CHAPTER NINE

The Nature of the Activity

One of the intrinsic difficulties of communicating the process we are considering is that no one word or phrase known to me does justice to its many facets. Over-emphasis of any one of these—including the non-directive approach—misrepresents it. So what I have attempted in this chapter is a kind of "diamond cutting exercise". In the first part I have "cut" as many facets of the nature of the approach as I can think of, as reflected by the core process and the various parts played by those who use it. Then I have examined some of the facets more fully.

I. MULTI-FACETED

The nature of the core process (from experience through critical and imaginative thoughts to creative action) is fascinatingly complex; discovering some of its facets has been one of the exciting privileges of living and working with it. I can best summarise it in the following way.

In its application it is —

- a human and spiritual activity;
- focused and centred on workers and their work, however mundane it is;
- proactive, and stimulates and facilitates others to be proactive;
- outwardly directed to wider socio-religious contexts and issues;
- interventionist, provocative and perturbing but respects the autonomy and privacy of others;
- structured and systematic—not to impose order and shape but to enable others to order and shape their working world as they need to;
- logical, affective and intuitive, giving equal attention to thoughts, feelings and hunches;
- specific but systemic and holistic, concentrating on people, situations and issues;
- practical because it is theoretical and theological;
- collaborative and generates mutual accountability;

- both a private and a public activity;
- reflection-in-action, and, when used rigorously, a form of action-research;
- hard but rewarding work!

In its effects it—

- uses and promotes theological understanding;
- engenders interdependency, which properly respects independence and dependence;
- distributes power;
- empowers people;
- mandates equal opportunities to participate;
- promotes creative consensus by revealing and working constructively at differences, factions and conflicts;
- promotes self-induced and inter-related human and spiritual development in secular and religious contexts;
- is educational without being didactic—it leads to perceptive ways of "knowing" about the human and the divine;[1]
- helps build socio-religious learning communities that can live and work for human well-being and the glory of God;
- equips people to work for development with each other and to be co-workers with Christ in the Church and in the world;
- is ecumenical, bringing together in common endeavour all kinds of people;
- makes contributions to all stages of human and spiritual development;
- is deeply satisfying!

In its intention, orientation and approach it—

- starts with people where they are, accepting them and their situations as they are;
- stands by people without attempting to take their place;[2]
- works to the rhythms of people;
- stimulates people to do all they can for the common good;
- is both inductive and deductive;
- is an act of faith in the abilities and willingness of others to pursue their own well-being and development and to work for the common good;

- is non-directive—religiously so in relation to the decisions people need to make for themselves;
- is complementary and integral to that which is done *for* us by God and other people;
- is inclusive rather than exclusive;
- contributes to all aspects of the ministry and mission of the Church;
- makes unique and essential contributions to the work economy of the kingdom of God.

It can be embodied in people (individuals and collectives) and their work through their—

- love of people and God;
- inner commitments, human graces and technical skills.

Unfortunately there is no word or phrase that points to the richly endowed nature of this approach. What a travesty it is, for want of a better word, to have to call it "non-directive"!

II. ORIENTED TO WORKERS AND THEIR WORK

The processes we are discussing are about ways in which people themselves separately and together can put their beliefs into effective practice and achieve their purposes for development in church and society. They are about people as *workers* (lay, religious and ordained) and about *their* work (with people rather than things); about the private and public work, that *workers* have to do within and beyond themselves to change things for the better within and beyond themselves. (Consequently workers and their situations are themselves their own "base workshops".) These processes promote a flow of task-centred behaviour from the creative core[3] of workers which empowers people to develop themselves and their environment. Figure 9:1 highlights the parts, the purposeful thrust and the principal axis of these processes.

