light but in the main this type of connecting rarely gets beyond a basic association. An assignment might well contain several links, echoes and biblical illustrations scattered throughout the piece of writing or a talk, indicating something of the sparks that are made at the point of the encounter

or when the issue or experience is discussed or reported. Critical use of the text cited, exploration of its context or the variety of possible interpretations are absent, however, from this connection-making and, unless challenged by others, it is open to a kind of uncritical self projection of 'seeing what one wants to see'.

2. Proof texting

This is where texts are identified to justify a particular view or action. In writing about the use of the Bible for Christian ethics, Deidun (1998) identifies a category he calls 'The Bible as repository of divine commands' in which the words of the Bible are treated as objectively revealed precepts to be obeyed. They can thus be called on to answer ethical questions facing Christians. 'Proof texting' has this feel to it. In theological reflection some people examine the tradition to find the texts that indicate what they should do or justify what they have done. Texts may be drawn from the Bible or from the Church's social or doctrinal teaching but they are usually handled uncritically to argue for a position.

In several of the Ushaw TRSA assignments, action was justified on the basis of a quote from a single scripture, an extract from a Vatican statement or papal encyclical or a small cluster of 'authority' citations. Reasoned discussions and critical evaluations of the texts, either in relation to their own context and history or in relation to other texts offering a different or even contrary view, were rare. In the TRSA framework it is, perhaps, not altogether surprising for three reasons. First, the students were in their first year of study and therefore unused to developing more sophisticated arguments. Secondly, the structure of the course tended to suggest to students that they should choose 'big issues' often of an ethical type for their theological reflection. The list for one year included such topics as climate change, abortion, Jubilee 2000, prison ministry and the exploitation of third world workers. To some extent these vast and complex issues tackled by first year undergraduates might easily favour proof text type answers. (It would not be unknown in other subjects or disciplines.) Thirdly, it could be argued that this proof text approach might well fit with Catholic understanding of teaching

authority and ecclesiology¹⁵⁷. Gustafson (1965) suggests that in using the Bible in ethics this is more likely to be the position of ‘evangelical conservative protestants’ but Deidun (1998 p22) notes that it is not limited to one Christian mindset¹⁵⁸.

Here, when the teaching of the Magisterium is included alongside scripture it may well have a good fit with some Catholic approaches to belief and action. It also fits well with the Cardijn ‘See, Judge, Act’ method, which can use the Bible and the statements of the Catholic Church as expressing the values against which actions are judged¹⁵⁹.

The same approach, however, can be seen in students from both Cranmer and NEOC. For example, one Cranmer student examined the phenomenon of ‘Cell Church prayer ministry’ encountered on church placement. The issue he discussed was whether anyone could offer prayers for others during church worship or whether there ought to be specific training and authorisation. The issue was answered for him by reference to several texts in the New Testament. The discussion was not without some subtlety but there was a plain assumption that one could answer this question by looking for texts about prayer and ministry in the New Testament. Another (Cranmer, Methodist) student chose to explore the feelings and issues around a particular funeral in which she had been involved on placement. Questions that had been posed by the grieving family at various points were in her theological reflection answered by Biblical texts. It is fine to feel anger and grief because it is witnessed in scripture (Eccl. 3, various Psalms etc). Forgiveness and guilt are also normal elements in the grief process (Mt 6.14-15) and the importance of hope in the face of death can be seen in scripture (Psalm 23 cf Mt 11. 28-30).

In this kind of engagement with the tradition clearly one goes beyond the simple association of experience with the tradition, to seeking answers to cognitive or affective questions posed by an experience or issue and expecting the tradition to provide an authoritative statement to justify or guide response.

¹⁵⁷ See the Roman Catholic-Methodism International Dialogue Report *Speaking the Truth in Love* (2001) p41ff

¹⁵⁸ Cf Barr (1977) Fundamentalism

¹⁵⁹ See Appendix 1 for details of this method, which is primarily a linear approach to theological reflection.

3. Resonance and Analogy

This is a more complex form of links and associations. Here students see in a Bible story or other Christian text many points of connection with their own experience and then use various aspects of the texts to draw out significance, meaning and insight for their own experience. A good example of this is a comparison of the Ushaw student we noted earlier who saw an association between his contact with a family facing the death of their child and the Road to Emmaus story (Luke 24) with a Cranmer student who also chose this Biblical story as a way of discussing death and pastoral support of the dying and bereaved. She used two case studies of bereaved people and cites Luke 24 as a good model for the grieving process, extending this through reference to contemporary writing on bereavement and drawing parallels between the story, the bereaved and those who seek to support the bereaved. She points to the various parts of the story as indicating the need to let people talk about their feelings, share pain, absorb hurt, come to grips with one's own bereavement and travel with people in hope, especially the hope of the resurrection. She also sets this within a survey of biblical material about death and bereavement and a discussion about rites of passage in different cultures. Where the Ushaw student saw a link between the Lukan resurrection narrative and his encounter, this student explores the story at a variety of points and broadens the scope of the exploration by relating to other perspectives and material. The theological reflection is here an extended and explored story in which the narrative is seen as a model of good practice.

The use of resonance and analogy works where individuals perceive the experience or situation facing them as analogous to a biblical story or incident and use this as a sounding or springboard for a more extended discussion between theology and experience. Another Cranmer student chose as a focus for theological reflection the issue of youth culture and church, arising from the approach to youth work taken in his placement parish. The issue at the heart of this discussion was whether to pursue the development of separate worship for young people on the grounds that the cultural divide between youth and adults is now so wide that integration of young people into the established patterns of church worship is not possible. The student begins by examining various contemporary writers on the subject and evaluating their arguments in various ways. There is then an extended exploration

of the Jew-Gentile tension at the heart of St Paul's ministry and witnessed at various points in the New Testament:

At Christ Church, X, the Youth worker is against the idea of youth congregations/churches, arguing that they have no biblical basis. Issues of Jew and Gentile in the New Testament are roughly parallel to youth and adult today. The Jews/adults are only comfortable with the old way of worshipping but for the gentiles/youth it seems almost anything goes. St Paul compromises; 'anything goes but not everything is beneficial' (1 Co. 6:12; 10:23). If Jew and gentile could be held together, so the argument goes, so can youth and the rest of the church.

Unfortunately this biblical example can be used to cut both ways. Paul was holding Jew and gentile together in a universal church but it can be argued that for the most part, they did worship in separate congregations (with a few notable exceptions like the Antioch church [Acts 15:5, Gal 2:11-13]). The pattern of the spread of Christianity involves separation from the synagogues. Gentile congregations were troubled by Jewish outsiders telling them their way was not proper (Acts 5:1, 24). Peter and Paul had missions to different communities. (Gal. 2:7-9)

This is not the final word on the subject for the student but illustrates for us a particular use of analogy. His analogy moves beyond the simple statement of St Paul in 1 Corinthinians 6 to an exploration of the wider context of the analogy and its setting in the social and religious development in the New Testament, demonstrating that analogy need not be simplistic or uncritical.

By comparison other students drew analogies between resistance to change encountered on placement and stubborn people in the Bible, and modern management models with the story of Moses leading the people out of Egypt and through the desert. The degree of criticality varies greatly.

Not all resonance and analogy went in the direction of finding a text which appears to mirror or parallel experience. One student wrote an extended piece in the form of a meditation on the words of an ordination service illustrated by the stories of encounter and conversation she had had on one day of her placement. It was for her a way of 'earthing' the words of her calling in the practical everyday realities of visiting the sick and bereaved and the bustling life of an urban church. The importance of analogy and resonance in interpreting and nurturing personal spirituality is real here. We see this in a NEOC third year student who presented her 'Looking Forward to Ministry' project as a story of personal change and

development drawing on a series of gospel stories to show her own move towards an understanding of ministry in terms of 'doing and being'. The nature of this written work is a form of testimony and thus is infused with 'the spiritual' where the scriptures were stories of change, healing and growth in which she saw an unfolding pattern of her own story.

Clearly there is some relationship between the 'Links and Association' type and this category. Is the difference one of degree or kind? This is hard to answer. On the one hand, the Emmaus story used by the two students (cited above) is in both cases related to the issue of death and bereavement. One student sees a parallel with his experience whereas the other uses the story as an extended model of good practice in bereavement, weaving this together with contemporary insights into the grieving process. This could suggest that the difference is a matter of degree in which 'Analogy' is simply a more extended discussion of a particular link. The difference of kind comes in, however, where an analogy is explored in various ways so as to raise the question of the suitability or 'fitness' of the analogy. If one says that a woman's handling of conflict is like an expression of the call to be peacemakers (Mt 5), it is a link. The suitability of the link is not particularly questioned. It simply provides a connection into the Christian tradition and it is not explored for detailed insight. If a discussion of peacemaking in this situation were to be explored in relation to the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45) or the reconciliation of Father and Son in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), one would be able to ask questions about the suitability and adequacy of the analogy to the life situation and of any insights drawn from the biblical story. Hence, by making a number of connections with a story, analogy becomes open to different use and scrutiny.

4. Exploring a Theological Theme

Theological themes often act as interpretative tools for experience. In both the NEOC and Cranmer programmes this is to some extent encouraged.

Does your chosen event, experience or story bring to mind any BIBLICAL IMAGES, INCIDENTS OR THEMES? What connection can you see between them? (e.g. Pilgrim People of God on a journey, Exile, Gethsemane, Crucifixion, Pentecost.)

What THEOLOGICAL MODELS of the activity/being of God, the Church and the World help to shed light on and give coherence to all this? (e.g. God as Creator, Judge, Saviour, redeemer etc. Church as Sacrament, Herald Family, Body of Christ.)

(NEOC Practical Theology Handbook 1999 p20)

As this text implies the overarching theological themes of the Christian faith become for Christians a way of seeing the world, a kind of lens through which to look or a set of ultimate truths about the nature of God to which all experience can relate. The major Christian theological themes would include creation, incarnation, redemption, self-giving love, death and resurrection, and perhaps, arguably, others such as, Covenant, God as Trinity, God's bias to the poor, liberation, justification by faith, holiness.

We noted in the NEOC interviews how Ivan spoke about the biblical idea of covenant as a way of understanding and responding to his school's structure and relationships. Through exploring this theme he was able to discuss responsibility and mutual accountability in staff-with-staff and staff-with-pupils relations, and explore his own role as a prophetic guardian of the covenant in the school context. This is an example of the thematic form of theological reflection. The interpretation of particular experience using a key theological theme becomes a way of making meaning and formulating a response. Likewise, Moira another school teacher following the NEOC course who felt caught between the demands of league tables and the pressure of the system on her to achieve results in school, on the one hand, and her own intuition about individual children's readiness for particular developments and activities, on the other, had recast the tension in terms of incarnation - God's willingness to work within but not be determined by the limitations of the world. From, this she had derived an understanding that enabled her to continue to work within the tension.

Themes are different from both texts and statements in that they are discerned as the central convictions on which the faith is built. They may be derived from a series of texts and distilled through the church tradition but they are much closer to the central conviction of the creed or the early church's 'rule of faith' than individual stories or writings. Some will talk of these as the overarching themes of

scripture¹⁶⁰, or key planks in the meta-narrative of Christian theology. In any form of Christian belief and practice at least some of these themes would be discernable in some form. Deidun (1998) has a similar category which he calls 'Master themes' – which in the realm of ethics can be seen as 'divinely authoritative framework' whilst capable of drawing other sources of knowledge. Theological themes also provide wide scope for theological reflection as they, by definition, lie at the centre of the Christian tradition and at the same time have many layers to the meaning and a variety of interpretation and application available. It is possible to think out what a theme might mean when acted out or applied in particular circumstances without having to be literalistic or simplistic in interpretation.

Nevertheless, themes can function like links and associations. One of the examples we gave above in the links section was of someone who saw his action in the school playground as 'incarnational'. This was no more than the connection of a single action with a theological notion. It was not pressed further than the initial link. For many, however, the theological theme is a fruitful way of entering and developing an extended theological reflection on experience or practice.

One Cranmer student was on placement in a rural parish in England during the time of and immediately after the Foot and Mouth Crisis in 2001. She chose to reflect on the impact the crisis had had on particular farming families with whom she worked. The way she did this was to use the themes of sacrifice and stewardship. Under the first theme, she was able to incorporate an account of a family who had voluntarily isolated themselves and had their livestock slaughtered even though no disease was diagnosed on their farm, for the sake of others, and some wider discussion about the cost of slaughter, personal livelihood and psychological trauma for the sake of consumer confidence and international trade. Under the second she questioned the huge cost to the animal kingdom of a consumerist society and its effect on the relations between humans, animals and the environment. In her analysis of the situation she drew on agricultural and scientific work and her first hand experience of the desolation felt by farmers but in her meaning-making she used these central theological themes as the defining markers.

¹⁶⁰ Themes were central to the Biblical Theology Movement in its old and new forms (Childs 1970). Recent work by David Lyall makes significant use of themes for theological reflection in Pastoral Theology. See Lyall (2001) especially pp 89-107

Another thematic approach was given by a student encountering a variety of different baptismal policies by ministers in her placement circuit. She saw the conflicting ideas as needing resolution for her own imminent practice and began a discussion of infant baptism from the experience of disparate practice and parental expectations, moving to the various arguments for and against infant baptism, ultimately resolving it for herself via a discussion of the theme of grace, especially the notion of prevenient grace. In this she was prepared, in part at least, to admit that her views would run counter to New Testament practice but justifying it on the ground of the higher theme of grace seen in God's undeserved love given to human beings symbolised in baptism and expressed in her church's traditional practice.

When used in theological reflection a theme can be explored at a number of levels. In its lower forms it may be like a link or even proof text but in its developed forms the theme is used to raise questions about the issue, if approached through this lens, and sometimes to extend or modify the understanding of the theological theme. The danger that Deidun sees in relation to this approach is primarily that themes may be presented as uniform and so ignore the (often wide) diversity of understanding in the tradition. A sign of the mature use of the theme for theological reflection must be an ability to acknowledge and work with this diversity.

5. An extrapolated question to take to the tradition

This is a common form of approach used by students across a range of types of assignment. Essentially students use the experience and its analysis to identify a question that needs some sort of answer, which they then seek from the Christian tradition. For example, a Cranmer student writing up a Personal Studies Unit on her experience in a deprived urban setting focuses on the nature of 'community' asking what this term means for the people of this area. She develops the questions by offering both an historical account of the place and a socio-political analysis of the developments in the period since the Second World War. The question of what community means is then posed to the Bible – 'What is meant by the concept of community in the Old Testament?', answer: place, birth and ritual; and then 'What is meant by community in the New Testament?', answer: the idea of *koinonia* (fellowship) involving belonging, a sense of purpose and value, inclusivity and

mutual respect and encouragement made possible by the presence of God's Spirit. The person then goes on to draw on the theology of the Trinity to suggest implications for the role of the church in this urban setting and its place in nurturing community for those in its area.

A small number of students simply used the experience to identify questions that they now wished to pursue within the Christian corpus and conclude their writing by affirming the value of identifying questions. The majority who extrapolated questions, however, went on to address the question to the tradition.

The taking of question to the tradition is on the one hand an ordering of the experience and a structure for engagement with the tradition on the other. The addressing of the question to the tradition is often met by a sequential interrogation of key resources: What does the Old Testament have to say? What does the New Testament have to say? What have key historical and contemporary writers had to say about this? and/or What examples from church history relate to this question? Like other patterns this approach can be pursued at a number of levels of critical sophistication. It can be an uncritical selection of texts bordering on the proof text. Alternatively it can be a very complex, critical and insightful piece of work weighing different traditions against each other and developing arguments that are original interpretations of the tradition.

The fact that this is a frequent pattern is probably because it relates more easily to the standard pattern of assignment writing for other theological subjects, which are often posed in the form of a question to be addressed using various resources, historical and contemporary. Students are used to this form of theology and make use of the experience in context to formulate the question to be addressed.

6. A one-way critique

This form of engagement with the tradition uses a particular perspective to evaluate a view or practice in mind. Most often it takes the form of an assessment of practice using the resources of the Bible and tradition. Hence it takes ministry practice or church life to the light of the Christian tradition to test it, refine it or to propose an alternative practice more consistent with the Christian conviction. Occasionally it takes the form of critique of the practice that has arisen from

Christian conviction but which is considered by the writer to be no longer appropriate or no longer to apply to a particular context. In this form the experience becomes the refining critique of theology and practice.

