CHAPTER TEN

Theology in the Approach

This chapter is about the theology in the approach to work analysis and design described in this book. As the approach and processes are central to church and community development, it is a partial commentary on the theology of that discipline. But it is not a theology of church and community development: that would have to cover other vital questions such as its contribution to the development of church and society and its place in the mission of the church.

Biblically speaking, the justifications for dedicated involvement in the processes are manifold. They help us to fulfil Christ's command, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself".[1] They help us to show ourself "worthy of God's approval as a worker with no cause for shame".[2] They assist us to work out our own "salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose".[3] They help to equip us to share in "God's work",[4] which Jesus said is ongoing: "My Father continues to work, and I must work too".[5] They help us to be co-workers ("fellow-workers" in the New Testament)[6] with "Jesus, a prophet mighty in work and word".[7] And his work aims "to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross—all things whether on earth or in heaven".[8]

What, then, is the theology in this thinking work which is oriented towards human and spiritual development beyond and within the church? I explore this by considering theological

— objectives
— commitments
— content
— activities
— competencies.

I. THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

In Chapter Five we saw that the beliefs of those engaged in thinking through their work are important reference points at all stages of the process. Making the best use of the processes involves those engaged in them pursuing several

theological (or ideological) objectives. They are:

(a) to develop those attributes in ourselves and in others by which we and they are
   - in touch with our own beliefs and able to examine them critically;
   - able to understand and empathize with the beliefs of others;
   - able to discuss beliefs with those with different beliefs;
   - able to modify and change our beliefs as we see the need to do so;
   - able, separately and together, to put our beliefs into practice.

(b) to use our beliefs habitually as primary reference points in analysing, designing, planning, programming, carrying out and evaluating our work and dealing creatively with positive and negative theological feed-back, and to get others to do the same;

(c) to deepen our understanding and experience of being co-workers with Jesus;

(d) to reflect theologically on our work and experience and to promote this practice among others;

(e) to enhance our ability, and that of others, to work for human and spiritual development with people whose beliefs differ significantly from ours and to explore those differences with them.

Making progress towards these objectives has far-reaching effects. Amongst other things it would:

   - help individuals and groups to be theologically firm and flexible rather than theologically shapeless or rigid;
   - enhance the quality of work and the satisfaction that people have in doing it, with all that that can mean for worship;
   - promote theological growth and conversion(s) of individuals, churches groups and communities and enable people to keep up theologically with their experience;
   - introduce theology and biblical principles into social and community work in a natural and wholesome manner and make explicit that which is intrinsic to it;
   - enable individuals and collectives to communicate their beliefs more clearly and convincingly through the "body language" of action programmes;

   - help to infuse contemporary pluralism with new life and theological vigour through enabling people with different beliefs to work and dialogue more purposefully and with integrity to their convictions (I pursue this further in Chapter Twelve);
   - make clear that theology is as much about the way you work at and use your beliefs as it is about what you believe and why you believe it;
   - encourage more people to "use" their beliefs in their work and then to theologize about the outcome.

II. COMMITMENTS

Commitment is the bonding of ourselves, from deep within ourselves, to people, principles, God through giving, pledging, covenanting, dedicating, fastening ourselves to them. It is the result of beliefs, convictions, purposes and our insights. It is an expression of the mind, heart and will. It is an inner transaction with something beyond us which forges connections of enormous importance to us. It is a dynamic movement of the human spirit by which we become involved at deeper levels in human and divine endeavours. The nature, quality, strength and durability of our commitment determine the practical, moral and spiritual value of our engagement with people for development. There is no substitute at all for commitment. The absence of it will show through any form of professionalism or battery of skills or technology. Yet its importance in development work is frequently overshadowed by our preoccupation with ways and means of doing things. There is a tendency to assume it and to allow it to be implicit rather than explicit. To compensate for this, a group of us studying the theology of church and community development felt it important to make our commitments quite explicit and to examine them and their implications.[9] Kenneth B. Wilson, writing from a secular perspective, thinks that they are so important that they should be a subject for research:

> The issue of commitment is central to community development and is clearly subject to research. The various types and levels of commitment which result in community development need to be identified and their causes and consequences assessed. One important line of research would be to identify and map the interplay of self-seeking and community-service motives underlying the various types of structural orientation. . . . Such research might be geared towards clarifying the distinction and the relationship between power and leadership in community action. Commitments of the individual, as these are manifested behaviourally within a situational context, provide an important link between theories of personal and social organization.[10]

Commitments are written deep into my exposition of work study. We need to

make them quite explicit because they reveal critical aspects of the theology in the approach and processes. In summary form they can be expressed as follows:

- The commitment to work primarily *with* all people for self-induced change rather than to provide services *for* them.