The work we are considering "begins with a feeling of something lacking, something desired ... something to be created, something to be brought into being ... in the environment ... in the self".[4] Those engaged in it are committed to their vision of what could be, and highly motivated to bring what is into line with it. For those of us who are Christians such feelings will owe much to Jesus and what he taught. Moreover, we will see the work to be God's as well as ours and ourselves in a working partnership with the Divine, co-workers with Christ and God and our efforts as complementary to the "work of Christ";[5] i.e., to those things Jesus did for us through his death and resurrection which we

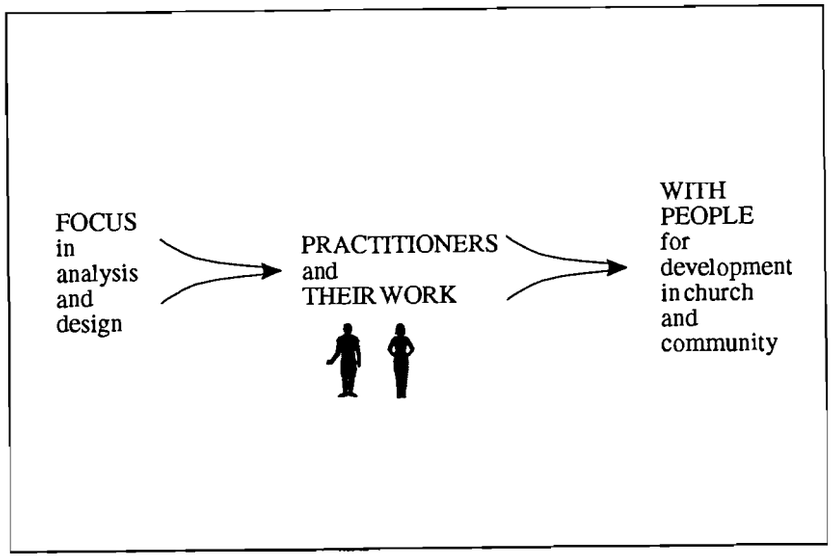

FIGURE 9:1. PRACTITIONER-WORK ORIENTED APPROACH

cannot do for ourselves. Therefore the work is purposeful and, as we saw earlier, set in ideological and theological frameworks and the human and spiritual values associated with them. Thus faith and human subjectivity help to define the work to be done and the way that it should be done. So the work, like the processes to be promoted, is deeply rooted in people and in their experience and understanding of things as they are and of God and God's Kingdom. Amongst other things, this means that the whole person is in action. Professor Elliott Jaques expresses this well:

> Work is an activity of the whole person. It is that behaviour which constitutes the primary plane of reality in which the individual relates his subjective world to the external world, transforming each in the process of creating some socially manifest output. It is a realization in the external work of a subjective project. It is the behaviour through which the individual experiences the reality of his core identity.[6]

Work of this kind is vocational. It is about the inner and outer worlds of workers and those with whom they work and the intimate and complex relationships between them and their environment—aspects of the indivisible reality of all church and community work.[7] It involves four kinds of work:

- the work of the mind;
- the work of the heart/soul;
- the work of the hand, i.e., the active engagement with situations;
- the work of the feet to put us in touch with co-workers.[8]

This kind of work is, in fact, vocational. As such, it has special powers over us; it affects us in one way or another quite dramatically because our hearts and souls are in it and because it is an outward visible expression of our most intimate and precious beliefs and purposes. These effects are complex. When, for example, the work is going well it can affect us positively or negatively: it can make us feel satisfied, humbled, thankful or it can make us feel self-satisfied, conceited and complacent. Similarly when it is going badly it can call forth reserves of creative energy we did not know we possessed or it can cause us to give up and feel a failure. In short vocational work is charged with all kinds of alternating positive and negative psycho-spiritual pulses whether it is going well or badly. Working creatively at these pulses is an important part of church and community development work.

However, the interaction between us and our work is more complex than this because the effects of our work upon us reverberate through complex socio-religious systems to which we belong; and throughout those same systems pulse the feelings others have about their work and ours. They variously harmonize, conflict, assure, confuse and confound. I illustrate this by constructing Figure 9:2, which shows how the work, when it is going well and when it going badly, can have both positive and negative effects upon the various relationships between workers and their relatives, friends, co-workers, church and God.

Adversity, for instance, can bring them all together or set them at variance as when workers or their relationships with others are being adversely affected by the work. In some instances relatives and friends can blame God and the church for difficulties their loved ones are experiencing in their work or for taking them away from them: in their anguish, and possibly loss of faith, they can argue that in the end it is God's work and calling and that of the Church—*they* called them and *they* got them into this mess.