This was a frequent pattern in pastoral placements reports. For example, it was common to test the theological basis for baptismal policy, pastoral visiting practice, bereavement support, the use of church premises, work with children, and patterns of worship. An example was the student who chose to focus on the relationship between the 'users of a church hall' and church worshippers. She interviewed a number of church worshippers and church hall users to ascertain how each saw the other group. She collated the findings and reported these to the Church Council for action. The feeling of neglect and non-consultation on the part of some users was clearly disturbing to the church members but her main critique was a failure to practice Christian hospitality on the part of the church, which she built from a variety of sources in the scriptures and Christian history. The result was the forming of a regular consultation group for all users of the premises.

Another Cranmer Anglican student who had the opportunity to work in the United States for a placement had encountered there a permanent deacon working in his placement church, a practice under discussion but not yet a feature of the Church of England. The work of the deacon clearly impressed him and so he chose to focus in his pastoral report on the theological arguments for and against an order of deacons within the Church of England. He begins in the New Testament and explores considerable contemporary and historical texts on the subject to conclude that the presence of a permanent diaconate symbolising the servanthood of Christ, working on the interface of church and community and supporting church members in their discipleship would be better practice than the current one.

Another student reassessed the view of icons in his own 'evangelical' tradition after a placement in the Orthodox Church in Romania, whilst another student marshalled considerable biblical and theological resources to assess the work of a Church preschool mums and toddlers club. One student seminar leader in the Cranmer postgraduate course discussed the detail of British legislation on mental health and extrapolated the concept of 'the patient' implicit in the Acts, and then offered a critique based on a 'biblical' view of human beings as made in the image

of God, responsible agents, creators and stewards, thus supporting the gradual move in legislation for patient involvement in decision making about their treatment and arguing for a different view of human beings to be at the heart of the medical perspective.

One very interesting critique was undertaken by an Anglican student placed in a Local Ecumenical Partnership, where the Church was involved in work with Asylum seekers being settled in the district. Although he had experience of working in an LEP previously, it is clear that the placement was very different from his previous experience and its energy and commitment caused him to revisit his thoughts about ecumenism which formerly he perceived as 'discussion about ecclesiastical politics and sharing agreements'. By returning to the texts with a fresh vision of ecumenical working he argues for an understanding of the notion of ecumenism as 'world focused' (the whole inhabited world) rather than focused on church unity. For him the practice acts as a spur to re-examine and reformulate his understanding.

One-way critique, as a common form of engagement with the tradition, explores and gathers resources from the Christian tradition in order to evaluate particular practices, or occasionally uses the experience gained or new practice encountered to critique and reform previous theological understandings. It can lapse into 'proof texting' especially if the tradition is uncritically privilege over practice but in the main is a more rigorous and advanced exercise which allows for the subtle argument and critical handling of the tradition.

7. A mutual critique

This is, in one way, an extension of the previous approach but operates in a more sophisticated and dialectical fashion. Here the critique is both a critique of the practice by theology and a critique of theology by practice and experience. This corresponds to Tracy's (1975, 1981) critical correlation approach, which applies criticism to both the perspective of human sciences and traditional theological views, after a careful examination of each, and results in suggestions for change in both.

One example of this is found in a Cranmer undergraduate placement report on the issue of baptismal practice. The student uses contextual sociology of the North Eastern Urban Priority Area in which he is placed to critique the theology underpinning current baptism liturgy and practice, arguing that in this the over-emphasis in baptism on washing away sin in the new born child no longer carries conviction. Even though folk religion around baptism has not died, the desire for belonging and significance is a greater felt need. The multiple deprivation of the area which results in a significant number of children born with low birth weight and the resulting effects of delayed child development and a higher vulnerability to heart disease, calls for a church which stands alongside people and is a living extension of the incarnation. In place of the Augustinian theology of baptism removing original sin he argues for a baptism that emphasises welcome, reconciliation, transformation and new creation, as in St Paul's writing, suggesting that baptism could be more strongly linked to Easter and the resurrection image. This should be expressed in a creative and mutual relationship with those who seek baptism for their children so that baptism becomes a contextual demonstration of the gospel which values inclusivity and offers transformation. The correctness of this vision is not for us to judge. The mutual critique of theology by contextual experience, and the desire to reform practice based on an equally ancient view of baptism shows the dialectic nature of this theological reflection.

A similar dynamic was observable in a postgraduate TPR seminar on the issue of children and worship. By involving people in a liturgy which also included a role play of aspects of children's experience in church, the student enabled people in the group to see the confusion and contradictions experienced by children in worship. This was followed by a detailed sociological and historical analysis of the place and perception of children in church and society and then a presentation of both positive and negative perception of children in the scriptures. The critique both of some biblical views of children and the practice of the church (in relation to exclusion from communion, sending children out of worship to other activities, etc) came from a number of sources including modern educational and psychological understandings of children, but at the same time the student argued for a view of children deep in one strand of the Christian tradition which emphasises the liberating presence and priestly ministry of children in the life of the church, thus

going beyond some societal practices. Again the critique was two-way, seeking to address by this theological reflection both reform in church and society.

Examples of this did not occur often in the undergraduate scripts that I examined or seminars I attended. They were more frequently found in the postgraduate seminars, but even here they were far from the norm. The reasons for this may be several. First, it appears to require a critical ability in at least two disciplines, no easy matter for undergraduate trainee ministers. Secondly, it requires a willingness to suspend the privilege normally accorded to the Bible and tradition (albeit temporarily) whilst evaluations are made. This leaves the issue of where authority is to be located undefined at some points in the process, or, arguably worse in a postmodern culture, privileges reason over both tradition and experience. To engage in this pattern of theological reflection may require a mature self-confidence as well as considerable skill. This may account for why the extrapolated question and the one-way critique are more common. And why despite the rhetoric, practical theology still leans towards the applicationist in practice.

Conclusion

Whilst these constructs need testing by further research work over a wider number of institutions and with different types of theological reflection material, the taxonomy appears to offer insight into the ways in which these students engaged with the tradition. Whilst there are some differences between institutions, all but the last category was observable in students' written and presented material in all three establishments.

Some activities and structures appear to favour certain types and styles of theological engagement. There were many 'questions to the tradition' in the longer placement and PSU reports, whilst the group seminar in the Supervised Placements at Ushaw favoured links and connections, and the mutual critique pattern is more likely to be encountered in the post-graduate programme at Cranmer. Similarly, the choice and use of a pattern is also strongly influenced by the interest and intended outcome of the students concerned. If they are seeking to relate their own personal growth in or response to a situation they are more likely to use a link and

association, analogy, or theme type engagement. If preparation for ministerial responsibility is imminent one-way critique is often chosen or a key question identified and answered. Themes offer themselves for making sense where individual action or single church policy decisions are unlikely to change things (e.g. urban renewal and the foot and mouth crisis) but where long-term orientation is needed. The types are not exclusive of each other. Some students will use several of these patterns in the course of one essay or within a structure conceived of, say a one-way critique, other types will be employed as contributing elements.

It may be tempting to see the structure as a hierarchy of more sophisticated and acceptable types, each requiring a more mature, more critical ability. This needs to be resisted, however, as the types do not yield to a strict 'ladder' classification. Whilst links and associations may become analogies, or proof texts be developed into critique, and one way critique refined into 2 way critique, it is also possible that each structure (even the mutual critique) may operate at either a basic or more critical level.

Educationally, there would be value in discussing these patterns with students before and after their writing or seminar session and there may also be implications for the development of assessment criteria. A regular complaint of the teaching staff of all three institutions was the low levels of criticality in the work of students in theological reflection. This was not merely a comparison of students to some kind of ideal. This criticism was often accompanied by the comment that the same student had shown a greater level of critical engagement in other theological disciplines or courses than was evident in his or her theological reflections pieces. It is possible that the absence of an investigation of patterns previously, and thus the impossibility of discussing these patterns with students, has meant that critical levels have not been raised. In the next chapter I make some suggestions about how this typology may be used to develop a more critical and consistent engagement with the Bible and the Christian tradition.

Chapter 6: The Research Findings in an Educational Perspective

So far in our investigation we have concentrated attention on the particular world of education for Christian ministry and the teaching and learning of theological reflection within it. This has been appropriate, in that the notion of theological reflection has meaning and relevance primarily within this context. It would be myopic, however, not to recognise the considerable research and discourse on issues directly related to theological reflection in various other fields of education. In particular, the work on the nature of reflection, critical thinking, and professional development are pertinent. Similarly, the theory of 'situated learning' appears to offer an overall framework for our case studies. In this chapter, therefore, we will examine literature from fields of education that bear upon our study. In so doing we will seek to make links with concepts used in other educational studies, consider whether and in what ways theories and insights from these studies may clarify or interpret our findings and engage in dialogue between the worlds of ministerial education and other educational endeavours to seek to suggest an improved pedagogy for theological reflection.

Reflection

The discussion of the idea of reflection has been a significant area of discourse for most of the last century. Dewey (1933) wrote on what he called 'Reflective thinking' as a form of deliberate and self-conscious activity and the concept has regularly appeared in writings about the nature of thinking. Donald Schön (1983; 1987) made the notion of reflection a central part of the discourse about professional development, whilst Kolb (1984) and others have linked reflection to a theory of experiential learning.

Moon (1999) examines the notion of 'reflection' as used in a variety of discourses. Considering, in turn, the use of the word as an everyday phenomenon; in the writings of Dewey & Habermas; and then in three fields of study: experiential learning (Kolb et al), the reflective practitioner literature (Schön et al), and the literature of professional development; she concludes that reflection is a form of thinking particularly oriented towards problem-solving or specific outcomes. (Moon 1999 p95). Whilst the different

discourses describe reflection in a bewildering variety of ways, she argues that there is core common understanding which is uncomplicated.

There is little in the literature, it seems, to indicate that reflection is other than a relatively simple mental activity, the many diverse descriptions of reflection being characterized by the frameworks of inputs and purposes within which they operate. (Moon 1999 p98)

Using the idea of an input-process-output model she suggests the input is generally knowledge that has been already learned¹⁶¹ and that the output can be a number of things, including: learning, action, reflection on the process of learning, critical review, building of theory, self development, decisions, empowerment or emancipation; emotion. The effect of reflection is thus to bring order, structure, insight and coherence to existing knowledge or learned material towards some goal which may result in outward action, changed attitude or emotion. Thus she writes:

reflection seems to be a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or an anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is no obvious solution. (Moon 1999 p98)

She argues that reflection has been investigated mainly by those whose interest is application, e.g. to management, but her chief interest in reflection is in relation to learning in general and higher order learning in particular.

She thus develops her own 'map of learning' to portray the role of reflection in learning. This map is built from two main elements: a constructivist approach broadly based on Piaget's ideas of assimilation and accommodation and the notion of 5 stages or sequential processes of learning. At the centre of her idea of learning are the twin notions of 'meaningfulness' and 'cognitive structure'. Meaningful learning is, in contrast to memorization, the way that learners construct meaning to relate new information to already existing knowledge (cognitive structure). Because this existing knowledge also acts as a frame or filter through which to engage with new experience or material, meaningful learning changes the cognitive structure and thus the creation of meaningful learning is a qualitative not a quantitative change. Alongside this constructivist approach Moon presents the notion of 5 stages or sequential processes in learning.

¹⁶¹ She tentatively accepts that the input may be new experience but in general sees reflection working on existing knowledge. See p99

1. *Noticing*, when something comes into the learner's view via sensory data, though, of course, strongly influenced by existing cognitive structure, which acts as a 'gatekeeper'.
2. *Making sense*, as the learner develops a coherent view of the material in relation to itself.
3. *Making meaning*, when learning is assimilated into the cognitive structure, which may be changed as learners relate the new material to what they already know.
4. *Working with meaning*, where there is no need for continued contact with original sources and the ordering and meaning given is influenced by the ideas accumulating from ongoing learning.
5. *Transformative meaning*, which differs from the previous category only inasmuch as it involves a 'more extensive accommodation of the cognitive structure' which might be termed a change in worldview or a 'perspective transformation'.

To some extent these levels or stages relate to the work of the Gothenberg School in the 1970/80s on deep and surface learning (Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle 1984 & 1997).¹⁶² The first two stages relate to surface learning, which is characterised and often represented in written or other expression by memorization and reproduction of ideas, whereas the higher levels are related to deep learning in which meaningful, ordered, coherent and integrated ideas are expressed and at the highest level learners show evidence of critical evaluation of their own frames of reference. Figure 12 (below) reproduces Moon diagram of her map of learning.

¹⁶² See also the subsequent work done in Lancaster and Australia on **strategic** learning, Biggs 1993.

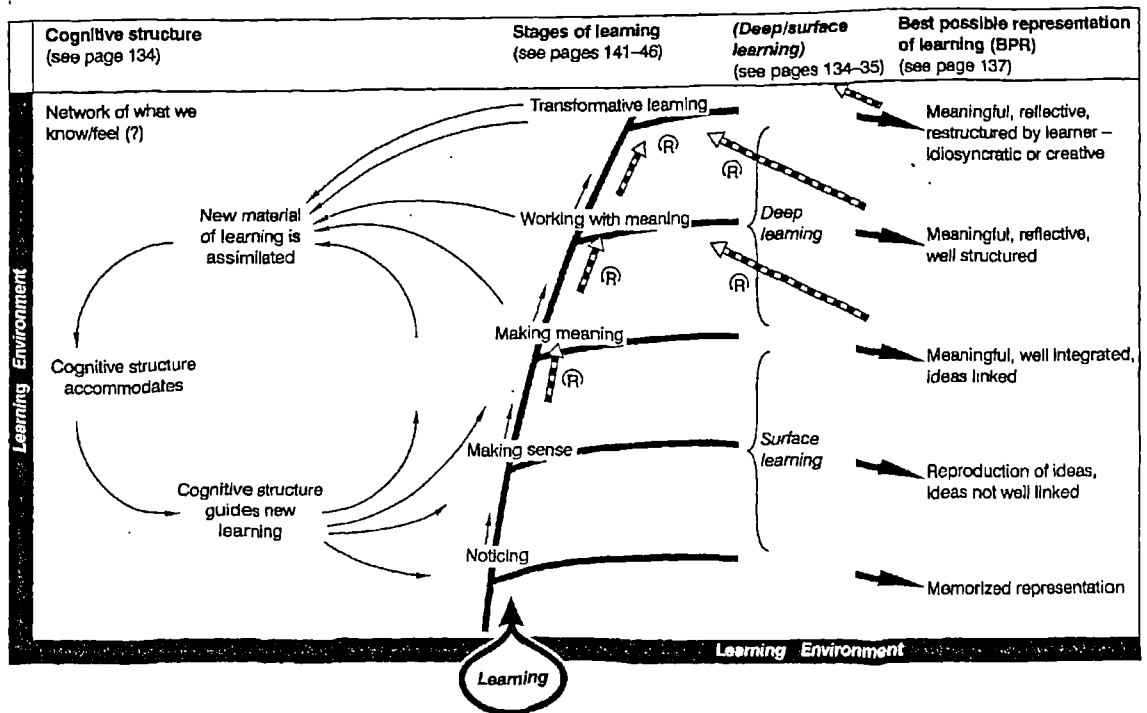


Figure 12.1 A map of learning and the representation of learning and the role of reflection

Figure 12: A map of learning (Moon)

(Moon 1999 p154).

The role of reflection in learning is indicated on the map of learning by the R (with a half circle over it) and by the striped arrows. Moon is suggesting here that reflection comes into operation at the higher levels of learning and that it has a special role in upgrading learning¹⁶³. It is particularly important in the move from stage 2 (making sense) to stage 3 (making meaning). For example, when in higher education students re-read and reflect on the notes they have taken in lectures and connect these ideas with previous studies and knowledge they are moving to the making meaning stage. Likewise reflection comes into play when students are working with meaning (stage 4) and relating this acquired knowledge to the accumulation of ideas in ongoing learning and also as they move from this stage towards the transformation of meaning (stage 5) and major shifts of worldview take place.