- The commitments to get people to work *with* and *for* each other for the common good, including those who differ from each other significantly.

- The commitment to collaborate rather than compete and to mandate equal opportunities to participate.

- The commitment to active purposeful involvement in church and community rather than to a spectator or commentator role.[11]

- The commitment to work with churches, communities and organizations as systems, not simply as collections of individuals or congregations.[12]

- The commitment to church and community *and* to the issues which emerge from it and impinge upon it.[13]

- The commitment to open processes of educational dialogue within which people freely articulate their needs in their own way through their own cultural norms.[14]

- The commitment to getting people thinking and thinking again.

- The commitment to power sharing and mutual accountability.[15]

- The commitment to promote those processes of change in others, ourselves and structures that facilitate human and spiritual betterment.

- The commitment to work at actual situations, no matter how small or large, and to do so in context.

- The commitment to work through and in the Church for overall betterment of people in church and society as a whole rather than any one part of it.[16]

(m) The commitment to work at theory and theology situationally and academically.

(n) The commitment to assimilate and to live out as a way of life the principles, concepts and approaches inherent in this approach to working with people.[17]

Convictions of various kinds underly these commitments. Amongst them are: attention to minute particulars promotes profound and far-reaching human and spiritual development; people have rich resources for development which are most effective when they are freely and willingly deployed; that by birth and divine endowment people have rights to freedom and power;[18] that these commitments are congruent with the ministry and mission of the church; that the rigorous use of intelligence for the common good plays an important part in Christian life and work. *Convictions, commitments, skills and abilities when bonded together form a powerful nucleus in individuals, groups, organizations and churches.* Such nuclei strengthen the will, generate and release energy and promote determined and persistent application to developmental tasks—provided, that is, that they do not make people into "heavy ideologues".[19] The character and constitution of the nuclei, combined with the human and spiritual resources available, determine the job that people can tackle in terms of complexity, difficulty and duration.

Such nuclei are created, strengthened and weakened in a thousand different ways, some of them quite unpredictable. This is especially true of convictions and commitments. (For instance, I first came to understand what commitment really meant when, as an engineer, I was a member of a multi-disciplinary team researching problems of escape from aircraft in emergencies. Medical doctors in the team were so committed to the research that they risked their lives to get information that could only be obtained by their acting as guinea-pigs and using their medical knowledge to observe what happened to their bodies in simulated crash and escape conditions.) One way in which these nuclei are formed and built up is through the use of the work-study processes we are considering and especially through their use in groups led by people committed to them. It also happens in consultancy sessions.

Three things help to explain this. Pursuing the processes involves working at the practical, technical, theoretical and theological issues in vocational work which variously contribute to the building-up of the elements of the nuclei—skills, convictions and commitments. Secondly, the action taken by workers and consultants comes from their nuclei. Third, the use of the processes generates a particular spirituality, which I discuss in Chapter 12. Thus the elements of the nuclei are communicated at various levels of consciousness through experiencing the process. When the analytical process helps people with issues of concern to them, they associate not only with the outcome but with the nuclei that made it possible. Attending to the development and maintenance of these nuclei involves using theology as well as the social and behavioural sciences.

III. THEOLOGICAL CONTENT

Doing theology is working on our own experience in the light of our own beliefs and those of others *and* working on our own beliefs in the light of our experience and the beliefs and experiences of others.[20] All those who use the processess described in this book to study their own work with people and that of others will engage in this kind of theological activity whatever they themselves believe or do not believe: doing theology is, in fact, an inescapable part of the

processes as it is of doing church and community development work. Amongst other things this involves:

1. theological engagement with a wide range of subject-matter;

2. working with human and divine relationships;

3. the interaction between similar and dissimilar belief-action systems which promotes creative interplay between doing the work and doing theology.

1. Subject Matter

The wide range of subject-matter about which church and community workers have to think theologically as they pursue these processes includes: the Bible and the theological traditions of the churches and organizations with which they are working; the nature of the church, society and their organizations; critical contemporary contextual issues; the ministry and mission of the church; human well-being and the common good; development and the competencies required to promote it, the attributes, roles and functions of ministers, priests, religious and laity in church and society and the approaches and methods they adopt; church and community development processes and the non-directive approach and their places in Christian ministry and mission and the work of the Church; specific work situations; the beliefs of the workers and their colleagues.