Clearly, practitioners are most effective when the whole vocational system is functioning well. Any one of the sub-systems can prevent it from doing so. Work analysis and consultancy concentrate on making the practitioner-work sub-system as effective as it can be. That involves attending to the complex technology of church and community work *and* relating the work sub-system to the other sub-systems. This contribution is much needed, as are psychological and spiritual counselling. Sadly, however, all too often such counselling has been offered to practitioners who were psychologically and spiritually distressed because they were not able to do their work as well as they needed to do for their own well-being. What they actually required was the kind of help described in this book. Getting the work sub-system right makes significant contributions to the overall effectiveness and harmony of a practitioner's vocational system.

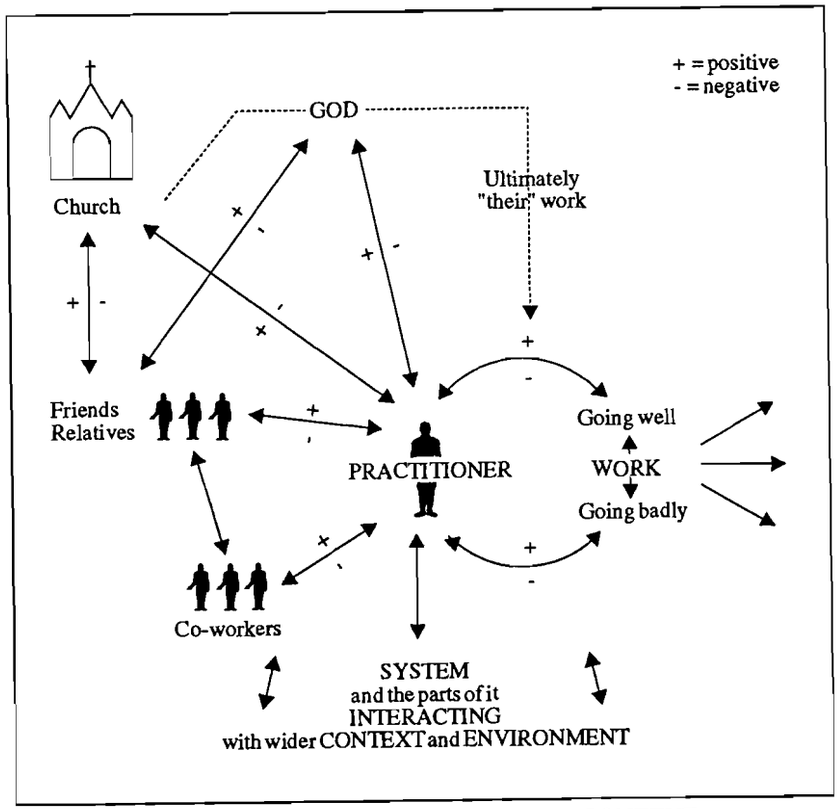

FIGURE 9:2. A PRACTITIONER'S VOCATIONAL CONTEXT

III. ROOTED LOCALLY, ORIENTED OUTWARDS

It follows from what has been said that the processes of analysis and design we are discussing are firmly rooted in people in specific churches, communities, and organizations, and in their purposes and beliefs. But they are not parochial. Whilst remaining rooted, they move outwards from the immediate actualities of people and their situations to the wider communities of which they are a part and to their socio-religious contexts. This is different from those processes that get people to approach their church and community work via sociological analyses of their overall context. Both approaches move outwards and inwards and engender interaction between the local and its context. However, the dominant thrust of one is outwards from the specific, and the other is inwards to the specific. Both must negotiate the interface between specific situations and their contexts, but in different directions. I make this point simply to clarify the nature of the processes I am describing. It is beyond the scope of this book to explore the differences further—though it is important to do so especially for pre-service training of those who work with people in church and community.