¹⁶³ See Moon 1999 p147

Reflection and theological reflection

Our research broadly resonates with Moon's understanding of reflection, particularly in its problem-resolving orientation and its role in re-ordering previous knowledge or upgrading learning. Whilst theological reflection is concerned with reflection within and for a theological understanding of the world, it is clear from our observations that this reflection is prompted by the problems posed by experience for existing knowledge and practice.¹⁶⁴ The awareness of a problem is also often triggered by the learner's emotional associations and interests, and the search for emotional and cognitive harmony are driving forces for the process. Theological reflection is thus the mental process involved as the individual, either through the formal structure of an educational programme or through personally developed endeavours, revisits his or her existing theological knowledge in order to integrate new knowledge or experience and to resolve conflict.

Theological reflection might be defined as a special case of a general model. In the terms used by Moon, theological reflection is reflection with particular theological input and output contents. This is consistent with her conviction that reflection is differently defined in the various literatures by different inputs and outputs but is primarily the same form of thinking or mental processing. Theological reflection thus might be defined as a 'form of mental processing with a purpose and/or an anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is no obvious solution', where the input is the learner's existing theological knowledge, and the purpose is to make sense of new, sometimes very different and challenging knowledge or experience, often for practical outcomes e.g. what pastoral policy to develop in a church, what to say in a funeral sermon, or what to decide about an ethical issue at one's place of work. The output therefore would include changes in belief, theological knowledge and self understanding, changes of practice, sermons, pastoral responses, the strengthening, modifying or creating of emotions and attitudes, decisions, plans and policies.

The strength of this approach is that not only does it correspond to my research findings which are concerned with individuals in structured patterns for learning theological reflection, but it also makes sense of theological reflection taking place where no programme is in place for its learning. In the theological studies which offer no explicit course on theological reflection, the expanding knowledge base of theological disciplines

¹⁶⁴ On occasions a problem is posed by a tutor's prompting but theological reflection is only likely to result if the problem is recognised by the student.

may create conflict in an individual learner which demands some form of resolution and thus the higher order learning processes use reflection in order to make meaning, work with it, and transform it at certain points. In higher degree practical theology research work, the problematising in theological terms of certain issues becomes a deliberate structure for the research. Similarly, in people of Christian (or other) faith outside education programmes but seeking to make sense of their lives and make decisions in line with their belief and self-understanding, theological reflection will be operating when this higher order thinking is prompted by new knowledge, experience or context.

Emotion in theological reflection

There is, however, another aspect of Moon's study that is relevant to our research and that concerns the role of emotions. Moon recognises that emotions play a part in reflection. According to her there are three possible ways of conceiving the role of emotion in reflection, which are not mutually exclusive. Firstly, emotion could be a part of the process¹⁶⁵. That is, it actively contributes to the way in which a person is reflecting and the outcome of the process. She notes Bruner's (1990) observation that, in the search for a memory of something, it is often a feeling about the content of the memory that reaches consciousness first. Secondly, emotion could be the content or focus for reflection, as it is often in counselling. Thirdly emotion may direct or steer the process of reflection so that it is not under immediate voluntary control as argued for by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985).¹⁶⁶ Moon appears to overstate the position of Boud, Keogh and Walker¹⁶⁷ and in any case the third point appears to be a variation of the first. Furthermore, she makes little use of the interplay between emotion and reflection in either her map of learning or her later recommendations for the promotion and nurture of reflection. She is right, however, to acknowledge the relationship.

We noted in chapter 1 that O'Connell Killen and de Beer (1995) emphasise the importance of feelings in the search for meaning and suggest a link between feelings and metaphors for both the understanding of meaning and the breakthrough into new insight. This may in part correspond to Moon's second category where emotion becomes a major

¹⁶⁵ There appears to be a typographical error at this point in Moon's text. The relevant sentence in the section dealing with emotion paragraph (p95 para 2, sentence three) reads 'Reflection could be a part of the process of reflection'. It seems clear from the next two sentences that she intended the word 'Emotion' to be the first word in this sentence.

¹⁶⁶ c.f. Mezirow's (1990) notion of psychic distortion

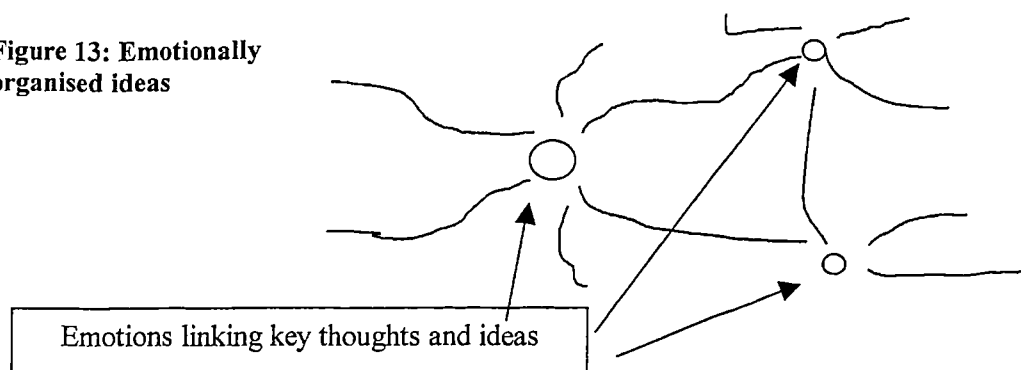
¹⁶⁷ See Boud, Keogh Walker 1985 p 11 where they outline the positive and negative influence of emotion on reflection but stop short of arguing for emotion overriding other factors.

focus for the reflection, though the 'search for meaning' process appears to use the strong emotions not for reflection on the emotions as such, but as keys to the release of images or metaphors which themselves disclose meaning and release insight. In this O'Connell Killen and de Beer implicitly argue that meaning is both made and remade (worked with or transformed) through the emotions which are embedded with the meaning organising symbols and pictures.

Goleman (1996) gives strong support to this from his argument for the primacy of the emotions in the brain. The research work on the area of the brain called the amygdala, concerned with the emotions, indicates that not only does it play a powerful role in acquiring, developing and controlling emotional responses, it also acts as a routing for sending messages to all parts of the brain and is linked with mental structuring and ordering (Smith 2001).

Our research suggests that affective elements are a key factor in the choosing of a focus for theological reflection, that strong emotions are often associated with a change of thinking, and that sometimes the outcome of theological reflection is a changed affection or attitude. This adds a small amount of evidence for the idea that emotions and cognitive organisation are closely connected. If we accept Moon's argument that reflection is concerned with higher order structuring of meaning and in particular the process of re-ordering of cognitive structure, then it may be that emotional bonds are both formed and released in the developing and transforming of meaning at the deepest levels of mental ordering. In other words the main pillars of our worldview may be embedded with strong emotional associations which may in part act as organising forces for meaning. One could envisage this as a key point or singularity in a spider diagram. (See Figure 13). In the encounter of new information and experience that pose problems for our worldview it is not surprising therefore that emotions will be a key factor in determining the focus for reflection.

Figure 13: Emotionally organised ideas



In some educational theories emotions are treated as an irrational area of human experience that needs to be rationalised. The growing evidence is of a more complex relationship between thought and emotion. Ballard (1999 p18) drawing on Warnock's (1976) description of artistic creativity states that emotion and imagination are crucial to gaining insight into reality. Astley (1994) has argued for an education of the emotions in Christian education which goes beyond the notion of 'getting the learner to think about them' to an approach that teaches people 'how to feel' and enables a change in 'feeling awareness'¹⁶⁸. I suggest that attention to the emotions in theological reflection is of paramount importance in the unlocking and transformation of thought and that both affective and cognitive dimensions must be explored together.

Theological reflection within professional development

A second literature which bears upon our study is that concerned with professional development. Whilst disputed among theological educators, there is a case for understanding some aspects of the work of the clergy and others in public Christian ministry as similar to that of the work of lawyers, doctors and teachers.

Of particular interest is the work of Michael Eraut in relation to professional knowledge. According to Eraut (1994), to understand professional knowledge and how it is learned one needs to recognise three dimensions to professional learning. The first dimension is to do with types of professional knowledge, the second is the various modes of knowledge use, and the third is the contexts of knowledge use.

In Eraut's view, there are three types of knowledge making up the knowledge of a professional. Firstly there is *propositional knowledge*, usually taking the form of codified (mostly public) knowledge and consisting of discipline-based theories and concepts, derived from bodies of coherence, systematic knowledge. It may also include generalisations and practical principles, specific propositions about particular cases, decisions and action. This knowledge is usually learned within an academic context. The second form of knowledge is *personal knowledge*, that is the stock of knowledge acquired and held by individual practitioners. It includes 'impressions', that is experience or information that has hardly been noticed, together with personal constructs, perspectives and frames of reference which are personal (even if influenced by public ideas) and

¹⁶⁸ Astley 1994 p 256

interpretation of propositional knowledge which has become partially personalised through the process of being used. Over time this personal knowledge will also include an accumulated knowledge built from personal cases handled by the individual and tacit knowledge. Finally, professionals also develop *process knowledge*, knowing how to conduct, and behave in, the various processes that contribute to professional action including such procedures as acquiring information; planning and decision-making; giving information and meta-processes for directing and controlling one's own behaviour.

Attention to all three knowledge needs of the professional is essential in the design and delivery of an education programme but this endeavour is made more demanding when these are set alongside the mode of knowledge use.

professional work of any complexity requires the *concurrent* use of several different kinds of knowledge in an *integrated, purposeful manner*. Yet this is difficult to achieve without significant interaction between formal teaching and professional practice, and specific attention to developing the appropriate modes of thinking. (Eraut 1994 p119-120)

Eraut argues that for professionals (and perhaps for all learners) knowledge needs to be used in order for it to be meaningful for the learner. He follows Broudy (et al 1964, 1980) in identifying 4 types of knowledge use: replication, application, interpretation and association. Whilst replication is largely confined to schools and other formal learning settings, application, interpretation and association are significantly affected in practical use.

Furthermore, the various contexts in which the knowledge is used also significantly affect it. He suggests that the three different contexts for most professionals are the academic sphere, the sphere of policy (e.g. for teachers this would be a school) and the realm of action (e.g. the classroom for teachers). In each sphere the skills needed and the nature of knowledge are different.

...it is misleading to think of knowledge as first being acquired and then later put to use. Not only does an idea get reinterpreted during use, but it may even need to be used before it can acquire any significant meaning for the user. Thus its meaning is likely to have been strongly influenced by previous contexts of use; and the idea will not be transferable to a new context without further intellectual effort. (Eraut 1994 p51)

In most professional education there is now a two-stage educational plan: initial professional education (IPE) usually prior to and/or in preparation for professional practice and continuing professional education (CPE) which is ongoing for the rest of

professional practice.¹⁶⁹ Where one stops and the other takes over is a matter of debate¹⁷⁰ but what should be clear from the above is that education at any point for professionals must seek to integrate the types of learning needed, must give attention to various modes of thinking and knowledge use and must be self-conscious about contexts and the particular skills to be addressed in each. What we have studied is without doubt in the IPE sphere, with most of those in the case studies still within a college or course structure prior to parish, church or circuit or other form of ordained ministry. Eraut points to the tension within this setting of introducing propositional knowledge some time before its use in practical ministry, thus risking the learner putting it into cold storage or forgetting, over against introducing propositional knowledge only when needed with the risk of destroying its coherence, and an uncritical acceptance of half understood ideas on the part of learners. He suggests the introduction of propositional knowledge be as close to its use as possible, that initial blocks of propositional knowledge should be kept as short as possible and that process knowledge of all kinds should be accorded central importance. By this last point I understand him to mean that the processes central to the particular professional practice should be addressed within IPE (and CPE) alongside the propositional and personal knowledge growth in order to embed the knowledge and its use in the particular practices of that profession. It may be that certain educational activities which address process knowledge are bridge building within professional practice.

In all the programmes we have studied there is some attempt to relate the disciplines of theology and the practice of ministry within this initial education period. Within each programme theological reflection or practical theology as a curriculum element appears to function as a bridging course and gives attention to process knowledge appropriate for ministers. That is, by beginning with life situations or pastoral problems and then exploring this using biblical and theological ideas, theological reflection courses imitate and rehearse the process skills necessary for professional practice of ministry, especially in helping people and churches make theological sense of their experience and work. The outcomes may be in speaking or leading groups, preaching sermons, supporting the bereaved, devising liturgies, helping develop church policy and practice, or engaging in

¹⁶⁹ In a recent publication of the Church of England (2002) the terms IME (Initial Ministerial Education) and CME (Continuing Ministerial Education) are used.

¹⁷⁰ NQT teachers and accountants working and studying for accountancy exams are sometimes seen as part of IPE and sometimes seen as in transition stage, indicating a three-stage process. With ordained ministers, in the three churches considered, initial training in a college or on a course is followed by an 'in situ' training (curacy or probationary period) before CME proper begins.

public dialogue but in all cases it requires the ability to engage with life experience and other (alternative) interpretations of them in order to provide people with a coherent theological meaning base for speech and action. It may also be an important building block for the development of the associative mode of knowledge use in that the role we noted for emotion and metaphor in higher order structuring may also have some connection with associative knowledge use. Eraut suggests that the associative mode is a way of ordering complex and expanding practical knowledge which uses metaphor and image in order to discern and choose appropriate interpretation, and this is an essential part of the somewhat mysterious but widely acknowledged notion of 'professional judgement'. Eraut may be wrong to think that this develops only at the maturing stages of professional practice. Our study and the work of O'Connell Killen and de Beer suggests that this ordering, sometimes half hidden, picture language may be operating for people from an early stage. In terms of those in our study, theological convictions will be ordering the worldview before they enter training. That this becomes important in professional practice is unsurprising as it is a facility for governing and directing a large and complex knowledge base in real life situations. By prompting students to explore associative knowledge use as they encounter new and challenging experiences, theological reflection courses may allow them to engage with an aspect of unconscious knowledge and provide the possibilities of critique and reconstruction.

Two challenges are posed by Eraut's model of professional knowledge and learning for all the programmes studied here. First, unlike Green and Whitehead who urge a corporate approach to theological reflection on all occasions, Eraut's discrimination in relation to context suggests that programmes of practical theology should be more selective in the methods used in relation to the task and process to be faced by a minister in church. For example, theological reflection related to policy work undertaken in the local or parish church (the spheres of policy) needs to give attention to theological reflection through negotiation, collaboration and joint ownership, whereas some tasks in the sphere of action (the minister's own work), such as the construction of a sermon for a funeral depends to some extent on the capacity of the individual to work reflectively with theology and life experience on his or her own. Theological reflection programmes might recognise and respond to this range of contexts more effectively.

The second challenge is in relation to the construction and integration of the whole curriculum. The Cranmer and Ushaw programme and that of the NEOC programme to a

lesser extent, do not plan for the integration of elements in the theological reflection programmes inasmuch as the content of biblical studies, systematic theology, church history etc being concurrently or recently taught is not made explicit use of in the theological reflection programmes. Little guidance is given on how to use the theological tradition and students are generally left to make use of the other theological resources as they wish. We have noted that students sometimes made connections with other material being taught simultaneously with the theological reflection work but more often there was a randomness in the material chosen from the Christian tradition. Eraut's point about the introduction of propositional knowledge close to its use could be taken more seriously in theological reflection programmes. There is scope for theological reflection exercises that encourage the exploration of theological themes which have been recently explored in other parts of the programme and which might also encourage greater understanding by offering a different context and mode of knowledge use.

Finally, Eraut's point about transfer needs to be taken very seriously. We have noted the intra as well as extra transfer problems of theological reflection. Students had difficulty in moving to other focal points for theological reflection and in conceiving of practices or approaches in other contexts than the ones in which they develop the skills. This is clearly not unique to this subject. In all learning (for professional practice) knowledge 'is likely to have been strongly influenced by previous contexts of use; and the idea will not be transferable to a new context without further intellectual effort' (Eraut 1994 p51). This is also a strong finding of the research work underpinning the theory of 'situated learning' to which we turn shortly. Meanwhile we note that transfer of skills or ideas in theological reflection needs careful consideration, some hard work and structured support, or to borrow Vygotsky's term some 'scaffolding', if students are going to achieve this.

Mentoring and theological reflection

Eraut has comparatively little to say about the role of mentoring in professional development despite the vast literature which emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s. Mentoring is variously conceived, partly because the role operates differently in different professions, partly because even within the same profession the role is different

depending on who is being mentored and what she or he is being mentored for¹⁷¹, and partly because it is a relatively new phenomenon in its present form. The role can be seen along a spectrum from informal, supportive guide, through conversation partner and role model, to that of professional, paid, coach seeking to help an individual to reach a threshold of predetermined competencies and engaged in both formative and summative assessment.