Differentiating the subject-matter helps us to see the theological tasks inherent in pursuing the analytical processes. One task is to think theologically about each aspect of the subject-matter. Another is to think theologically about relationships between one aspect of the subject-matter and another, e.g. the spiritual ethos of a religious group, the ways in which they traditionally work with people, and the processes described in this book. Particular attention needs to focus on any dissonance because this can lead to creative change and to putting aspects of the subject-matter together in coherent patterns of theological thought. (It helps me to think of this as making "theological mosaics".) Such patterns are however, soon disturbed in a minor, if not major, way by further thought and experience. That is inevitable in any programme of human and spiritual development. This approach means that the theological activity suffuses and transcends the processes and prevents it from being an optional extra.

2. Human and Divine Relationships

Processes of analysis and design, like community development, to which they are central, are about working with God and with people. Consequently, in one way or another and at one level or another, they are concerned, not only with people's beliefs, but with their religious experiences and their spiritual relationships with each other and God—or about their absence.

Some people believe in God without claiming to have a relationship with him. For others the personal experience of, and personal relationship with, God are the quintessence of life and religion. Researches have shown that large numbers of people not associated with religious organizations have various kinds of mystical or extra-sensory experiences which have profound effects upon them but which they do not normally share.[21] Christians variously experience living relationships with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit through prayer, worship and everyday events. God calls them, Jesus is with them, (Emmanuel), the Holy Spirit leads and guides them. They feel that they work for God; they are co-workers with Christ.

Thus, within and beyond the human relationships that are the normative stuff of community work, there are human–divine relationships and mystical experiences which must be the stuff of church and community development work. These relationships exercise spiritual authority in the lives of those who experience them and frequently determine vocational choices and apostolates. When they are in good repair they engender commitment to human well being and they enthuse and energize people. Whether in good repair or not, their influence, like that of unknown reference groups, can be profound and quite beyond logical deduction. But, whilst mystical experiences and spiritual relationships are clearly important in development work, they do not get the attention they deserve because they cause problems for development workers. For one thing, they are even more difficult to understand and analyse than human relationships—and they are difficult enough. There is widespread embarrassment in talking about them and many people are sceptical about them. It is all too easy to neglect them, as, I am sorry to say, I have done at times. It is so much easier to talk about beliefs than about "spiritual relationships".

One of the models that helps me to take all this into account is a trihedral of relationships, a triangular pyramid. The points represent self, others, the physical environment and God. The lines represent the relationships. To my mind's eye it looks something like Figure 10:1.
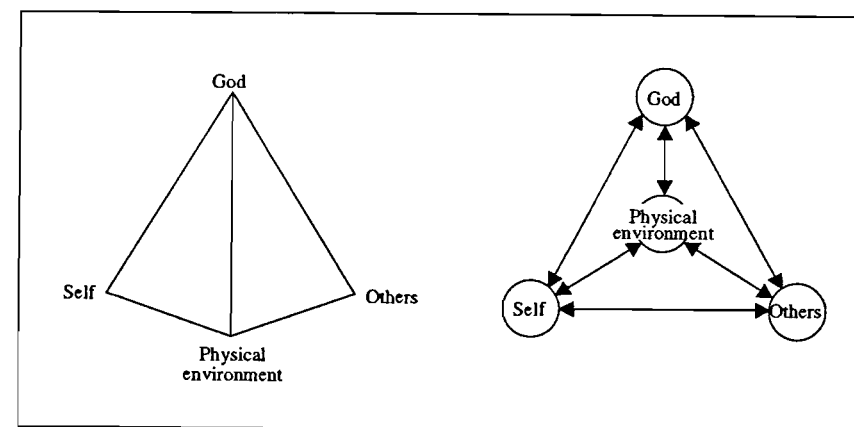

FIGURE 10:1. A TRIHEDRAL OF RELATIONSHIPS

People would model these relationships differently. They might, for instance, invert Figure 10:1 or lay it on its side to show God as the ground of all being and to avoid hierarchical inferences. Some people might substitute an ideology for God. However this might be, for me this trihedral of relationships underlies all human affairs, even though it is impossible to define with accuracy all the lines—they are easily blurred by the way in which human and divine relationships infuse each other. Aspects of it may be covered and confused by institutions, churches, communities, groups or individuals, or by the way disciplines variously focus on individuals (counselling, case work, psychotherapy), on collectives (sociology, anthropology), on God (theology), or on the physical environment (physical scientists, technicians, artisans).