IV. REFLECTION-IN-ACTION[9]

One aspect of the nature of the processes is variously described as "reflection-in-action", "action-reflection" and experiential learning. And, when used rigorously on programmes with an innovative element, it can be described as action-research.[10] In Part One we saw the results of using the processes of analysis and design on specific pieces of work. Other things can accrue from the continuous use of the process over a period of time on problems, cases, work programmes, projects and the various activities undertaken by people in church and community. The work can be continuously assessed for what can be learnt from it, and whatever is learnt can be ploughed back to inform future decisions and action. This enables workers and people to build up their own body of knowledge about the work and how *they* can do it best, plus their own codes of good practice and the theory upon which they base them. Learning from experience in this way means that the process is inductive (working from the particular to the general). Applying what has been learnt to other situations means that it is also deductive (working from the general to the particular).[11] Sometimes the inductive method of drawing things out of specific experiences is equated with the non-directive approach and the deductive method with the directive approach. This is confusing. Induction involves attending to the situations in question. What is learnt can be used in a directive or non-directive manner.

This book as a whole exemplifies the nature and use of the reflection-in-action and the action-research method and the inductive and deductive methods. The chapters on tackling the problem of a sense of failure, on the family communion case study and on the study of the bishop's situation conclude with reflections on the use of the method. In the first two of these chapters I discuss the practice theory of working on problems and cases. Chapter 5 establishes a generic process by reflecting upon the outcome of the use of the methods described in Part One in an extensive and extended action-research programme of in-service training and consultancy work over a period of twenty years and more.

V. DEVELOPMENTAL, CONCENTRATING ON CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Identifying common elements in the outcome of the very different work study experiences described in Part One helps us to consider the developmental nature of the processes we are considering. The following significant changes had occurred in the workers and the resources available to them:

- they had a more profound understanding of themselves as workers (their beliefs, purposes, etc.) and of their working situation, therefore

they were much more in command of themselves as workers and of their work (not necessarily of the work of others nor of the working situation as a whole);

- they had seen the importance of getting others to engage separately and together in the kind of processes of analysis and design in which they had been engaged; (This emerges most strikingly in the discussions about the problem of failure where the group said, "We must get this kind of discussion going amongst the people with whom we work!" and when the bishop saw the need to focus on other people's theological orientation to ministry as well as on his own.)
- they had inward experiences of developmental processes;
- they worked out development plans and designs which fitted them as workers and their situations;
- they gained some knowledge and profitable experiences of the use of analytical tools which they could continue to use and make available to those with whom they worked;
- they had more confidence;
- they had acquired new energy and enthusiasm.

In short, they had developed as workers and were better equipped within themselves to promote their own human and spiritual development and that of others—provided, that is, that they were committed to offering to others the kind of help that had been offered to them.

These and similar kinds of change occur when the workers themselves freely and willingly make those contributions from within themselves which they alone can make. Without this contribution the human and spiritual developments we want to see simply do not happen, no matter how much others do things to and for the workers and people. The thrust of our effort is persistently and consistently directed towards inducing development action from within individuals, groups communities, organizations and churches; i.e., the nature of the approach is that it concentrates on getting people to make their own contributions to their development and that of others. Such development is "a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future in order to realize the full potential of life that God has made possible".[12] It empowers people and enables them to change their environment. It gives them a better subjective purchase on their lives, work and circumstances. It facilitates egalitarian working relationships and power-sharing. It creates a work culture and spirituality which of itself is a medium of development. (I discuss these claims in Chapter 12.)

The processes are designed to promote these kinds of development. The very nature of them is that those who use them become actively involved in applying them to themselves and to the work in which they are engaged. When people

become engaged in the processes the processes are at work in them inducing inward changes—and the more freely and willingly they give of themselves to the activity, the more creative the outcome. At the same time the processes safeguard against enablers and consultants doing those things for people that they simply have to do for themselves.

Clearly this contribution is only one part of that which is required for our temporal and eternal well-being, but it is an indispensable part at all stages of human and spiritual development, much neglected when undue attention is focused on what God and other people do for us—and must do for us. Relating this contribution to wide-ranging discussions about development as a concept, stages and processes of development in organizations and communities, theories of underdevelopment and the diverse approaches to promoting development is a task that desperately needs to be done, but one that is quite beyond the scope of this book.