Aveyard (1997) notes the value of mentoring for theological reflection. In our studies we noted the importance attached to a significant conversation partner. Four different figures were cited as exercising this role by students: tutors, placement supervisors, spiritual directors and, in the NEOC programme alone, designated mentors for a particular study. On the spectrum of mentoring, the role is towards the soft end, with very few having any formal assessment responsibility and in most cases not being paid or trained for the role. For students what seems to be important in a mentor is a combination of a respected role model, a guide to good relevant resources and an effective listener and questioner. Where the mentor was outside the staff of the institution, and the student found the mentoring valuable, the effect was to reinforce the value and relevance of theological reflection and so develop motivation and skill. It is arguable that without some form of mentoring, theological reflection is unlikely to embed itself in the student's process knowledge.

The fact remains that the support and training of mentors is meagre and unsystematic in these programmes. This should be addressed and courses in the development stage should consider what kinds of mentoring needs to be provided for the theological reflection programme. The wider literature is now identifying the generic skills for effective mentoring (Butcher 2000); and a keener understanding of the dynamics of the interaction between mentor and mentee (Elliot and Calderhead 1995). These could be more formally explored with mentors in the programmes and the mentors' community of practice nurtured so that best practice in the specific field can emerge and knowledge creation take place¹⁷².

¹⁷¹ There is a difference in role and approach between mentors of pre-service teachers and those of head teachers (Butcher 2000).

¹⁷² English and Bowman (2001) make a theological and educational case for the expansion of mentoring practice in the schools of theology and seminaries, though their concern is wider than the provision of mentors for particular programmes. They are concerned about new faculty members as well as students. They acknowledge the value to the mentor of mentoring but assume that all mentors are within the school/seminary structure, thus they do not reflect on the potential impact on church communities. This may in part reflect their research, which has largely been carried out in North America. In the UK few programmes do not involve a wider range of people than the college/course staff.

The effect of the introduction of mentoring into schools is widely reckoned to have had positive effects. The foremost is the increase in reflection on practice by mentors themselves which in turn leads to wider staff conversation and thus helps to make schools into learning communities. Though this is the political claim of the Government (DfEE 2000), Devlin (1995) reported the same from a survey of school mentors in the early 1990s. In theological colleges and courses, placement supervisors regularly speak of the positive effect on their own ministry of having students on placement. Attention to the development of the role of mentors for theological reflection by course leaders, could have further effects on the learning culture of the ministers and perhaps also congregations.

Critical thinking and theological reflection

A regular comment made by teachers in our study about theological reflection work is the failure of students to think critically about the subject matter whether that was in conversation, in the leading of seminar or in written work. This was less evident in the postgraduate work but critical thought is not guaranteed in this realm and several staff-assessed seminars in the Cranmer Hall postgraduate programme were judged to be lacking in precisely this dimension. All teachers were concerned to develop further the critical thinking of students and sought ways to increase criticality in theological reflection programmes.

It is with this in mind that we turn to the literature on critical thinking. At first sight the discourse appears promising. There has been much attention to the notion, especially in the 1980s and 1990s (Ennis 1962; Glaser 1985; Brookfield 1987; Grant 1988; McPeck 1981 & 1990; Mezirow 1990; Stice 1987 et al). Brookfield, for example, describes a process of critical thinking that parallels the patterns outlined by several of the writers about theological reflection. He suggests that there is a fivefold sequence or series of phases in critical thinking beginning in 'trigger events' (similar to critical incidents in that an experience or context may prompt inner discomfort and perplexity or perhaps a positive new feeling) which lead into 'an appraisal' or self examination, followed by an 'exploration' in which a person begins to search for new ways of explaining discrepancies and 'flirts with new possibility'. These phases eventually give way to a period of developing of 'alternative perspectives' and finally a mental 'integration' is achieved in which there is an unconscious working out of new behaviour or attitude. The criticality

here identified is aligned with Harbermas' (1971) notion of emancipatory knowledge in that it is related to the ability to unpick the development of previous thinking and the shaping of thought and so liberate thinkers to re-conceive their view of the world and so free themselves for new patterns of thinking and living. All this resonates with our research. To a great extent, however, Brookfield fails to deliver what the title of the book promises: insight into the ways in which critical thinking may be developed or enhanced. In the end Brookfield seems to believe that outlining the nature of critical thinking is sufficient for individuals to develop it in themselves or for those in adult education to develop it in others. In many ways Brookfield is simply identifying the type of higher order thinking in adults which Moon labels 'reflection'.

Dewey (1933) who wrote about 'reflective thinking', was cautious about whether one could teach thinking skills. He rather believed that there were conditions in which reflective thinking would develop, particularly through the extension and use of language, through the nurture of careful observation, and through teacher pupil/class conversation in revisiting topics already explored. Later writers such as Ennis (1962), Beyer (1985) and Quinn (1994) developed the idea that critical thinking is a specific form of thinking concerned with "the assessing of the authenticity, accuracy and/or worth of knowledge claims and arguments" (Beyer 1985 p271) that can be taught and developed by various means. Whilst acknowledging that critical thinking is a frame of mind, they argue it is also a set of procedures, mental operations and skills with learnable rules and criteria. Critical thinking tests were developed by Ennis and Millman¹⁷³ and Watson & Glazer (1980), as tools for assessing the level and growth of critical thinking. McPeck (1981 and 1990), however, attacks the notion of critical thinking as a separate, generic, set of skills. He criticises the approach of Ennis and others as fundamentally flawed in assuming that critical thinking is a generic skill when in fact critical thinking takes place within a context and a discipline. To see critical thinking as "the correct assessment of statements", according to McPeck, tends towards the idea of a single right answer and therefore doesn't allow for degrees or mistakes, it allows a person to be right about judgement but wrong about process and most important it dislocates critical thinking from the field of study. The nature of critical thinking, he argued, is not the same in all subjects. What counts for critical thought in history, for example, is different from critical thought in science and different again from critical thought in fine art. Critical thought must be related to the epistemological structure of the discipline. He writes

¹⁷³ Cornell Critical Thinking Tests (1985), two forms, Ennis and Millman., Midwest Publications.

epistemology is, in effect, the analysis of good reasons for belief, including their specific character and foundation' and there will be 'many different epistemologies corresponding to different fields of human endeavour (McPeck 1981 p155)

McPeck believes that critical thinking can be taught and tested. The conditions for testing are:

- the test must be subject specific in an area of the test taker's experience or preparation;
- answers must permit more than one justifiable answer;
- good answers are not predicated on being right, in the sense of true but on the quality of the justification given;
- the test should not be used as a measure of one's capacity or innate ability but a learned accomplishment. (op cit. p149)

The biggest contribution to developing critical thinking in education would be to teach both basic information together with the epistemic foundations of that field' or 'none other than the study of the foundations of various types of belief (op cit. p155)

Whilst the main advocates of generic critical thinking are North American, European writers have generally lined up behind McPeck. Dunne & Morgan (1995), for example, argue that "thinking skills are context specific" (p108) and "critical thinking is best developed through an engagement with different areas of knowledge rather than an autonomous skill to be taught in itself." (p 117)¹⁷⁴. One of the strong arguments in support of this position is the research on the transfer of skills between subject areas, which they review. With the exception of the somewhat remarkable findings of Adey & Shayer (1993),¹⁷⁵ the research suggests limited transfer of skills across the curriculum. They conclude: 'There is little evidence in this literature of massive transfer across domains of problems or between different kinds of subject matter.' (p117). The philosophical ideas of Jurgan Habermas concerning the constituent interests of different kinds of knowledge (Habermas 1971) with their particular epistemological structures, patterns of arguments and forms of evidence appears to be correct in general, though there may be more than 'three' interests and many more disciplines.

¹⁷⁴ c.f. Smith 1992

¹⁷⁵ Using a Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) programme to develop thinking in science, Adey and Shayer reported significant and long term transfer of achievement into English two years after the original science programme. Dunne and Morgan note this and offer an explanation related to strong teaching strategies allowing the development of metacognitive processes and suggest that replication of the research would be valuable for further understanding.

There are two implications of this review in relation to our research. First, we cannot expect critical thinking to transfer from other subject areas. This may apply as much to the separate disciplines constituting the study of theology as to other disciplines or professional experience. Indeed there is evidence in our research to suggest that critical approaches learned in biblical studies, church history or systematic theology may be strongly associated with the original context and may be abandoned by students in theological reflection activities, where they revert to uncritical use of Biblical texts, or other theological resources. If these learned critical thinking skills are to be used in the theological reflection arena, they will probably need to be (re)introduced, modelled and reinforced within this teaching/learning context. Given that most models of theological reflection involve the substantial use of other disciplines for analysis and the development of a 'rich description', this attention to critical thinking within education for theological reflection will also need to include the nurture and rigorous use of forms of critical thinking appropriate to those disciplines also.

Both the skills and the dispositions can be taught - but only through a kind of teaching that enables them to be acquired in situations and contexts that give practice in bringing them into play again and again, contexts that are diverse and steeped in cognitive matter. (Dunne & Morgan 1995 p108)

The second implication is that there may be forms of critical thought which are specific to theological reflection itself and can only be developed within that sphere. Tracy's view of critical correlation requires, for example, not only an ability to think critically within a sociological or psychological perspective, and the ability to think critically within biblical and theological contexts but also some pattern of interrogation of both perspectives which involves an ability to critique and justify a conclusion within an inter-disciplinary process using evidence. Whilst inevitably Christians in this process may choose to privilege theology over another discipline, for the sake of integrity, the pattern of thinking has to be open to a wider public scrutiny and therefore must develop and recognise patterns of acceptable and unacceptable thinking within practical theology and activities involving theological reflection.

This theological reflection-related critical thinking process applies equally to the choice and use of material from the various traditions or disciplines used. In particular, when biblical and theological resources are chosen, there needs to be some critically examined and self-conscious pattern or process which is open to wider critical appraisal. In chapter 5 we described the ways in which the students of the three institutions engaged with the Bible and tradition. We identified seven types.

- Links and Associations
- Proof texting
- Resonance and Analogy
- Theological Themes
- An extrapolated question to take to the tradition
- A one-way critique
- A mutual critique

Whilst these constructs need testing by further research work over a wider number of institutions and with different types of theological reflection material, the taxonomy already suggests that critical thinking might be developed using these observations. In the first place the discussion of types with students before and after writing and seminars will enable them to make choices in their style of engagement, which in itself will be an improvement in critical awareness. Secondly, to some extent the types represent different levels of criticality. Whilst not strictly hierarchical, one can discern a difference in criticality between the first three and the second four. Students could be encouraged to move from the first group to the second and enrich one approach by using another in a complementary or contrasting way. At the same time one can discuss the appropriateness of certain kinds of engagement for particular aspects of theological reflection. Links and associations clearly lend themselves to frequent and perhaps prayerful self-orientation in the Christian tradition but may be inadequate in a critical discussion of a pressing issue of practice. It may be possible also to develop levels of critical engagement for each approach. The linking approach, for example, may at first sight seem to be trivial but may hide powerful critical potential. If the links were followed by further discussion of the reasons for the choices - affective, cognitive and in terms of personal historical - together with or over against other possible resources it may uncover opportunities to reform and creatively reorder thinking. Perhaps most attention needs to be given to using and, therefore, reinforcing critical thinking developed in theological and other disciplines within the processes of practical theology and the development of particular forms of critical thought appropriate to theological reflection activities. An increased self awareness about types and possible usage in this way may lead to a form of metacognition which allows students to be better equipped for the life long task of theological reflection.

So far we have identified educational literature which throws light on certain aspects of our research findings, such as the nature of reflection, the dynamics of education for professional practice, and the nature and development of critical thinking. Finally we turn to a larger frame of reference and explore the theory of situated learning as a key to understanding some of the overarching dimensions of what we have studied and suggest substantive ideas that need to be addressed in the teaching and learning of theological reflection.

Situated learning and theological reflection

'Situated learning' as a distinct theory of how people learn began to emerge in the late 1980s (Suchman 1988; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). In some ways a development of Vygotsky's work on socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky 1962; 1978; see Cobb 1999), situated learning emphasises the idea that all learning is situated in particular physical and social contexts and that any theory of learning and cognition must take serious account of the social interaction and physical activity in which the learning occurs¹⁷⁶. The best model of understanding learning according to this theory is that of the apprentice who is enculturated into the work place. In this situation the new apprentice gradually learns, by social interaction and by undertaking certain tasks, a whole range of emotions, attitudes, and skills, an awareness of the power structures operating and the correct rituals, together with language, cognitive constructs, values and the type of reasoning appropriate to the particular community of practice.

A "community of practice" need not be a closed work place environment. It could be any socially-constituted community including a family, a church community, a Weight Watchers club or an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. It may even be a dispersed community such as the world-wide Jewish community or a community of scholars working on particle physics. The analogy with the apprentice still holds, for in each of these situations newcomers learn the nature of the community, its purpose and activity by

¹⁷⁶ Many of the early advocates of situated learning attacked school based learning as representing and perpetuating the wrong model of learning. Brown et al (1989) expressing some dissatisfaction about the nature of much school "learning" as concentrating on abstract knowledge, dislocated from context, and the naiveté about the neutrality of the school, argues that what just plain folk (JPF) do is crucial to the nature and understanding of learning. He writes 'Though there are many innovative teachers, schools and programs that act otherwise, prevalent school practices assume, more often than not, that knowledge is individual and self-structured, that schools are neutral with respect to what is learned, that concepts are abstract, relatively fixed, and unaffected by the activity through which they are acquired and used, and that JPF behaviour should be discouraged.

social interaction with members of that community, and by utilising the learning resources available within the community.

The crucial point about learning is that it is situated and the situatedness profoundly influences the nature and structure of learning. The problem of transfer may thus need to be seen in a different light¹⁷⁷. Knowledge in this theory is seen not as an 'abstract entity that resides in the heads of individuals' (Gruber et al 1999) but rather as a practical capability for interacting, doing and making that is learned in a particular setting. Hence it is social in nature and is 'distributed' over individuals, groups and tools (Putnam & Borko 2000). Meaning is the construction of a social unit (a person or group) that shares a stake in a common situation. As a consequence, learning is seen as a capability for increased participation in communally experienced situations - a dual affair of constructing identity and constructing understanding.

Lave & Wenger (1991) describe learning as "legitimate peripheral participation". Legitimate means simply that people are accepted as belonging and have a right to the learning resources of the community of practice. Peripheral is defined over against full (not central) participation. Peripheral participation is appropriate for newcomers as they explore the community.

"Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills (p 29).

This approach has gained widespread support (Resneck 1991, Greeno 1996, Rogoff 1990, Pea 1993 et al) so that it is possible to speak of the 'situational perspective' (Putnam &

¹⁷⁷ Lave (1988) gives the example of a Weight Watchers Club, where a man who has studied high school calculus has to prepare a quantity of food for a diet. The instruction given in the community is that the quantity required is "three quarters of two thirds of a cup of cottage cheese". This he works out by measuring $\frac{2}{3}$ of a cup and then flattening the cheese on a board and dividing it into four and serving three parts. The calculation and action was appropriate and effective, and despite his high school calculus, at no time did it occur to the dieter to use the algorithm of multiplying $\frac{3}{4}$ by $\frac{2}{3}$, which would indicate that he needs only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. The point is made effectively. Both the multiplication of fractions, which no doubt the person would have done in school, and the practical apportioning of the cottage cheese were examples of situated learning. They were learned in particular situations and associated with these contexts and their practices and artefacts. This contextual situatedness accounts for other earlier findings which show a marked discrepancy between 'out of school' and 'in school' learning such as the finding about children working in street markets who are mathematically very proficient at handling calculations involving currency exchange but who cannot use these skills in formal class room mathematics (cf Carraher et al 1985).

Borko 2000), even if the terms are not used identically nor the theory refined to a consistent expression.

From our point of view, situated learning is a more adequate way of understanding what is going on within our case studies. In the first place we become aware of three different communities of practice in which the individuals attempt to learn theological reflection. These communities of practice, whilst apparently oriented towards the same goals are distinct communities of practice with their own distinct geographical, structural and educational features. Each has its own sets of values, rituals, patterns of worship and ways of relating to the wider communities of the church and world. Each is situated within one or a combination of denominational traditions and practices and its staff members are chosen by and engage with particular Church structures and policies. The modes of participation in the communities are different from each other.