Then again, the shape is constantly changing because the relationships are inter-related. Change one and the others are changed. Indeed Jesus teaches us that restoring our relationship with God involves first mending our relationships with others.[22] Working with people in church and community variously involves working with them individually and collectively on each and all the relationships, sometimes focusing on one and sometimes on another of them, systematically and haphazardly as circumstances require.

Whichever aspect we are concentrating upon, we will make our best contributions when we work consciously to the whole, whatever our own beliefs might be: easier said than done. The processes are designed to help us do just that by assisting us to work with people on their needs and the issues that interest them in and from the area of human experience marked out by self, others and the physical environment and through beliefs to as much of their mystical experiences and spiritual relationships as people need and can work on; no less and no more.

What I am trying to do through working to this trihedral of relationships is to emulate the ministry of Christ. Essentially, as I see it, through his life, death and resurrection Jesus is *giving* people to each other, to God and to the world which he loves in satisfying, creative, loving relationships. An event at the crucifixion epitomizes this for me in an enacted parable. John describes it in this way: "Jesus saw his mother, with the disciple whom he loved standing beside her. He said to her, 'Mother, there is your son'; and to the disciple, 'There is your mother'; and from that moment the disciple took her into his home".[23] Jesus gave them to each other in one of the most sacred of human relationships, mother and son, as he gave himself to both of them and established a new triangle of loving relationships.

3. Interaction between Belief-Action Systems

Making contributions towards these kind of developments involves people who differ from each other, in one way or another, working together for the common good *and* exploring each other's ideas, beliefs and spiritual relationships and the deep things of existence. For me these two things—work and dialogue

—are symbiotic activities of Christian mission which facilitate each other. Quite quickly the use of the processes I have described reveals differences. One of the things that has helped me to get people engaged in work and dialogue is a simple conceptual device which can be used to demonstrate points of agreement and disagreement. It is presented in Figure 10:2.

This diagram helps individuals and groups to see where they stand in relation to others by setting out in parallel their respective beliefs, spirituality, purposes, objectives, approach, method and activities. It helps to see precisely where there is agreement and disagreement between the people, where their thought and action converges and diverges, where there is conflict and consensus.

Those who wish to make common cause with others can use it to assess whether there is a sufficiently strong basis of agreement and mutual acceptance to enable them to work together and to explore their differences as they do so. This helps people to take each other seriously. It can be done quite simply and directly: "It seems we have similar objectives but different beliefs and approaches. Have we a basis for a partnership and for discussing our differences if that proves to be necessary?" Any understanding (contract) that is established in this way provides a basis for *all* to engage in joint ventures openly and with integrity. It avoids the well-meaning but dangerous use of commonly accepted sayings which play down the differences simply to get into working relationships. One that comes to mind is: "We're all the same underneath and we worship the same God anyway". It also helps to challenge those who refuse to have anything to do with others on the false assumption that they are totally and unacceptably different: "They're different from us." One of the things I have had to work against in church circles is a very strong tendency to be suspicious and frightened of working on equal terms with people who do not confess their belief system in their language.

Whilst I was on sabbatical leave in 1986 at Tantur, an Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research situated in the West Bank between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, I heard a rabbi who was highly committed to his faith and to working for peace with the Palestinians say with great emotion: "I can pray with the people with whom I cannot work and I can work with the people with whom I cannot pray". I felt for him deeply. I have had the same experience. The processes I am describing have helped me to work and dialogue with people previously segregated by the barriers and boundaries of culture, class, belief and spirituality.