To illustrate the nature of the processes, we have concentrated on the changes for the better that they can induce in workers. This could be described as reflexive development. As we have seen, the use of these approaches on the stuff of church and community life promotes the inter-related development of:

— Christians and non-Christians;
— the human and the spiritual, the physical, the intellectual and the moral;
— people and their environment;
— church and community;
— groups and organizations.[13]

VI. EDUCATIONAL

Two disciplines have contributed much to the evolution of community development: education and social work.[14] The processes of work analysis and design described in this book have evolved from pursuing the educational tradition in church and community work. Education is associated with essentially healthy and normal people who need to change, acquire more knowledge and understanding and become more competent if they are to be and to do what is required of them.[15] The people are seen as co-workers in making things better: not as clients as they are in social work; the changes are developmental, not remedial. The ethos, orientation and approach is educational and, because of the centrality of the non-directive approach, it involves people's learning together and from one another: collaborative learning, not some teaching others. This is so whether one is working with people who are "educated" or "uneducated", affluent or deprived; and the richest learning experiences occur when people who differ significantly in education, ideology, power, wealth and experience actually learn together and from each other. It

is amazing what emerges from the study of a case such as the one about family communion in such a group of people. Time and again I have found that some of the most profound insights come from those with least power and education but a "wealth" of experience of living in comparatively powerless relationships. Learning together in order to work together for the common good[16] takes the patronage out of church and community work.

Many kinds of learning occur as people—paid and unpaid, those with and those without formal training and clergy, religious and laity—become reflective practitioners[17] through studying their work in the way described in this book in order to promote the common good. They learn about themselves as workers and about the people, situations, organizations, and churches with whom they work. They learn how to make their best contributions to their own human and spiritual development and that of others. They learn about other cultures and different ways of thinking and talking about things. Some of the learning is directly associated with acquiring knowledge and skills to do something that those involved really want to do, and some of it is incidental to that but highly valued.

VII. NON-DIRECTIVE

Facilitating other people to think for themselves about their own and other people's ideas is to be non-directive. This book demonstrates just what this means in specific situations and draws out the generic implications for general practice. Had I written the book a few years ago, discussion of this approach would have been a major section of it, probably appearing earlier. Reflecting on this, I realize that I have expounded the approach by showing what it looks like when it is written deep into the people who use it and into processes and methods they employ. Explicit references to the non-directive approach do appear here and there to elucidate the main thrust of the exposition, but I am struck by how little needs to be said about it directly when describing it in action. That is entirely in line with my experience when working with people. Once it becomes an integral part of us it is unobtrusive even though it radically affects our being and our doing. That is the nature of the approach, engaging with people purposefully, energetically and proactively without dominating them.

This illuminates an aspect of my experience. When people begin to adopt the approach they are inclined to say "we must take non-directive action" or to ask "how do we take non-directive action" or whether they should be directive or non-directive. This I find disturbing because it is singularly unhelpful. It can lead to being doctrinaire about the non-directive approach and failing to make creative connections with reality, which is what the approach is all about. It is much better to ask "What needs to be done to help the people in this situation in relation to our purposes and theirs?" (I return to this in Chapter 12.) Tackling

such a question is more likely to get at the appropriate action, which will be an admixture of non-directive and directive action.[18]

VIII. BUT WHAT OF DEPENDENCY?

A major thrust in the approach we are considering is away from dependency and towards interdependency and independency. Vanstone highlights possible dangers of this approach, with its emphasis upon the action that people can and must take for their own well-being and development and that of others.