For example, Ushaw College is a geographically-isolated seminary in an extremely large set of premises, architecturally designed and decorated with artefacts of Catholic spirituality with daily life revolving around a structure of worship and devotion drawn from and oriented towards priestly devotions. Students are within this physical setting for up to six years, taught largely by priests, and so it is not surprising that those preparing for ordination locate their theological reflection within a relationship of spiritual direction and lay students are disorientated about both the notion and how to integrate it within their own lives. Moreover this community does not exist in isolation but lives within the larger frames of priestly formation and Catholic ecclesiology. The values of and power structures within the college are clearly learned by students and at the same time these are themselves shaped by the broader power structures and values of the Catholic Church.¹⁷⁸ That theological reflection should for most exist at the interface of Catholic social teaching on major issues and individuals' lives and that the preferred model of theological reflection should be Joseph Cardijn are unsurprising.

The NEOC students, by contrast, meet in a variety of dispersed settings, often travelling to an evening teaching session after a day at work or to a weekend venue immediately

¹⁷⁸ Sharp (1997) has argued that the striking differences between English and French primary school education are the result of the respective Catholic and Protestant histories of the two countries. He suggests that the structures of consciousness and forms of social organisation, which originally developed in an ecclesiastical context, have been transformed over time into secular equivalents for educational purposes and found expression in the school systems. A similar argument could be made for Catholic versus Protestant Seminaries, especially in view of the strong roots of English Catholic Seminaries, such as Ushaw, in France.

following a full working week. Students meeting on the weekend have a strong sense of reunion, fellowship and support: a sort of comradeship in surviving in the worlds of secular employment and theology. Whilst the setting and structure of much of the worship is Anglican, it nevertheless draws on Methodist and URC traditions to some extent and has a feeling of utilising what is at hand in the venue. It runs summer schools in the midst of Birmingham multi-faith communities and in the Holy Land, and it puts many of its resources to help students integrate their work, home and study lives. Theological reflection is explored and expressed in these terms also and the ownership of theological reflection is high because there is strong correspondence between the institutional ethos, the study situations and training needs of the students, and the type of work that many are preparing for.

Cranmer Hall is located on the 'peninsula' of Durham city adjacent to the Cathedral and one of a line of old university colleges in this confined space. It reflects the culture of a college of the University of Durham, with a concern for high academic standards and research, combined with the traditional interests and emphases of an evangelical college e.g. in preaching, mission and outreach. Students here spoke of the 'academic' nature of the course in a way not found in Ushaw or NEOC. It may be, in fact, that the academic pressures and standards are little or no different from those in the other two institutions but its very location, history and environment situate it in an 'academic' context in the minds of the students and their participation in the community is seen not primarily in terms of its worship but in its study life. At the same time the strong motivation of students to be in ministry and the programme's orientation towards ministry and mission means that high value is associated with placement and mission work. It is significant that its 'successes' in terms of theological reflection relate to (a) its postgraduate programme (b) the first long placement experience and (c) its use of developed assessment criteria in connection with placement reports. These are all expressions of its ethos and life.

In other words, all three institutions are distinct communities of practice in which individuals participate according to the values, norms and patterns of the institution, which in turn is shaped by its geographical, historical and ecclesiological position. Theological reflection is shaped and expressed within that total framework. Students construct a sense of identity, vocation and belonging by participation in the community and the degree to which theological reflection is successful is the degree to which it has

meaning within and expresses the central values of the particular institution.

Discrepancies between institutions can often be traced back to the overall context and situatedness.

The learning of theological reflection is then shaped substantially by the institution in which the learning is situated. Students are, however, participants in more than one community of practice. In relation to theological reflection, the churches from which they come and the parishes and churches in which they are on placement represent other communities of practice whose pattern of life may be differently structured from and even in tension with the training institution. This has the potential for substantial learning. We have noted that where supervisors in placement settings have a high regard for theological reflection, learners value it more and are more likely to own and practice it. In this case a significant person in a second community of practice reinforces, models and develops the practice of theological reflection. If a well-respected minister dismisses the notion it may undermine the learning or may cause the student to consider more deeply what is meant by the term and whether it operates by another name or is indeed worthless in 'real ministry'. Much more could be made of these interfaces. Lacey (1977) argues that a complex process of adjustment takes place in trainee teachers on placement and in their subsequent probationary year as they move from training institution to professional practice, contexts that would be now understood as different communities of practice. This could be utilised in our contexts. Already within theological institutions students are encouraged to use situational analysis and theological reflection to evaluate aspects of the placements. These could be used on the training institutions also and there would be much to be gained by discussing the practice of theological reflection within the various communities of practice entered by the student.

The idea of 'communities of practice' thus helps to explain the nature of some of the learning outcomes we observed in the three institutions. At the same time this way of looking at learning allows us to see enormous potential for the learning of theological reflection which is in most cases designed to come into play at points where students enter 'new' communities of practice and where communities of practice confirm or are in tension with each other. The literature on situated learning does, however, give other possible lines of development. In particular, it offers another perspective on the problematic nature of transfer and suggests different approaches to enable transfer to occur.

Transfer and the development of teaching and learning

Broadly speaking, situational learning theorists argue that transfer is misconceived because the nature of knowledge is misconceived. Where for cognitive psychologists and theorists knowledge is seen as cognitive abstraction existing in the mind of individuals which then might be taken into other novel situations, in the situational perspective knowledge is much more tied to the physical and social setting in which the learning occurs and because its relatedness to interaction with objects, people and the particular environment is so strong, transfer cannot be seen as mental abstraction and application to a new setting. Some argue that knowledge does not exist in a transferable form (Clancey 1992) though this seems to overstate the case and the evidence, as Anderson et al (1996) has shown. Others conclude that the issue of transfer needs to be reconceived and investigated in terms of the nature of interaction between different environments. Greeno (1992), for example, suggests that the notion of 'affordances', properties of things that are relevant to the interactions of people with them, is central to the issue of transfer. It is the ability to perceive the affordances of a situation that are familiar already and to explore and utilise new affordances which enable transfer. Lave argues that facilitating pupils' understanding of the social organisation in the school as part of the curriculum will likewise facilitate the ability of children to interact with (some) other environments. This suggests that a self-consciousness about the particular learning situation one is in may assist the ability to interact with similarly (and perhaps differently) structured communities of practice.

Gruber et al (1999), reviewing the issue of transfer by different situational theorists, notes the basic shift in conceptualisation of the issue and points out the limited empirical research work to support the various claims. Yet there are recurring features of the various writers that in some ways represent changes of emphasis rather than new ground being proposed. Rogoff continues to argue for the role of 'guided participation' building on Vygotsky's notion of Zone of Proximate Development as a teaching strategy for enhancing transfer with the gradual movement of responsibility to novices. There is also much emphasis on collaborative learning as a form of developing the ability to utilise resources of any situation. These collaborative projects involve peers who are a supportive and investigative resource and teachers who are partners, coaches and models (Greeno 1991). Resneck favours bridging apprenticeships, that is using simulated work

environments in schools or training situations to mirror and engage with approximations to real life situations. None of this sounds new. The writers simply shift the focus from mental representations and process in individuals to a focus on interactivity as a way of understanding and strengthening transfer.

For the enhancement of transfer in relation to theological reflection, we have already noted some points made by Eraut earlier in this chapter. I suggest that the situational perspective can provide some further ideas for developing the teaching and learning of theological reflection. Firstly, the variety of contexts in which theological reflection is explored needs to be extended. Even critics of situational learning accept that knowledge is more context-bound when it is taught in a single context (Anderson et al 1996; Bjork & Richardson-Kalvehn 1989). Multiple contexts and exercises may not guarantee transfer but are likely to increase its possibility. Within our studies, work/life projects form one context, pastoral practice another, case studies another, leading or enabling theological reflection in a group situation another. Students should gain experience in a range of such settings and reflect on the nature of the interaction in each. Where multiple opportunities are not possible discussion about transfer to other situations will be useful.¹⁷⁹ Secondly, students should become aware of the larger frameworks in which their study and formation is being carried out. This already exists to an extent within the broad programmes of the institutions, particularly in relation to the denominational, theological and liturgical history but could be extended to a more careful observation and reflection on physical location, power structure, language acquisition and use, and relationships etc. of the institution in operation. Institutions may find this uncomfortable, but rather than resisting should make it part of their curriculum, in order to enhance transfer in practical theology and allow participants to be agents of development and change. Thirdly, the role of teachers as partners, coaches and models might be developed alongside collaborative practice outlined above, particularly in relation to problem-solving projects. We saw collaborative approaches to theological reflection in NEOC and Ushaw College, but in the latter students did not see the connection between the placement seminars and theological reflection. Both the practice of collaboration, its orientation and its relation to the objectives of the programmes could be strengthened.

¹⁷⁹ Anderson et al (1996) cite 5 separate studies in the late 1980s to support their argument that 'transfer is enhanced when training involves multiple examples and encourages learners to reflect on the potential for transfer' p7

Summary

In this chapter we have considered the discourses of various strands of educational literature which relate to the teaching and learning of theological reflection: reflection, professional practice, critical thinking and situated learning. In the course of the discussion we have chosen to consider some relatively independent literatures without seeking necessarily to place them all within one theoretical framework. This may be justified on the pragmatic grounds that insights to teaching and learning can be gathered eclectically. This approach has allowed us to see that the nurture of theological reflection has parallels with other fields of teaching and learning. It has enabled us to interpret our subject in a wider educational context and to draw on the wisdom of others both for understanding and in order to make some proposals for development.

The discussion has led to a set of tentative suggestions for enhancing the teaching and learning of theological reflection in the institutions studied and in similar contexts. These are summarised here.

1. In individual development theological reflection may be best understood as learning connected with the stimulation and development of higher order thinking processes for the making and transforming of meaning in relation to existing knowledge. Theological reflection is reflection with a theological input and output and is a form of thinking that creates and transforms theological meaning.
2. Major frames of meaning are often deeply emotionally connected and the development of theological reflection involves engaging people in the affective as well as the cognitive domain.
3. Wisdom from professional practice suggests that the introduction and use of propositional knowledge close to its use in theological reflection programmes would both strengthen theological reflection and encourage greater understanding of the knowledge by offering a different context and mode of knowledge use from the original.
4. There is also a need to be more selective in the use of the methods and models for theological reflection according to the variety of tasks to be faced by a minister in a church situation (and others in other contexts).
5. The support and development of mentoring may have beneficial effects both for student learning and church practice.

6. Criticality may be developed by (a) attention to the transfer of critical thinking skills. These may be already developed in other theological disciplines but cannot be assumed to transfer to theological reflection activities and will probably need to be (re)introduced, modelled and reinforced within this teaching/learning context; (b) exploring the nature of critical thought which is specific to theological reflection itself and can only be developed within that sphere; and (c) using the typologies identified in teaching and learning for increased self awareness and critical exploration.
7. The use of the situational perspective, especially the notion of ‘communities of practice’ is a useful analytical tool when theological reflection is taught in relation to placements. It prompts some degree of self-consciousness whilst the exploration of ‘new’ communities and the tension between the different communities of practices may be creative also. It thus may enable a form of metacognition in theological reflection.
8. As regards enabling students to transfer theological reflection to other settings and for it to become an embedded habit of ministry, (a) multiple contexts should be used and (b) students should become aware of the larger frameworks in which their study and formation is being carried out.
9. The role of teachers as partners, coaches and models might be developed alongside collaborative practice, particularly in relation to genuine problem-solving.

In the next, and final, chapter we conclude this study of the teaching and learning of theological reflection by gathering together the findings, insights, interpretations and suggestions made so far and seeking to spell out the implications for curriculum.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This is the first study of the practice of the teaching and learning of theological reflection in the UK. In attempting to map out the contours of the curriculum and some of the detail in specific case studies of practice, there have been deliberate choices for a particular approach and methodology and inevitably some neglected alternative possibilities. In offering the findings of this research I am all too conscious that other lines of investigation could have been taken which might have produced different insights and identified other important features of the programmes and possibilities. In this chapter I will attempt to summarise my findings and the implications of the approach taken, to reflect critically on my methods, and to identify other areas of research that might be undertaken to develop a richer description of the subject and its development.

The findings and their implications

The first two chapters of the thesis outlined the concept of theological reflection as portrayed in the literature and located it within a broad movement concerned with theological method, which has emerged since about 1970. Theological reflection, like the reconceived notion of practical theology, is primarily concerned with a process of theological investigation which begins in life experiences, societal issues or practice, and proceeds in a dialectical manner using for conversation partners human science and culture, on the one hand, and the theological tradition on the other. Its orientation is critical, and its intended outcome is consistent and coherent Christian praxis. The term theological reflection is used within the literature in three ways: to identify the process itself, to name a creative moment or phase of the process, and to describe an epistemological and philosophical basis for a variety of theological methods which share a similar approach.

In examining the various impulses shaping practical theology and theological reflection, I was able to begin to identify some of the elements that might characterise the teaching and learning of theological reflection and the tensions that might manifest themselves in the curriculum. In addition to the obvious need for a practical experiential and existential orientation of any teaching and learning programme, we recognised the need to learn how to use human sciences and explore the associated hermeneutical questions, the

need for a structured, creative and critical use of the Christian tradition and the need to address the confusion in terminology. Finally, I surmised that all this would be embodied in people, groups and processes and might need to be tested in terms of competence and collaboration as well as comprehension.

Chapter 3 allowed us to glimpse something of the reality of teaching and learning of theological reflection. We found that at least 40 institutions in the UK were engaged in helping learners to understand and participate in theological reflection. The majority of these were concerned with the training for and support of those in formal, mostly ordained, ministry for the churches, and thus in these institutions the teaching of theological reflection has a strong association with professional development for church ministry. The practical focus for learning we had expected to find usually took the form of placement or project work, though some institutions were able to utilise other approaches including the use of current employment experience and contemporary social issues for theological reflection. Around this practical focus institutions build programmes of lectures, seminars, discussions and assessed assignments. There were hints of the other elements and tensions we expected though insufficient data was available for detailed analysis. We were, however, able to extrapolate how institutions were operationalising theological reflection and discerned six intended outcomes to programmes concerned with theological reflection. These are that students completing the courses would develop:

- basic observational skills;
- a greater self awareness of personal agency;
- the ability to use other disciplines for the interpretation of experience;
- skills for using the Bible and theology in the interpretative dialogue;
- familiarity with models of theological reflection and the ability to apply them;
- skills of action and reflection which are internalised within the student and provide a permanent way of working.

The case studies examined the teaching and learning of theological reflection in three different institutions by observation, interview and documentary analysis. By these methods not only was it possible to test the programmes' effectiveness in relation to their own stated aims and outcomes and the generic outcomes extrapolated above but also to identify other features of the appropriation and development of theological reflection within learners. The semi-structured interviews both allowed for an informal measure of

effectiveness of the programmes and provided phenomenological data which extended our understanding of how theological reflection is perceived and practiced. They also enabled students to identify the key elements in their own learning of theological reflection.

Programmes were judged to be effective where individuals participating in the programme had an understanding of theological reflection corresponding to the literature, where individuals owned and used a form of theological reflection and could give current examples, where they could relate this notion to their ongoing discipleship and ministry, and where students judged the programme to be effective for their own learning.

According to these criteria all the programmes had a degree of success with most students and a small degree of failure with some individuals. Particular strengths and weaknesses were apparent from a comparison of the programmes, students' experience of them and the examination of changes to the programmes over time. The following elements are central to the effectiveness of the learning.

- **Genuine experience with authentic problems to be addressed.** Classroom based teaching is largely ineffective for theological reflection, if it is not quickly linked into the person's experience. Models of theological reflection are treated as interesting but irrelevant items of knowledge if the programme does not allow students to make links to life or work fairly speedily and enable them to use the material for sustained exploration. Models serve mainly as stepping stones to practice, or for structuring assignments. At a later stage in the learning process, models are dispensed with or modified as students have some sense of theological reflection in practice. By then they have internalised some way(s) of doing theological reflection and tend to sit lightly to received models.
- **The learner has a role in identifying a problem to be solved through theological reflection.** Virtually all student examples of theological reflection were connected with the resolution of a problem and thus they appear to appropriate theological reflection as a way of resolving or at least approaching problems. This fits well with Moon's notion of reflection as a mental process for making and transforming the meaning of previously learned material, for problem solving. Where students saw or chose for themselves the problems to be addressed the affective and cognitive motivation was high and the learning of theological reflection accelerated. The ability to frame appropriate questions as a pre-requisite

to theological reflection is important here. In some cases it may be necessary for a tutor or mentor to problematise issues for learners in order to motivate or provide scaffolding for the learner.