Holding together work and dialogue is vitally important in Christian action for development. Writing about relationships between Christians and people of other faiths, Kenneth Cracknell enunciates these "four principles of dialogue":

Dialogue begins when people meet each other.
Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust.
Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community.
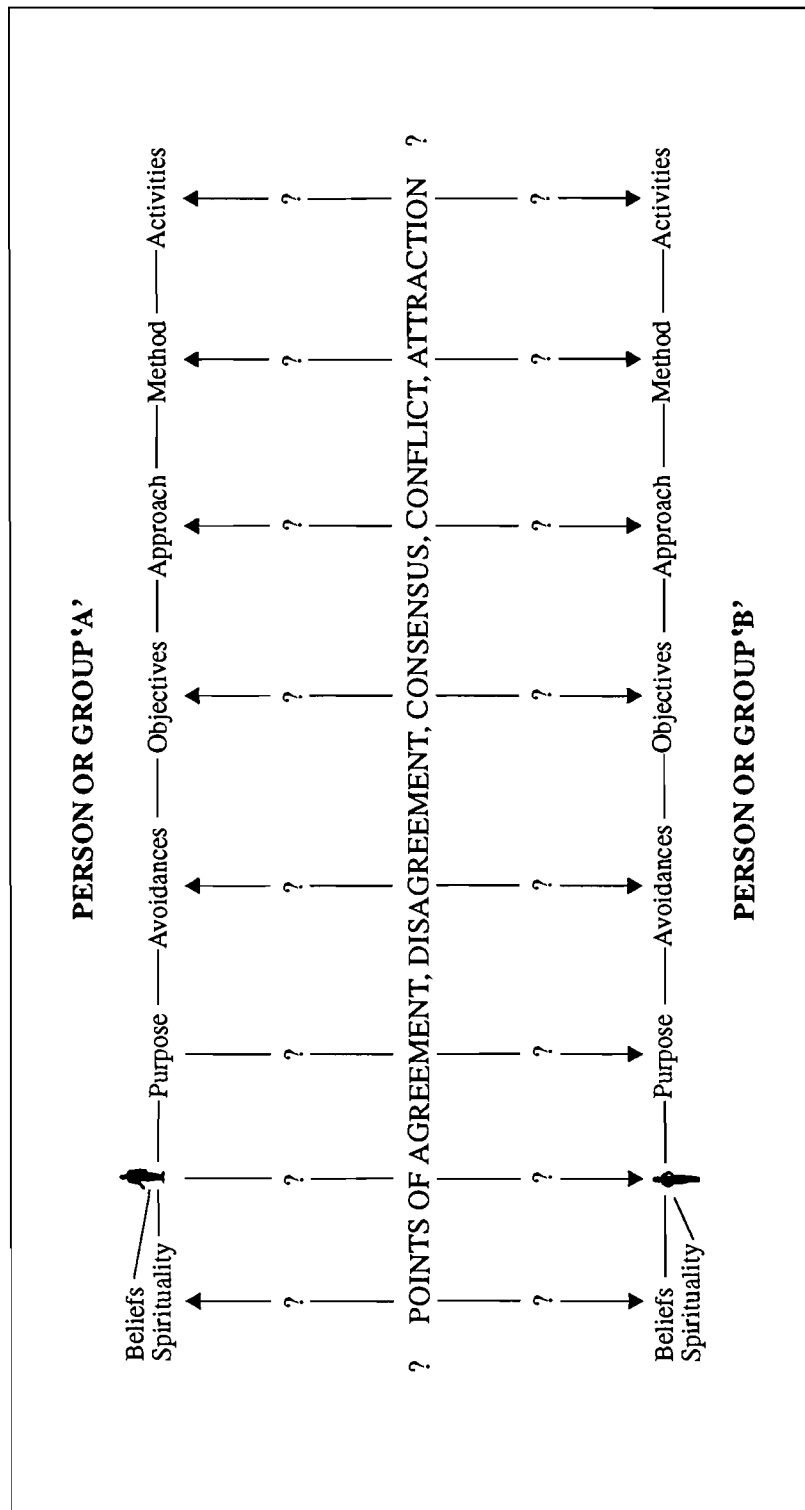Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness.[24]

PERSON OR GROUP 'A'

PERSON OR GROUP 'B'

? POINTS OF AGREEMENT, DISAGREEMENT, CONSENSUS, CONFLICT, ATTRACTION ?

FIGURE 10:2. SOME POSSIBLE POINTS OF CONCORD AND DISSONANCE

I would add that dialogue is a means of human and spiritual development. Working together in churches, religious organizations and communities provides opportunities to extend and deepen it in every possible way.

IV. THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

To use the analytical processes in church and community work people have to engage in several different but complementary theological activities. They have to clarify and articulate the beliefs upon which they intend to act in general and in particular situations; to apply them to the work in hand; to handle theological feedback; to analyse and reflect on the experience; and to assimilate any theological implications for them and for their work. (These activities could be variously described as different forms of theology: applied, empirical, existential, experiential, process, dialectical, pastoral and practical.)

