

An introduction to theological reflection



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Stephen Pattison article entitled *Some Straw for the Brick: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection* introduces a model of theological reflection called “critical conversation”. In this model the conversation is between three parties, namely the student's own faith presuppositions, the particular situation/context being looked at and the Christian tradition. Pattison is by no means suggesting that the critical conversation model is the only model of theological reflection. He has chosen it because it's derived from other forms of theological reflection and lists seven advantages to it. (pg. 139).

According to Pattison, the purpose of this model of theological reflection according to him is to help people think through and analyse their own experiences, the issues and the situations that they face and in so doing the practical theology gets underway. As far as Pattison is concerned the critical conversation has more to do with asking the right questions than arriving at the right answers. He also appears to suggest that theological reflection has less to do with academic ability than with inventiveness and imagination, creativity that seeks to discern patterns in a particular situation.

Why critical reflection one might ask? Pattison's answer to that question is as follows:

a). It helps us to bring about an understanding of human and religious experience in contemporary society whether superficial or complex. He suggests that, the more complex the situation, the more depth is required in the conversation by drawing resources from other secular knowledge bases, i. e. or Christian theology.

- b). It connects belief and practice to everyday life.
- c). Prevent people from making false assumptions.
- d). Helps one to grow deeper in faith and appreciation of theology.

Theological reflection must become the filter of the ministry of the church.

Critical reflection serves as a critical tool for the purposes of practical theology

It is active enquiry, . dynamic, deep searching and open ended. Not intended to produce universally acclaimed answers by everyone and in every places in all cases. Theological reflection should not be seen as relevant to all people in all situations because of the different contexts. It is worth pointing out that theological reflection undertaken by individuals may well reveal more about the person and their perspective than it does about a secular situation or Christian theological tradition. To avoid that Pattison recommends that individuals be self-critical when doing theological reflection on their own. Theological reflection should be done as a group exercise instead. Helen Cameron illustrates the importance of this through her group work with TAP. Clearly this important point is articulated by all the other writers whose work form part of this review. Theological reflection in group setting is conducive to a deep and enhanced critical conversation likely to produceAny enquiry must aim at enriching the individual but crucially must be for the benefit of the Christian community. Such an outcome is bound to give new meaning and new orientation to the ministry of the church as has been the case throughout the church's history.

The weakness of this model of theological reflection is that it can be too subjective as it appeals to people's particular theological bias, temperament and cultural leaning. Relativism, idiosyncratic are.. mutually interrogative method can lead to further questions, does not provide eternally valid answers which can be applied to everyday life. Asking questions and engaging in critical conversation is not an adequate way of conceiving theological reflection. Pg. 142 (limitations) Also the conversation may not be academic enough. One other criticism to be said about Pattison's model of theological reflection is that it assumes everyone can do it. The fact of the matter is not everyone has the skill Ballard page 2.

Elaine Graham Elaine Graham et al recognises that the subject of theological reflection has been researched extensively resulting in the production of numerous publications. However for her and fellow writers their article entitled Method or Mystique in Theological Reflection: Methods offers a challenge to the vague manner theological reflection is viewed. They point to the fact " received understanding of theological understanding are largely under- theorised and narrow, and too often fail to connect adequately with biblical, historical and systematic scholarship" (pg. 1). As such they aim to help the reader " engage in patterns of theological reflection that are richer in the source they draw on more rigorous and more imaginative.

Their introductory chapter gives a history outline of the discourse. We have an account, of understanding practical/pastoral theology as a discipline concerned with practical training which is broader and understands theology as critical reflection in a variety of settings. Graham et al, sites Donald Scon who argues for a shift from theoretical knowledge, technical rationality and <https://assignbuster.com/an-introduction-to-theological-reflection/>

scientific precision which is all theoretically and not practically based consequently eroding public trust of experts. According to them, professional knowledge of expertise is only acquired in a particular context or situation that is implicit and problem based. Furthermore the learning takes place by responding with flexibility to situations, willingness to be a proactive learner and risk taking. (pg. 4) This view that knowledge comes by experience is also shared by Kolb in his book on model of experimental learning. (pg. 5) As such theology ought to be understood as a process rather than product. Christian practice, alongside systematic biblical and historical theology is crucial to theological reflection. In their view such engagement with these traditional Christian resources is weak. It is to this interrelated problem of traditional Christian resources that Theological Reflection: Methods reverts.

My third article for review is entitled Characteristics of Theological Action Research by Helen Cameron et al. The article comes from the book written by her and others called Talking about God in Practice. In it a methodology of research called Theological Action Research is introduced. TAR is a brain child of Action Research Church and Society made up of two teams that are ecumenical and interdisciplinary chosen. The team members are all theological practioners and researchers, made up of a team from Heythrop and the other team from outside.

ARCS objectives are realised when dialogue goes on in each team and also across the teams. The teams demonstrate willingness to share good practice and ideas of theological research between teams. As a model TAR has four stages called a cycle of theological reflection and are the following; experience, reflection, learning and action. The methodology require that

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each stage of the cycle is carefully examined and documented using its action research process and social sciences methods of collecting data. Theology plays a key part in all the stages of the practice right from the beginning to the very end. That also includes the shared reflections of the practitioners and researchers.

We can conclude that the lessons learnt are the following:

Theological reflection and theology is directed at life situations in every human experience whether be a believer, church community including those who confess to be atheists. According to Metz, as he made reference to Karl Rahner's a critical observation of Vatican II. " God is a universal theme, a theme concerning all humanity or it is simple no theme at all". (pg 57 M. K). Rahners ascertainment is an attempt to address an absurd belief which was sectarian and excluded others in taking part the faith dialogue/God. It is also true to say that when theology becomes self-absorbed by ignoring the world's reality of human suffering, poverty injustice etc. it loses its purpose.

The theological reflection model looked at in this review appear narrowly focused at..... with a particular racial group, principally white European and middle class. We live in a diverse The church is a reflection of society that is multicultural, ethnic

Robert Kinast in his article on the subject makes the same point that theological reflection is a threefold movement, which begins with the lived experience,