- **Mentoring and learning through conversation.** Almost all students identified conversation with particular individuals as the way in which they had learned the nature and practice of theological reflection. The conversations provided worked examples, prompts to thinking and exploration, and modelled the dialectic pattern at the heart of the process. The mentoring also validated the process in the eyes of the learner, especially where there were multiple mentors, among and beyond the core teaching staff. This reinforcement by tutors, external mentors, placement supervisors and spiritual directors strengthens the value learner's placed on theological reflection as well as offering practical ways of reflecting theologically. Where the institutions' staff offered mixed messages, or connections were not made between the theological reflection programmes, key individuals and other courses in the wider programme the status of theological reflection was lower and learning less effective. Mentoring, I have argued, could be strengthened and extended by support of and conversation between mentors, an outcome of which might not only be the fortification of the programme but also a wider development of reflective practice in church ministry.
- **Explicit links between different elements of the programme.** Where the links exist, for example between taught courses and practical work, and students are aware of these links, they have the scaffolding to connect and integrate various elements. Where this was in the minds of staff but not explicit in the course documentation and/or staff input, students saw the elements as discrete and were not able to make the necessary connections.
- **Progression** was a particular hallmark of the NEOC programme where students were given increasing responsibility for theological reflection over the period of their training. In the first year a personal mentor is provided, in the second year students work with a placement supervisor and in the third year on their own, using staff as needed and defending their reflection to other students. The effect of this three-stage process means that theological reflection is revisited in different circumstances, or communities of practice, and at the same time the learner becomes more personally accountable for the reflection.

- **Carefully designed and explicit assessment for theological reflection.**
Cranmer Hall had seen a marked difference in quality after introducing detailed criteria of the assessment for placement reports and making these explicit to students. Students confirmed the use of the assessment criteria as a means of designing and writing their reports.
- **Institutional signals and resources** were also important. The value placed on theological reflection by staff and the resources made available appear to influence strongly the perception. The impact of undertaking a nine month long project on a topic chosen by the student with an individual mentor in NEOC was enormous and sealed in the minds of the students the positive value of theological reflection as part of their professional training.

A number of factors emerged from the case studies, however, which all programmes were unaware of, neglected, or underestimated. Attention to these matters would strengthen and develop programmes for the teaching and learning of theological reflection.

First, there is the problem of single focal points. Situated learning theory has offered a theoretical framework for understanding a persistent problem encountered in the research, namely, the rapid association of theological reflection with particular types of focus and context and a consequent inability of the learner to transfer theological reflection to other communities of practice or focal points. As these institutions concentrate most of their energies on the ministry placement type focus, the ability to engage with other life experiences becomes limited. Even the NEOC students, whose Life and Work Project appears to work so well for theological reflection, find it difficult to move to another focus, though the experience of moving from a life and work focus to a placement focus did encourage more flexibility and skill for these students. Institutions need to consider the possibility of several types of focal point in different communities of practice for the development of theological reflection.

Second, the role of emotions in the learning of theological reflection is much higher than any of the three institutions admit and overtly use. The point of contact for most students with a situation for theological reflection was most frequently an emotional connection and often of a deep type involving the resolution of some affective disharmony. The research work of Goleman, discussed in chapter 6, suggests that emotions have a strong role in the structuring of higher order thinking and knowledge and thus that

transformation of meaning will involve emotions. Institutions need to work with this more deliberately, yet without any manipulation.

Third, we saw the strength of the influence on the learning of theological reflection of the overarching values of the tradition or denomination and the particular physical and social context of the institution within which the study is set. This too may complicate the issue of transfer, and thus restrict the functioning of the learned skills of theological reflection to particular settings. An antidote to this situatedness is to take seriously the reconceptualising of the nature of transfer of learning in terms of inter-actions with contexts and thus make critical, contextual self-consciousness an integral part of the process and its outcomes. By understanding the nature of the institution as a particular setting for teaching and learning, it may be possible to work with theological reflection within and beyond it.

Fourth, the relation between the traditional disciplines of theology and theological reflection need more coherence in all the programmes. This manifested itself again and again in interviews and essays by way of a seeming randomness in the use of the tradition and a lack of criticality. The ways of engaging with the tradition were regularly unguided by the institution and unstructured by the students. Often the biblical material chosen simply happened to be drawn from a course being taught simultaneously with the theological reflection task, without any intention on the part of the institutions. Not all these links were tenuous and weak, but the overall approach lacked coherence. This, to some extent, reflects the tension within all three teaching institutions between traditional disciplines of theology and the commitment to practical theology in its modern form. As Todd (2000) argues, these two approaches send out very different signals about how theology is undertaken. This is unlikely to be resolved by minor changes to curriculum. However, the research on education for professional practice suggests that the timing and structuring of propositional knowledge and its use needs careful coordination. The use of theme teaching enables this to happen to some extent in all three programmes. Institutions could consider this further and in so doing attend to the issues of how students are taught to engage with the tradition for theological reflection and how they transfer critical skills learned in the individual disciplines to theological reflection.

The nurture and extent of criticality in the theological reflection is a significant point in itself and the institutional staffs concerned believe that this is a weakness of all the

programmes. The typologies identified in chapter 5 and discussed further in chapter 6 provide a tool for developing a more critical engagement. In addition to this, and to the point made in the previous paragraph, the literature on critical thinking suggests that criticality needs to be more deeply embedded and modelled in the teaching and learning of theological reflection itself. Assuming or complaining about the lack of transfer is insufficient. Some aspects of an interdisciplinary task can only be critically assessed at the meeting point of the disciplines.

Finally, there was little by way of training for the facilitation of others in theological reflection in these institutions. The only significant element addressing this in the college or course setting was the small seminar groups employed for reflection on pastoral placements at Ushaw College, for postgraduate TPR seminars at Cranmer and the small group sessions at NEOC weekends. Of these three, only the Cranmer postgraduate course is oriented towards students developing the educational skills needed for facilitating others. The introduction and extension of aspects of the course for this would not only aid understanding but also strengthen the possibilities of transfer.

These findings, both those judged to be the central features of effective learning of theological reflection and those suggested as possible development points, together form the outline of a curriculum which is set out in tabular form at the end of this chapter. (See Figure 14) I have tentatively suggested a seven-stage pattern for the teaching of theological reflection in the context of ministerial training, with notes on content, process, the role of the tutor, resources, and outcomes. It is offered in the hope that it will help those involved in design and delivery of theological reflection programmes by way of providing a starting point and checklist for curriculum development. The thesis is the rationale for the suggested curriculum.

The originality of the research

The originality of the research lies in three areas. First, as indicated above this is the first detailed study of teaching and learning theological reflection in institutions in the UK. As such it enables readers to grasp something of the intricacies and complexities of the programmes and the experiences of learners, and indicates some of the factors that help and hinder the effectiveness of particular programmes. Second, the discussion of the case studies within an educational rather than a theological framework is the first of its kind.

This approach has drawn on the theory and research of related educational fields for both critical evaluation and proposals for programme development. Finally, the study of written and presented theological reflection work, underpinning the taxonomy of patterns of engagement with the Bible and tradition, is an original attempt to examine in detail how students in these ministerial training contexts employ the tradition in theological reflection. As already argued, the articulation of this typology provides a base for the development of criticality in students' work and for the devising and refinement of assessment criteria. It may also hold potential for exploring affective as well as cognitive relations between individuals, their contexts, lifestyle and practice, and the Christian heritage. Thus it may be a key to illuminating further the role of theological reflection in spirituality¹⁸⁰.

Reflections on the research process

In retrospect it is not difficult to see how my research might have been improved or modified. The longitudinal study at Cranmer might have included more students, have been replicated at the other two institutions and, had time allowed, been extended to cover at least one year beyond training for each student involved. Comparing the four spaced interviews with the six Cranmer Hall students over the two years with interviews of students in different years at the other institutions meant that the development of ideas and concepts over time was not easily evaluated. On the other hand, this approach allowed access to perceptions of courses taken before the study period and through it I gained student insights into changes in the courses over a longer period of time than the two-year study period. Moreover, the inevitable influence on the students' view of theological reflection of a longitudinal monitoring was absent in the other two cases and helped to correct any distortion implicit in the research design. If tackling the research again I would include independent samples within each case. That is, I would structure a longitudinal study at all three institutions for new students and I would interview students from other different year groups outside the longitudinal studies. I continue to believe, however, that the choice of an exploratory survey followed by multi-site case studies was the right strategy for this research. The survey allowed me to plan case studies which were reasonably representative of the institutions involved in this teaching and learning, and the case studies themselves provided the details necessary to engage with curriculum

¹⁸⁰ Chapter 5 on typologies has already been accepted for publication in the *British Journal of Theological Education*, to be published Autumn 2002.

design and development. It would be possible now to turn to quantitative methods to test the findings with a larger number of institutions.

A recurring concern of this study for me has been a fear that individual interviews with students has skewed the investigation towards a study of the cognitive processes of individual learners and thus neglected the corporate dimension of 'distributed' knowledge residing in groups learning and participating in theological reflection. Whilst the investigation reflects accurately how the institutions teach and test the learning of theological reflection, I suspect that more could be learned by group interviews and observing group projects in which theological reflection is a significant feature. The institutions studied only used peer groups in modest ways to discuss individual placement reports or the progress of an individual's personal reflection or study. None set up group tasks for the purposes of theological reflection but an attempt to explore the nature of theological reflection in relation to a shared problem might have added significantly to the research.

Further areas for research

The research here, like any research, is incomplete. It would be possible to extend and enrich the study in a number of obvious directions. First, the issue of the long-term use of theological reflection by those who trained and studied through the programmes here might prove to be interesting for understanding theological reflection and its practice. Eraut's work on the nature of knowledge use and its effect on personal knowledge and skill suggests that one might see some development and modification of theological reflection in individuals over time. Likewise 'associative knowledge' would be expected to change over time also. A longitudinal study could be undertaken through regular interviews with those in ministry over a period of 10 to 20 years. Second, to extend our understanding of the mentor relationship, found to be crucial for learning in our study, extensive observation/recording of mentor conversations might be carried out together with an examination of mentor perspectives, training and support. Third, a further examination of written and oral presentation of student's theological reflections from a wider range of institutions would, I believe, expand and deepen the typologies identified and suggest ways of teaching and learning .

In the educational reflection undertaken for this thesis I chose to examine the literature on critical thinking in order to understand our findings. We might have turned to the growing literature of creative thinking and the use of imagination in theological reflection.

We have seen hints in the study to suggest that gender, age and personality types¹⁸¹ might affect an individual's ability to learn and use theological reflection. In the light of what has been learned to date, it would be possible to use quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the correlation between, for example, Fowler's faith stages, Myers-Briggs personality types, Honey and Mumford learning styles, or gender and the learning of theological reflection.

We also deliberately concentrated our case studies on institutions which have a primary or major role in training for ordination. We noticed in our survey, however, that some institutions seek to nurture theological reflection for other forms of work: e.g. Church-related adult educators and youth workers and some teachers in training at denominational colleges. These could be studied using similar methods to my own study and useful comparisons drawn. Likewise the study of groups in parish, circuit and local church or social and political issue groups such as those connected with the Woodstock College in North America would add to our understanding of the concept of theological reflection and its learning and use in particular contexts.

These research projects may be ways of developing what has begun in this work. For my part, having identified some of the limitations of my own research and some possible areas of further research, I offer this thesis as a contribution to the understanding of teaching and learning of theological reflection.

¹⁸¹ See chapter 4.3 NEOC.

CURRICULUM FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN MINISTERIAL TRAINING CONTEXT

A possible 7-stage pattern of learning

AIMS: To introduce and develop patterns of theology which arise from experience and practice
 To cultivate habits of personal and corporate theological reflection
 To nurture critical, theologically reflective practitioners

Stage	Focus	Role of tutor	Processes	Resources	Outcome
Stage 1: Orientation	What are theological reflection and practical theology?	Introduction to terms and 2 or 3 methods	-Lecture and discussion - Student reading - Model seminars	- Papers - Handouts - Modellers (2 nd years)	Basic understanding of terms and idea of process
Stage 2: 1 st Experiential focus	Current or recent experience (work, home, church, or community)	General support for the student in the process (Possibly acts as mentor)	Identification of significant experience Conversations with mentor over time Presentation to peer seminar group	- Materials for identifying and reflecting on experience e.g. critical incident material - Mentor	Experience of the notion in practice; Increased awareness of self and agency, cognitive and affective involvement; patterns of theological reflection
Stage 3: Reflection	Examination and extension of the models and methods used in 1 st experiential focus	To facilitate discussion about models and methods – adequacy, fitness for purpose, affective and cognitive dimensions To introduce other models and approaches and use of human sciences	- Classroom based discussion - Student reading	- Papers - Handouts - Booklist	Increased self awareness; Knowledge of variety of models and ability to choose, use and evaluate models for TR.
Stage 4: 2 nd Experiential focus	New experiential focus - move into another community of practice (e.g. placement)	General support for the student in the process	Journaling; Data collection, profile building Conversation partner (supervisor or mentor) Presentation and/or written submission	Materials for observation and collecting data for situational analysis	Further developed skills in observation; self awareness; description and analysis; theological presentation and evaluation

Stage 5 Reflection on underlying issues	Critical elements of TR - Communities of practice - Types of engagement with Bible and tradition - Criticality - The nature of theology, normativity, authority, epistemology. New focus in another community of practice	To facilitate discussion about issues (including some reflection on the nature of the training institution itself as a community of practice)	- Classroom based discussion - Student reading	- Papers - Handouts - Booklist	Heightened criticality, Developed critical awareness and ability
Stage 6 3 rd Experiential focus		General support for the student in process	- Limited mentor help, more emphasis on autonomy, peer or team process within CoP - Presentation and/or written submission with reflection on method	As requested by student	Further developed skills in observation; - self awareness, - description and analysis; - theological presentation and evaluation
Stage 7 Projection into other situations with an eye to the facilitation of theological reflection in other settings	Discussion and critical evaluation of patterns, models and approaches	To facilitate discussion about transfer, and facilitation of process for groups in other different settings	Discussion, site visits and seminars	Critical discussion of action/ research case studies in practical theology	Increased ability to choose, use and critique methods and models Enhanced ability transfer interaction to new contexts

Figure 14 A 7-stage pattern of learning for TR

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Models of Theological Reflection

Models of theological reflection can be divided broadly into three types: linear, cyclical and dialectic.

1. Linear Models

An example of a linear model is the See, Judge, Act model which originates from the work of Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967). Whilst not named by Cardijn as a model of theological reflection, it is the favoured approach of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) whose literature speaks of this approach in terms of theological reflection.

As a priest, Cardijn began work with young women workers in Laeken, Belgium in 1912. He divided the large group into cells according to place of work and challenged each cell to 'Christianise' its own place of work. These cells took the form of study circles in which all had a participating role and relied on the observation of each member – what Cardijn called 'personal knowledge' – in order build up a picture of situation. The roots of the 'See, Judge, Act' method can be seen in the meeting of the cells.

'First the girls would consider a particular problem in their place of employment. Next they would read a Christian social teaching bearing on the problem, and finally the group would read and reflect on a Gospel passage. Then the cell would form a plan of action which provided a Christian solution to the problem. Joseph called this his See, Judge, Act plan.' (Hanley 1985 p12)

Hence, the model begins with the experience both encountered and observed. This experience is extended and analysed through the group's sharing and discussion. The second step is a setting of the experience and the structures and worldview or values behind it alongside that of the tradition, in the form of Catholic social teaching and scripture, in order to test where the current practice matches or is challenged by the Christian perspective. Where experience and practice fall short of gospel values, the group members attempt to plan and support each other in action for change.

See – observe a situation or practice, pool experience and gather facts;
Judge – think about the situation in the light of the gospel and the teaching of the church.
How does it match up to gospel values and convictions?
Act – form an action plan for change based on the reflection.

This model is transferable to settings other than the workplace and has been widely used in the YCW movement.