Rarely is the process as orderly as this sequence. It is an integral part of a work programme, not a process adjacent to and at a distance from it. Consequently beliefs and events, two powerful dynamic forces, interact complexly: beliefs and commitments kick-start work programmes and provide a continuing thrust; events generate feedback which either confirms theological presuppositions or it challenges them and stimulates analysis, reflection and the review of beliefs and possibly their revision.

All these aspects of the theological activity are going on as the work continues: theological activities, work and spiritual relationships overlap and intersect. This is complicated, especially if the theological basis of programmes to which workers are committed is challenged—and even worse if they begin to doubt it. The case study in Chapter Two illustrates this. Beliefs that the teachers and minister shared about children and communion and their plans to put them into effect started off a sequence of events that led to theological conflict. The plans were abandoned because no way was found of handling the theological feedback, but the work with the children and the communion services had to continue whilst the theological analysis and reflection went on. Another example is the theological dissonance I experienced through practising the non-directive approach and engaging in community development work. Elsewhere I have described this and my search for theological help to cope with it.[25] Diagrammatically I represent the theological activities in Figure 10:3. I follow it with notes on each of the principal phases.

1. Articulating Beliefs

Bruce Rahtjen,[26] a biblical theologian who became an experiential theologian, helpfully differentiates between:

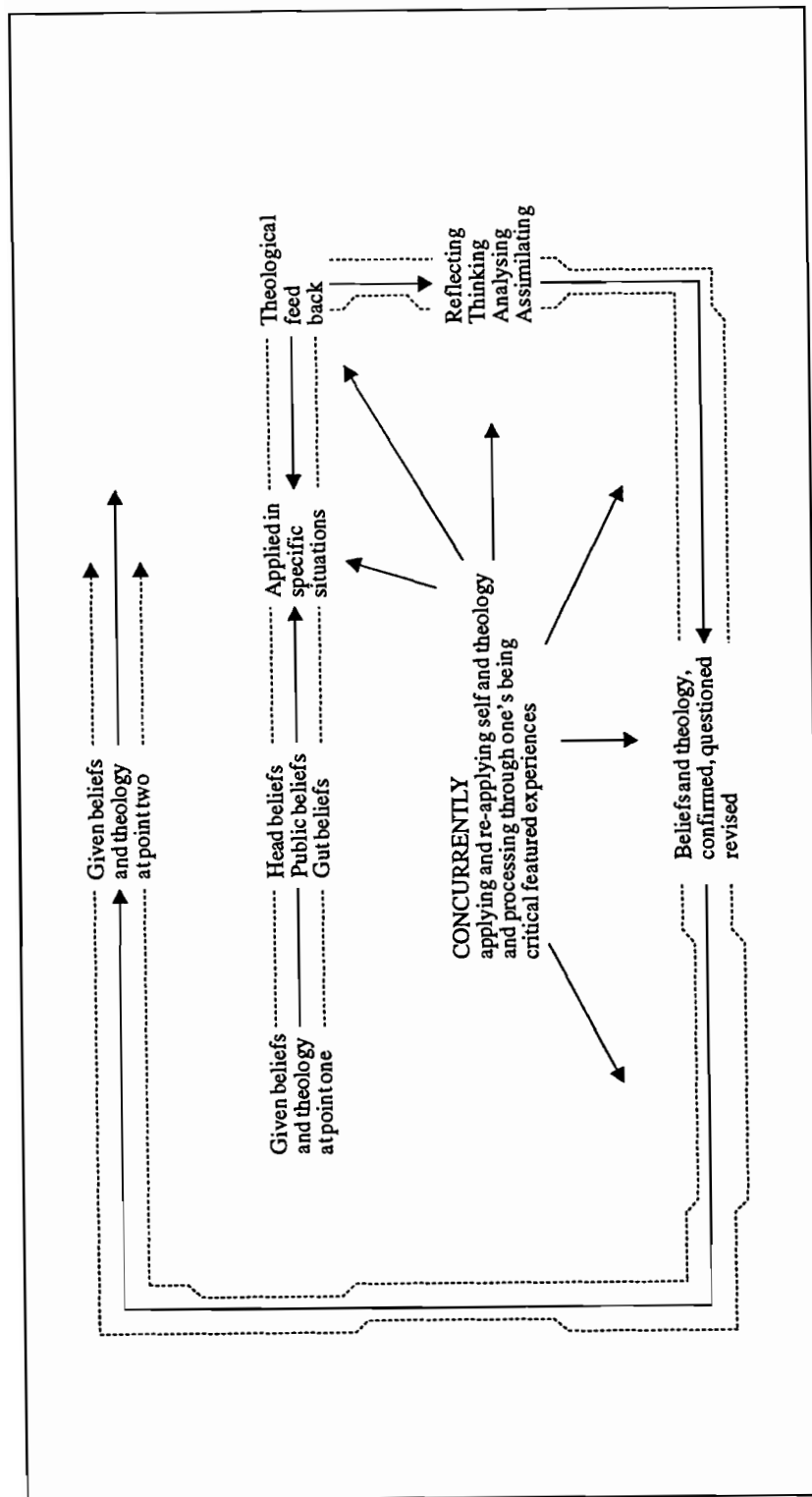**public theology,** which is what we say we believe, our public self;