> The emphasis in agencies of social care is now on "enablement" rather than "help"; and the change of terminology is significant even when no change is involved in the procedure and practice of the agency.... The presupposition behind the new terminology is, of course, that what a person does for himself, as his own achievement, is of higher worth than that which is done to or for him by the help of others: that the practice of independence is, in itself, of greater worth or dignity than the condition of dependence.[19]
>
> Public opinion accords the highest worth and respect to those individual and corporate enterprises which are intended to maintain and enlarge the areas of human independence, to increase the possibilities of personal achievement, to provide greater scope for private initiative, to "enable" people into self-reliance and self-sufficiency. But perhaps these enterprises are no more than gallant or despairing gestures, no more effective than sand thrown against the wind or Mrs Partington's broom wielded against the advancing ocean. Perhaps the transition of the individual into a condition of ever more marked dependence or receptivity or passion is, for the foreseeable future, irreversible.
>
> It is not necessarily the case that man (*sic*) is most fully human when he is achiever rather than receiver, active rather than passive, subject rather than object of what is happening.[20]

He illustrates this by telling how the help given to an "almost totally dependent" person on a housing estate generated a sense of community and the "enrichment" and "blessing" which a helpless child has been to a whole family.[21]

This is a timely challenge from Vanstone. It evokes several responses in me. In varying ways and to a greater or lesser extent we are permanently dependent upon each other and God. Dependency is as much a part of interdependency as independence. Vanstone's illustrations are about different kinds of dependency: that of the child is a necessary part of development; the other of an undesirable disability. People can be enriched or debilitated by helping to meet the needs. That says more about the way others respond than about the state of dependency. Whilst I reject any suggestion that we play down the emphasis on enabling, I think that it is vitally important that the way we do enable does not marginalize those who are dependent. Working *with* rather than *for* people enhances their autonomy, dignity, and self-respect and prevents

them from being objects of care *however dependent or independent they might be*. Therefore the processes I have described are as relevant to us in our dependent states as they are to us in our independent or interdependent states—whether they are primarily physical or moral or spiritual. These different dependent states are often confused and wrongly correlated. Dependency need not necessarily be a passive state.

When we are dependent we have to work quite hard at our inner and outer responses if we are to retain our dignity and privacy, to relate creatively to those upon whom we are dependent, to prevent them, for example, from patronizing us and to get them to provide what *we* need and want rather than what *they* think we need and want. Doing all this and building up reciprocal respect, love and care in dependency relationships is a demanding task. It promotes the development of "dependent" and "independent" parties to the caring relationship. But it is very difficult. Anyone who has been dependent upon others—those for instance who administer social and medical services, family and friends—knows just how difficult it can be. "Providers" and "carers" have a propensity to take over, patronize, overpower, "push people around", make people supplicate and trade on their gratitude. Consequently, dependent and independent parties have much to do in order to avoid the dangers and realise the potential of caring relationships. The processes I have described, and especially the case study and problem-solving methods, could be used by dependent and independent alike.

Bruce Reed has made an important contribution to the discussion about dependent needs and meeting them. He says that he and his colleagues have "coined the term 'extra-dependence', where 'extra-' means 'outside', to refer to conditions in which the individual may be inferred to regard himself (*sic*) as dependent upon a person or object other than himself for confirmation, protection and sustenance. Correspondingly, we use the term 'intra-dependence', in place of 'independence' to refer to conditions in which the individual may be inferred to regard his confirmation, protection and sustenance as in his own hands."[22] "Religion", he says, "provides a focus for behaviour in the extra-dependent mode of the oscillation process"[23] between these modes of dependency. All of us, he argues, have needs for controlled regression to extra-dependence and a return to intra-dependence. (Regression is Reed's word, not mine. I do not like it because it suggests the movement is undesirable.) Worship can and should facilitate this, he argues. I think that this gives important insights into the functions of religion and worship. It also provides theological insights into the processes I have described. Over and again, when these processes are used in task groups and consultancy sessions, creative oscillation occurs between extra- and intra-dependence.

IX. *IN VIVO*

By their very nature, these processes have to be applied to living human situations in relation to many things which are of enormous importance to people in church and in community. They have to be used with the animate to animate. To do this with rigour and loving.care calls for sensitivity which comes from the realization that you are on holy ground when you are studying with people vocational work for human and spiritual well-being. Vocational analysis can be painful. What is important is to remember that the process is used *in vivo*, i.e., in the living body, not under laboratory conditions, in working situations and in consultancy and training sessions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. Watts, Fraser & Mark Williams, *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) and especially "the middle way", p. 153.