The linear nature of the model is evident in that the steps are sequential and invariable. They lead from experience to action via the Christian tradition. In this process the Christian tradition acts as a set of criteria by which actions, beliefs and practices are tested and judged. The actions planned and enacted are to bring reality in line with the values at the heart of the Christian tradition and make the policy and practice an expression of these Christian values. In practice, as advocates will argue, the process is more complex, in that the participants are also learners and interpreters of both their experience and their faith and at each stage of the group process a dialectic-hermeneutical dynamic is at work. Nevertheless, the model favours a one-way critique of practice by theology and church teaching. It has a tendency towards unreflective and non-critical engagement with the tradition and, as is seen in the case of Ushaw College students, towards a ‘proof-text’ approach to action. With other linear models, it is attractive in its simplicity and focus on action for change but by neglecting the dialectic involved it can convey and promote a simplistic and even imperialistic view of theological reflection.

Other examples of linear models are the ‘Movement towards meaning’ (O’Connell Killen 1995) and the ‘Shared Christian Praxis’ (Groome 1980). These models emphasise a series of sequential steps though they are more sophisticated in their description of the hermeneutical processes in the model. Both models are discussed in detail in Chapter 1 and are thus simply noted here.

2. Cyclical Models

We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 the most common forms of this, the ‘pastoral cycle’ and the more complex 5-stage van der Ven empirical-theological cycle. Like the experiential learning cycle of David Kolb (Kolb 1984 c.f. Jarvis 1983), these models see some form of cycle of steps that bring the group or individual back to the point of original departure

with some new insight to apply or action to take. Once taken, say the advocates, the cycle can or must begin again to consider the new action via theological reflection.

Cyclical or spiral models emphasise this ongoing process of action and reflection and offer a series of steps that make up the cycle for reflection and action. There is a tendency in this model to maintain the hermeneutical dynamic of theological reflection by confining the role of theological reflection to one step or phase in the cycle and to emphasise the creative moment when tradition is set alongside the analysed experience or practice. The cyclical models are popular among teachers. As Moon (1999) points out, however, they provide a better teaching model than a map of how learning occurs. Like the linear models there is a tendency for the cyclical models to understate the pervasive nature of the dialogical aspect in the process. Theology, as well as other factors, will be active both as a prompt and a filter at the initial experience and at the analysis stage, as well as the 'official' point(s) of theological reflection.

3. Dialectical Models

Whitehead (1980) and Todd (2000) offer models which place the emphasis on the continuing dialectic in the process of theological reflection. Whitehead does this by distinguishing model, with its three sources of insight, from method which uses a series of steps to bring all three elements into dialogue with each other. Likewise Todd describes theological reflection as a conversation between the elements that make up the current situation – engagement with context; ways of seeing and knowing; and action – which together form a story, and the identical elements and story in the Christian tradition. In this way both writers recognise and try to give expression to the complexity of the hermeneutical process in which participants are involved.

Such models are less popular with both teachers and activists, as they are more complex for teachers to convey and for students to grasp in the abstract until students have some experience of theological reflection. It may also tend to obscure action outcomes in the desire to be more accurate about the process.

All models build around the basic idea of beginning theological exploration from experience or practice. All acknowledge the need for critical engagement and awareness of complex hermeneutics. They each emphasise different aspects of what is being

portrayed or modelled and thus carry some tendencies to present and practice theological reflections in particular ways. The model particular students choose appears to be related to both what models are taught and how their own practice is carried out and understood.

APPENDIX 2: Methods and Techniques for Theological Reflection

There are a number of techniques or methods offered by different writers for various parts of the process of theological reflection or practical theology. These differ greatly in relation to the group in mind or the particular focus. The quality or fitness for purpose is variegated even as viewed by the writers themselves. I will attempt to gather these the techniques offered under four headings.

- Techniques for identifying and presenting experience
- Techniques for deepening the understanding of the experience
- Techniques for engaging with the Christian Tradition (Theological Reflection)
- Techniques for moving to action

Techniques for identifying and presenting experience

The identification of experience and its presentation are often intertwined in the literature. It seems to be assumed that experience presented is in some way significant but how its significance is identified is not always made clear. Ballard and Pritchard (1996) think that ‘theological issues are latent in the specific contours of every situations in ministry’ (p 87) and, therefore, presumably do not think that it matters which ministry issues are identified¹⁸². O’Connell Killen and de Beer (1995) write about particular experiences of beauty or pain that ‘disrupt the taken-for-granted measure of our existence’ (p22). Similarly, Chadwick & Tovey (2000) advocate identifying experience for reflection through a ‘**critical incident**’ approach¹⁸³. This they identify as ‘an event, or series of events, that lie outside one’s normal range of usual experiences ... which produces an emotional reaction in the person who experiences it’ (op. cit. p7). Hence like O’Connell Killen they see emotionally charged incidents as key for the process. Two methods for

¹⁸² In their introduction to the relevant section they give three particular ‘situations in ministry’ which they then use to illustrate the various approaches and techniques for learning from experience without justifying the choice. Ballard & Pritchard 1996 pp87-88

¹⁸³ Critical Incident Analysis is used in both for training and learning purposes in both nursing and teaching. See Flanagan 1954; Cormack 1996; and Tripp 1994

learning from critical incidents are then offered both using a series of questions and exercises with which to interrogate the experience¹⁸⁴.

Gariboldi and Novotny (1987) argue for the use of **biography** in training as a way of identifying the key experiences of others that have led to theological reflection (pp 97-104), and which in turn helps students to move to autobiography as a source of experiences for theological reflection. As with critical incidents the identifying of an experience is selected by what the individual considered significant.

Green (1990) assumes a church based group and therefore believes that a focus will to some extent emerge as the group gets to know each other (p43-45). This is important because 'it will be easier to be sure that whatever focus is chosen really does carry all the members of the group and is not just the personal interest of one or two of the team.' (p45) Choice here appears to be important but Green suggests that in reality it may be curtailed and the issue of identifying the focus rendered void because an obvious crisis in the life of the church, community or nation demands attention.

Ballard and Pritchard (1996) offer two techniques to help theological college students in the preparatory stage of identifying a focus or particular event for theological reflection in a placement: '**the personal reaction sheet**' and '**the pastoral focus**'. The first of these is intended to be filled in at the end of a placement and asks a series of nine questions encouraging the student to identify enjoyable, difficult, rewarding and frustrating experiences of ministry and to pinpoint learning accomplished and needed as a result of the placement. The second is designed for a student to pursue whilst on fieldwork and entails some concentrated work with a specific family, group or institution within the placement. Both these serve to aid the students in narrowing down from a wide-ranging set of activities to a particular focus for reflection.

For presenting or describing an experience, there are various techniques¹⁸⁵:

¹⁸⁴ Kinast (1996 p27) also advocates this approach, seeing a critical incidents as 'combination of the verbatim and the case study' for written purposes. Ballard and Pritchard (1996) also offer an outline proforma for recording a 'significant event' with questions leading into theological reflection and action planning.

¹⁸⁵ The vexed question of what constitutes experience complicates the problem of separating identification and presentation. Kinast (1996) offers some methods for presenting experience which illustrate this. Among his collection of methods are listed 'role play' and 'interview'. Whilst he recognises that role play is in some ways a secondary form of experience in terms of not being the 'real' place and persons acted out in role, there is, nevertheless, an immediacy of experience provided by the active involvement of the persons, their emotions and their thoughts in a spontaneous form. This therefore can become an experience, which provides material for theological reflection. Likewise a one-to-one interview may be the means of identifying and

- ***A simple narrative:*** Patton (1990 p14) argues that some people have great difficulty in describing in any detail what has happened to them in their lives and need practice in art of recounting life events.¹⁸⁶ The first step in the O’Connell Killen “movement towards insight” model, is what they call “entering our experience”, that is a heightened awareness of the experience through narrative. Here individuals or groups tell the story of an experience, keeping the narration as concrete as possible and suspending judgement to avoid premature interpretation.
- ***The Journal or diary:*** is a written record or log of personal experience, reactions and reflections over a period of time. It may be deliberately undertaken for the sake of recording placement or fieldwork experience or simply used for noting personal everyday experience. (Aveyard 1997 p8-9 c.f. Chadwick & Tovey 2000 p15ff) The scope of items for entry is wide, as Ballard and Pritchard (1996) point out, from sights and smells from a place to the inner journey an individual is making (92-93). This record can then be used to identify particular events or an issue encountered over several weeks or months.
- ***The verbatim:*** (Kinast 1996 p26; Ballard and Pritchard p 95;) this is written record of a verbal conversation in a personal, pastoral or ministerial encounter, a method often used in pastoral work training and for spiritual direction. Whilst not tape-recorded or written down during the conversation, the account attempts to be as accurate as possible about what was said by each person in the conversation. It is best done immediately or shortly after the event. The transcript is then available for others involved in the theological reflection, e.g. supervisor, study class or group, as well as giving the key reflector a written account to work with.
- ***The case study:*** (Kinast 1996 p27) Case study here means setting a description of a particular experience set within a broader social, political and pastoral as well as personal context highlighting some of the dilemmas or difficulties implicit within the context¹⁸⁷. Ballard & Pritchard suggest that students on placement can used

exploring an experience but its own dynamic, may insert another experiential focus for those observing or participating in the interview.

¹⁸⁶ Patton cites Ernest G Schactel ‘On Memory and Childhood Amnesia’ in *A Study of Interpersonal Relations* P Mullahy (1949 NY: Hermitage Press) to support this case. Schactel argues that people cannot remember many of their childhood experiences because they have not developed ways to describe and reflect on the events of their lives and share them. This is an impoverishment of human being. Patton writes ‘If persons are genuinely to experience their human being, they need to reflect on, re-create and share what has happened to them’ p15.

¹⁸⁷ Kinast does not defined case study in this context except by referring to its use in law, business medicine etc. Rather he argues that the case study should not be third party but written by a participant. Otherwise it risks violating ‘one of the basic conditions of theological reflection – that experience should be personal’

church and community profiles for this purpose, for which they offer example proformas¹⁸⁸

- **Role play:** What is meant here is an imagined setting with certain given characters which are taken by members of a class or group and played with each person responding as if s/he were the person in the situation. After a given time the role play is stopped and discussion about the experience can take place. Whilst it is in some ways a secondary form of experience in terms of not being the 'real' place and persons there is an immediacy of experience provided by the active involve of the persons and their emotions and thoughts in a spontaneous form.
- **Interview:** (Kinast 1996 p 29) The interview is a one to one meeting either live or recorded in which one person asks questions and seeks to respond to the unfolding conversation. Issues of power and control aside, this can be a useful live encounter in which very different views or experiences may meet.

These techniques are taken from different writers. It is important to remember that the conceptions of theological reflection are not identical and that the writers may be advocating different models for different people, purposes and settings. Whilst the above may have application in several different contexts, some will be more appropriate for some than others.

Techniques for deepening the understanding of the experience

Almost all writers in the field agree that the first presentation of the experience needs elaboration in order to be useful for the purpose.¹⁸⁹ Indeed the desire to keep the narration concrete and free of premature value judgements is in part to keep open a variety of avenues for exploration and analysis. Thus all advocates indicate some second stage of exploration, study or research to enlarge the framework and inner dynamics and details of the experience. The purpose is to provide a 'rich' or 'thick' description out of which a theological engagement may take place.

The resources suggested for this part of the process are broadly twofold.

(p27). One assumes from the examples given in various parts of the book that case study (e.g Jody's Dilemma p70; How much to reveal p110ff; and 'A case of Talents or Gifts' p140)

¹⁸⁸ See Ballard & Pritchard Appendices A & B p167-169

¹⁸⁹ Cardijn's threefold sequence, See-Judge-Act appears not to do this, though in modern usage the first phase usually combines personal perception and concrete involvement with detailed social analysis.

(a) The exploration of the texture of personal involvement

We have described elsewhere in the thesis the ‘movement to insight’ model¹⁹⁰ in which by recounting an experience people naturally encounter feelings. These feelings are vitally important in the process and the model encourages the exploration of the feelings around the incident to provide ‘clues to the meaning’. Metaphors, which arise out of the affective dimension of the experience, can become powerful vehicles of disclosure and new meaning. Hence, **attending to feelings** is a vital part of the process. Thus, the exploration of the nature of the person’s involvement is an important part of making of a rich description and some attempt must be made to identify and incorporate these affective elements in the analysis. Of course, the issue may be a group or church issue, not that of an individual and so the feelings of group will be an important feature too. Likewise the feelings expressed and metaphors used others by players in the arena of the event, encounter or issue are a form of knowledge too. Whitehead (1980) suggests that attending to what is said verbally and non-verbally through such things as tone of voice and silences can also be important in this exploration.

Kinast 1996 uses a form of one might call ‘**textual criticism**’ for this purpose. That is having presented the experience to the group, or mentor he adopts some literary techniques to ‘entering the experience’. Here Kinast uses the imaginary of the theatre. One may enter the experience through three possible entry points: the players, the plot or the place. (p45ff) The players are clearly those involved in the reported incident or verbatim. On the basis of the report is it possible to ask how the players relate to each other, their roles, their expectations their feelings, their influence. The plot refers to the issues or values that are at stake and ask what is the dominant issue, an issue which is likely to keep recurring throughout the narrative, often in images or symbolic language. The ‘place’ is the setting in which the event occurs and about which one can ask questions to begin to make a social analysis of the situation. Questions about economic, political, cultural and gender features are appropriate. Useful for all three entry points or perspectives are what Kinast calls ‘clues along the way’. These are the images, gestures and objects that are present within the experience that point to or symbolise keys to understanding and meaning. Kinast is careful to point out that these should not be artificially imposed on the situation but discerned within it, though he suggests that they are often small, subtle and simple and by implication not easy to detect. The purpose of entering into the experience is to enlarge the understanding of the experience in a variety

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter 1

of ways in order to begin to discern theological dimensions to the incident or event. Entering from one or more of the different perspectives, alert to clues, is both a technique and an art form into which people can grow.

Green also points out that the importance of exploring nature of the personal involvement with an issue or experience. He assumes a group rather than an individual involvement but the issues are similar. What is the nature of the group, how has it come into being, where does it stand in relation to issue, what are feelings of the group member about the issues, where are the angers, fears, biases, and in what way is the group part of the problem/issue itself? (Green 1990 p67)

(b) The exploration of the 'facts' of the situation and the perspectives of others

Green calls this moving from 'anecdote to analysis' and envisages a process of information gathering from a variety of sources to inform thinking about the issue in focus. Whether the concern is local or national, the broad approach is the same: it involves collecting information on the relevant history, geography, politics and social development through maps, census information, planning departments, etc but also may entail the use of arts as well in the form of novels, works of art, video and cultural events. (Green 1990 p59) Whitehead (1980) describes all this as the 'cultural information' surrounding the issue or experience and assumes that it accessed through various disciplines such as history, philosophy and social science. In the work of Friere, Cardijn and the early liberation theologians the emphasis was primarily on the social and political analysis of the situation, often drawing on Marxist analytical tools. Through this it was believed to be possible to illuminate the experience by identifying in particular the historical and structural sources of poverty, oppression and injustice. Other perspectives from, for example, psychology and cultural studies, as well as other sociological approaches have been encouraged in recent writings. Underlying the approach again is the need to develop a rich description of the issue or experience in which one may be able to detect connections, values and causes and the need to create dialogical conversation between theology and other views of the world. Rather than generic techniques, most writers advocate the introduction and use of the methods developed within the academic disciplines and/or interdisciplinary ways of working.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Ballard and Pritchard gives two examples of students on placements in inter-disciplinary or inter-professional setting p111-112: (a) a lay Christian women studying for pastoral qualification, working in a community project with social workers, police, health workers etc and (b) an ordinand placed in hospital

At the same time this area raises some hard questions. In particular, it raises the questions of expertise. Given that it is unlikely for most people to operate at a high level of expertise in several disciplines, to what extent can a person draw from a discipline in which they are not expert or perhaps even competent for the purposes of theological reflection? Ballard & Pritchard argue for a permanent, inter-disciplinary way of working for practical theology but warn against a number of the problems inherent in this process: superficially, through having limited awareness of different approaches to sociological analysis or out of date information; selective bias, neglecting important but unwelcome perspectives; eclecticism which results in the bringing together a bizarre collection of bits and pieces that simply do not fit together and false assimilation resulting in not comparing like with like. In terms of the teaching and learning of theological reflection this means at least raising these questions and may mean developing practices that guard against the dangers.