2. *Avec Occasional Papers Number 3* (1992), p. 2.

3. See Chapter 5, Stage 5, "Drawing Up Development Agendas".

4. Jaques, Elliott, *A General Theory of Bureaucracy* (London and Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational, 1976, reprinted 1981), p. 101. Later he says: "The experience of the future is an experience in the present of a lack, of something missing, of something to be desired; but especially of something to be worked for. It is a conception in the present of something not yet realized but which might be realized by activity involving the exercise of judgement and discretion; that is, activity involving psychic effort" (p. 121 f).

5. A phrase used to indicate all that Christ did to secure our salvation and redemption and that of the world.

6. Jaques; *op. cit.*, p. 112: cf. pp. 113 f.

7. In this section I have drawn up some of the ideas shared by Charles Elliott in *Comfortable Compassion: Poverty Power and the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987). He argues that tackling problems of poverty and suffering involves "a two-fold process, a dialectical relationship between the outward, material world and the inner spiritual world" (p. 119).

8. Charles Elliott says these are the four main elements of the inward and outward journeys. *op. cit.*, p. 182 f.

9. I owe this term to Schon, Donald A., *Educating The Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987): cf. Part Two, pp. 41 ff.

10. Cf. Lovell, George, *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work* (A Grail Publication, 1982), pp. 52 ff for a brief statement about action-research. "Innovative element" is one of three factors Michael Bayley identifies which all action research programmes should include, the other two being that researchers should be involved in the development of the aims and strategies which comprise the innovative element and that there should be a continuous process of interaction between workers and researchers. Cf. *Dinnington Papers: Neighbourhood Services Project: Paper No. 1, Origins, Strategy and Proposed Evaluation*, (March 1981) p. 33.

11. There is a very useful induction-deduction model by A.W. Ghent which is quoted by McKelvey, Bill in *Organizational Systematics: Taxonomy, Evolution, Classification* (University of California Press, 1982), p. 19.

12. Sider, Ronald, *Evangelicals and Development: Towards a Theology of Social Change,* Contemporary Issues in Social Ethics Volume 2 (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1981), p. 19.

13. Cf. Lovell, George, *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work*, pp. 12 ff. Lovell, George , *The Church and Community Development: An Introduction* (An Avec Publication, 1972, reprinted 1992), Chapters 7 and 8.

14. Brokensha, David & Peter Hodge, *Community Development: An Interpretation* (Chandler Publishing Co., 1969), trace out the educational and social roots of community development. They say that "the contribution of education is especially clear in the historical forerunners of community development of the former United Kingdom dependent territories" (p. 25). Thomas, David, *The Making of Community Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983) describes the conflict during the period 1966–68 between those who were involved in preparing the widely influential Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Report *Community Work and Social Change: The Report of a Study Group on Training* (London: Longman, 1968) about the educational and social work emphases in community development. Thomas gives an open and honest analysis of the conflict which T.R. Batten, one of the principal participants, considers to be fair and accurate. The social work emphasis prevailed. (Cf. pp 25–36).

15. Here I am indebted to an article by Armstrong, R. and Davies, C.T.: "The Educational Element in Community Work in Britain", which appeared in the *Community Development Journal* Volume 10:3 (October 1975): cf. p. 155 f.

16. John Atherton suggests that "the common good", an image from the Anglican Holy Communion service, along with the Body of Christ, provides "an *inspiration* for vision and involvement and guide lines for *informing* the content of vision and involvement". Cf. *Faith in The Nation: A Christian Vision for Great Britain* (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 31 ff and 44.

17. Cf. reference 9.

18. See Batten, T.R. & M., *The Non-Directive Approach* (An Avec Publication, 1988) and Lovell, George, *The Church and Community Development: An Introduction* (Grail Publications/Chester House Publications, 1972 revised 1980).

19. Vanstone, W.H., *The Stature of Waiting* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982), pp. 44 f.

20. *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

21. *Op. cit.*, p. 55 ff.

22. Reed, Bruce, *The Dynamics of Religion: Process and Movement in Christian Churches* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), p. 32.

23. *Op. cit.*, p. 51.