Techniques for engaging the Christian Tradition

Whilst there is some degree of sophistication in the exploration stage of this process, the methods offered for engagement with the Christian Tradition appear to be simple and even naive at first sight. Holland and Henriot (1980), for example, having argued for a complex and critical approach to social analysis as a pre-requisite to theological reflection, offer a brief 10 step guideline for this process¹⁹² which includes prayer, reading relevant scriptures and asking questions about the role of the church in this situation. Likewise, Green (1990) talks about a number of set pieces or 'ways in' to working with the Christian traditions. These are techniques for making simple

captaincy team. Both are able to raise questions about inter-professional worker from their placement experiences.

¹⁹² STEPS for theological reflection

1. Identify 'root' elements
2. Pray for discernment
3. Develop questions for reflections e.g. what consequences does this situations have for building a Christian community
4. Read scriptures which suggest themselves and/or Churches teaching tradition
5. Pray again asking questions about situation e.g. where is sin, Jesus, grace in this situation?
6. Ask questions about scripture and teaching e.g. including what more do I need to know about (this) scripture
7. Ask questions about church structures and practice e.g. what is the role of the church here? What spirituality is appropriate?
8. Prioritise some of the major lessons which have emerged
9. Practice prayerful discernment over lessons learned
10. Pray for strength to move into decisions and actions which are called for by situation submitted to social analysis and theological reflection

connection with the Biblical tradition, doctrine or worship. One method is to **list all the stories** the group can remember of what Jesus did or the stories he told, then cluster all the ones that the group think are relevant to the situation. A Concordance can then be used to supplement the list. Others techniques include using participatory Bible study methods such a **bibliodrama**, or checklist approaches to potentially relevant texts or for Bible passages studied throughout the whole process. Kinast (1996) uses the approach of **'that reminds me of...in the Bible'** where a detailed examination of the experience is then directed towards the Christian tradition by asking the person or group to say what immediate echoes they find within the Bible.

This apparent naivety needs to be explained. In the first place all these writers assume that participants are bringing much by way of already formed or implicit theology to the task, which has been shaped by years of worship, prayer, preaching and bible study. Even recent converts will carry some convictions about God, the world and what the Bible says and these needs to be brought into the dialogue. Holland and Henriot point out that theological reflection is going on throughout the process of Social Analysis because theological presuppositions are present in the one who takes part in the process. Secondly, there is an assumption that the theological knowledge is growing alongside the process. Kinast is assuming that his students will be studying the scriptures and other aspects of the study of theology as part of their training alongside his theological reflection seminars and so will be able to draw on both a prior and an expanding knowledge. Whitehead (1980) believes that the minister who is to be involved in theological reflection will 'befriend the scriptures'. By this they mean that she or he will become familiar with scripture including the historically diverse contexts of the texts and ability to handle them critically but at the same time entering the scriptures prayerfully and imaginatively so that they are saturated in the scriptural tradition.

Green has another concern. He recognises the complex hermeneutics issues that underlie making connections between the biblical narrative and the modern day issues but he wants to safeguard the process from not relying 'upon academic expertise' as this might exclude many Christians from the process. Simple set pieces allow everyone to make the connections and thus to be involved in the theological reflection. He does, however, assume facilitators (usually ministers) who are 'soaked in the tradition' and who are able 'to interpret what technical theologians are saying for the groups'. (p124). Biblical and theological competence are present therefore and the need at this stage is to make simple

connections between the issue and the tradition that can be further refined once the dialogue is going.

Ballard and Pritchard (1996) identify a number of methods for engaging with the Christian tradition. Most of their methods are similar to those of Green¹⁹³ but they point to three significant additions to the list. First under correlations approaches they include a technique called a ‘**spidergram**’. This is a written form of brainstorming, drawing on lateral as well as linear models in which participants write down aspects of the experience and exploration and seek to identify a key theological theme, which relates to all. Then from this central theme they then draw on paper a spider diagram to the other elements of group findings. The value of this exercise may be its ability to reflect cognitive structure and influence the mental networks already established and thus reshape the constructs and connections¹⁹⁴. Second, Ballard and Pritchard underline the role of **asking questions about theology** of case studies and verbatim reports. Finally, under what they call the ‘*habitus*’ approach, they draw attention to the place of godly conversation; the type of conversation that often takes place with a spiritual director. Here in the personal integration of the person’s being and prayer life, theological sense may be made of complex and carefully explored experience.

Techniques for moving to action

What Green calls ‘discerning the appropriate response’ from theological reflection is a crucial part of his doing theology cycle. It flows from careful and rigorous attention to the earlier parts of the cycle and may not be best described through the idea of learning techniques. The types of action as well as the business of devising and monitoring strategies for action will emerge from the theological reflection process, its focus and its context. He does, however, offer criteria for the selection of courses of action determined by a threefold purpose in theology. The first purpose is the *contemplative purpose*, or better knowledge of God. The second purpose is the *instructional purpose* which is to do with being formed into the people God would have us become, and the third is what he calls the *transformative purpose*, or the ‘opportunities of working with God’s saving intention in the transformation of ourselves and of society’ (Green 1990 p106) understood in social and political terms. Action should be selected in relation to all three so as not to

¹⁹³ Like Green much is made of participatory Bible study approaches e.g. The Bible workshop of John Davies & John Vincent and what they call artistic methods with response in paint, clay and collage. See pp117-135

¹⁹⁴ We return to this in chapter 5.

separate the three complementary purposes O'Connell Killen & De Beer appears to accept that the first two purposes will give rise to the third. They are content with outcomes that may be expressed through poetry or art and therefore do not offer particular structure or techniques for moving to action. Green fears that this approach will revert to a conservative version of theology which will maintain the status quo. Perhaps what unites all writers in this area is the view that theological reflection needs concrete expression through some means.

APPENDIX 3: Interview Questions

The following introduction was used in all interviews:

Thanks for being willing to help me. I am conducting some interviews as part of research work I am doing on how people learn, and how their views change over a period of time. It is research work, which will help me, I hope, to understand certain things better about Christian education and is part of a thesis I am writing for the University of Durham. I am recording the interview to help me analyse what people say and return to make sure I have heard and remembered things correctly. Interview is confidential – it will not be listened to by anyone other than myself (and possibly my supervisor) and any written quotations used will be anonymous. It is not part of the college process or course and will not be used in any other way than for the research.

This interview is concerned with the notion of theological reflection. It is term that you may have heard before or not. You may have already formed views about the notion or you may not. There are no 'right' answers. I am quite simply interested in what you honestly think at this moment. I hope that we may have another interview later in the year and explore if and how your ideas have changed.

Cranmer Hall (Longitudinal Study)

1st SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (October 1999)

Preliminary and identification questions

- Can I ask you for the tape to tell me your name?
- You are a first year student here at Cranmer Hall/Wesley study Centre.
- Briefly describe yourself and say how you came to be here?
- What do you hope to gain from the experience of being here?

Have you come across the term “theological reflection”?

If YES -

- where have hear the term?
- in what situations? (by whom?)
- what do you think it means?
- can you give examples?
- what has helped to develop that idea? (experiences, books, people)
- how does it work?
- why do think people are interested in this notion

IF NO

Let's take the word reflection

- What is generally meant by the word reflection?
- Can you give examples?
- How does it work?
- do you think you can get better at it...
- what kind of people are good at it and how do you know?
- what aspects of you are involved when you reflect

Let's turn to the word Theology

- How would you describe what theology is?

- Who involved in theology and what do they do?
- Why do think that
- Can you give examples?
- What then do you think it means to put the words together to get the phrase “theological reflection”.
- Do you think there is a better term for this activity?
- What is it?
- Why do you think it is better?
- Can you give an example?

Given what you have said about ‘theological reflection’, is it something that you do?

- If so, what form does it take
- who does it or (should) do it?
- are there some people who are better at theological reflection? ... who? .. can you give examples what makes you think that they are better at this
- Do you think theological reflection can help a person be a better Christian and if so how?

Do you think Theological reflection is do with feelings, thinking, action or other things?

- What kind of feelings, thinking, action etc...?
- Can you give an example?
- Are any of the following involved: imagination, logic, critical thinking, evaluative, intuition, creativity, judgement, understanding, problem solving, valuing, action, practice?
- Why do you think you choose these words?
- Is there anything left out?

Do you think that theological reflection is

- Natural and happens anyway
- Discipline that you have to work at
- Triggered by events or other things
- Can you say why

If it triggered, what triggers theological reflection?

- Can you give examples
- How would judge that theological reflection had been successful?
- How do think theological reflection features in your course

Have any other thoughts occurred to you as we have been talking that you think are relevant?

2nd SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (July 2000)

What would say theological reflection is now?

- Do you think your view has changed
- Can you give examples of theological reflection?
- Has the term been used in College during this year?
- Where, when?
- Has your understanding changed as a result?
- What has caused that change?

Has you undertaken fieldwork, attachment or placement during this year?

- If yes, has theological reflection figured in this?

Other example outside college?

Do you think people can progress in theological reflection?

- How do you know when progress has taken place?
- If you were assessment progress in theological reflection?

3rd SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW: After Placement (October 2000)

Areas of exploration:

- What was the nature of your placement?
- Did you write a report?
- What did you choose to focus on in your report?
- Why?
- What were the main areas of your discussion?
- Was there any sequence in your exploration of the issue?
- Did you have an interview?
- Was the interview valuable and if so in what ways?
- Did the interview add to the process?
- What other activities or elements of process might have helped?
- What was the value of the process as a whole?
- How would you now define theological reflection?

4th SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW: After 2 years (June 2001)

- How have you changed over the two years of your training?
- What are your feelings about training?
- Has your thinking about God changed?
- What part did theological reflection play in your training?
- Has the way you do theological reflection changed much?
- Have you developed his ability for theological reflection – what has caused that – what was most important?
- Examples of theological reflection (personal and observed)
- What factors that make for good in theological reflection and how they are resourced?
- How can one judge when theological reflection is good or bad?
- What role do you see theological reflection playing in your ministry?
- Examples from work to date
- How do you plan to go on developing theological reflection?
- How might you help others develop theological reflection?

Questions used in interviewing student at Ushaw College and NEOC.

Preliminary

Background

DOB

Year

Reason for being on NEOC/at Ushaw College

- 1) Have you hear the term theological reflection?
 - Where have you hear the term?
 - In what situations? (said by whom?)
 - What do you think it means?
 - Can you give examples?
 - What has helped to develop that idea? (experiences, books, people)
 - How does it work?
 - Why do think people are interested in this notion?
- 2) Has the term been used in any of the courses?
 - When, by whom,
 - What meaning
 - How has teaching or other learning changed your idea of theological reflection
 - How does it relate to other courses?
- 3) What is the role of theological reflection in placement?
- 4) How do you think people learn theological reflection?
- 5) Do you associate theological reflection with do with feelings, thinking, action or other things?
 - What kind of feelings, thinking, action etc...?
 - Can you give an example?
 - Are any of the following involved: imagination, logic, critical thinking, evaluative, intuition, creativity, judgement, understanding, problem solving, valuing, action, practice?
 - Why do you think you choose these words?
 - Is there anything left out?
- 6) Do you think that theological reflection is
 - Natural and happens anyway?
 - Discipline that you have to work at?
 - Triggered by events or other things?
 - Can you say why?
- 7) What role do you think theological reflection will have in future ministry?
- 8) How would help others to develop theological reflection?

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire to Institutions

Questionnaire On Theological Reflection

1. Does your institution/college run courses or programmes with elements that are explicitly concerned with theological reflection?

- Yes
 No, but plan to in the near future
 No, and no intention of running such a course

If you ticked one of the first two boxes please move to question 3. If you ticked the third box please move to question 2.

2. Please indicate why your institution does not offer such a course? (Please continue on a separate sheet, if necessary.)

Now move to question 9.

3. Who are the intended students for the course? (Please tick all the boxes that apply)

- People training for ordained ministry
 People training for some other form of recognised church ministry
 Lay people wanting to study for interest or to develop their discipleship
 Other: please specify

4. Details of course (Please tick the box that best fits)

Total number of students and study hours

	under 10 hours	11-25 hours	26-40 hours	41-56 hours	over 60 hours
1-25 Students					
26-50					
51-75					
76-100					
over 100 students					

Level Pre-access level Access to HE Undergraduate Postgraduate

5. The primary aim/objective of course is?

- An understanding of the concept of theological reflection and associated issues.
- The development of skills and practical application of theological reflection
- Both of above.
- Other. Please specify

6. What methods are used? (Please all tick boxes that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lectures on theological reflection | <input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seminars on theological reflection | <input type="checkbox"/> Group projects or placements |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual tutorials | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring on practical or placement work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual student placements with theological reflection writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify |

7. Are there specific skills you intend to develop through the course? If so please list them.

8. What methods of assessment are used? (Please tick all boxes that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unseen examination | <input type="checkbox"/> Group interview or oral presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Examination, where paper is seen beforehand with preparation time | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual written reports on placement or projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A set of written assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> Group written reports on placements or projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extended essay | <input type="checkbox"/> Not assessed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual interview or oral presentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: please specify |

9. What assessment criteria are used to judge the student's success in this course or programme?

10. I am attaching a course outline or summary of the course.

Yes No

11. Please give a brief definition of what you consider "theological reflection" to be

12. I would be willing to discuss the topic of theological reflection and the teaching of the subject in interview

Yes No

Name

College/Course/Institution

Date

*Thank you for your help. Now please return this questionnaire to:
Rev Roger Walton, Open Learning Centre, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR*

APPENDIX 5: Institutions responding in the exploratory questionnaire

<i>Name of Institution</i>	<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Types of institution</i>
Aberdeen University Divinity Dept	Non-denominational	University Theology/RS Dept
All Nations Christian College	Ecumenical	Christian Based HE College
Bristol Baptist College	Baptist	Seminary/Theological College
Carlisle & Blackburn Diocesan Training Institute	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
Centre for Research and Development in RE University of East Anglia	Non-denominational	Other HE Institution
College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth	Anglican	Christian Based HE College
Cranmer Hall	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
Culham College Institute Oxford	Other	Other
Department of Religious Studies College of Ripon and York St John	Anglican	Christian Based HE College
Department of RS Open University	Non-denominational	Other HE Institution
Department of RS Sunderland University	Non-denominational	University Theology/RS Dept
Dept of Religious & Theological Studies University of Wales Cardiff	Non-denominational	University Theology/RS Dept
Dept of Theology and RS University of Glasgow (Trinity College)	Non-denominational	University Theology/RS Dept
Dept of Theology and RS University College Chester	Anglican	Christian Based HE College
Digby Stuart College of the Sacred Heart London	RC	Christian Based HE College
EAMTC	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
Edgehill Theological College Belfast	Methodist	Christian Based HE College

King Alfred's College Winchester	Anglican	Christian Based HE College
Liverpool Hope University	Ecumenical	Christian Based HE College
London Bible College	Ecumenical	Bible College
Mattersey Hall	Ecumenical	Bible College
Moorlands College, Dorset	Ecumenical	Bible College
NEOC	Ecumenical	Ministerial Training Course
NOC	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
North Thames	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
Queens College Birmingham	Ecumenical	Seminary/Theological College
Regent's Park Theological College Oxford	URC	Seminary/Theological College
Ridley Hall	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
SEITE	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
Springdale College Birmingham	Other	Seminary/Theological College
St Albans & Oxford MTC	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
St John's College Nottingham	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
St John's Seminary Womersley Guildford	RC	Seminary/Theological College
St Michael's Landaff	Other	Christian Based HE College
St Stephens' House Oxford	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
STETS	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
SWMT Scheme	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
TISEC	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
Trinity and All Saints College Leeds	RC	Christian Based HE College
Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield	Methodist	Other
Ushaw College Durham	RC	Seminary/Theological College
WEMTC	Anglican	Ministerial Training Course
Wesley College Bristol	Methodist	Seminary/Theological College
Wesley Study Centre, Durham	Methodist	Seminary/Theological College

Westminster College Oxford	Methodist	Christian Based HE College
Westminster College, Cambridge	URC	Seminary/Theological College
Wycliffe Hall Oxford	Anglican	Seminary/Theological College
York Institute for Community Theology	Methodist	Seminary/Theological College

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