FIGURE 10:3. SOME THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

Theological feed back

Reflecting Thinking Analysing Assimilating

Applied in specific situations

Given beliefs and theology at point two

Head beliefs
Public beliefs
Gut beliefs

CONCURRENTLY
applying and re-applying self and theology and processing through one's being critical featured experiences

Given beliefs and theology at point one

Beliefs and theology, confirmed, questioned revised

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head theology, which is what we believe we believe: our thinking self;

visceral theology, which is what we show we believe through our life-style, value systems and commitments: our feeling self.

Head theology is that with which we are consciously in touch whereas there may be aspects of our visceral theology (our gut beliefs) of which we are not conscious. We bring these three theological selves to any work in which we are engaged. I have represented this by three undulating lines to represent the way in which our head, public and visceral theologies are sometimes close together and sometimes apart. They rarely entirely coincide. Rahtjen and his colleagues organized sensitivity group workshops to help the feeling, thinking and public theological selves to interact more creatively. I have worked for this end through different means.

One of the things I have done is to get people to write about their beliefs, i.e., the beliefs, principles, concepts, assumptions, ideas and purposes which have been fundamental to their life and work. Some responded by giving an account of their public theology and a minority by referring to the theological statements of their church or organization. But by far the greatest majority described, but not without difficulty, aspects of their head and visceral theology. Strangely the requirement that the statement be brief helped them to do this. Another thing that I have found more recently has helped people, is to ask them before they attempt to express their beliefs to reflect on their working life and ministry up to the present and to describe people, concepts, events which are landmarks in their working life, journey, or story. (See Appendix I.)

Discussions that are thoroughly non-directive are another thing that I have found helps people to go deeper into their head and visceral theologies. Examples of the way in which people have expressed their beliefs are given in Chapters Three and Four. Working at things in the ways described helps to integrate the public, head and visceral theologies. It was these processes that helped the bishop to look at just what was involved in pursuing his beliefs about justification by faith with the clergy and church workers.

2. Application and Feedback

Many advantages accrue in church and community development work from people being in touch with their beliefs in the ways described in the previous section. It promotes their theological development, equips them for theological dialogue and helps them to embody their beliefs in action programmes through:

— helping them to understand and accept their belief and unbelief and their theological commitment and lack of it;

— making their beliefs more readily available for use in reflection and analysis and for review and revision.

In short, the argument is that theological creativity can be stimulated by theological clarity about belief and disbelief and spiritual relationships.

What we said earlier in Chapter Five about handling feedback in general also applies to handling theological feedback in particular.

3. Reflection and Analysis

A distinction we have already mentioned needs to be noted here. Applying our theology to work situations and analysing things theologically are in the active mood whereas reflecting on things theologically is in the attentive or receptive mood. In this mood it is possible to listen for what things might "say" to us or what God might say to us through them. Alternating between these two modes of activity helps us to get to the theological heart of things. The approaches and methods described in this book help us to do so but as Michael Taylor has written,

> There is no process of reflection which can, if followed step by step, lead us inevitably to the answers to our questions, as if having correctly programmed the theological computer we have only to wait for it to produce the required results. Rather, the process of reflection nourishes our minds and provides them with a far richer store of new material out of which we have to make a judgement and take a decision. It provides food for action and not just for thought, but it will never decide for us what action to take.[27]

But they do help us to confirm or revise our beliefs and to bring into a more creative unison our theology and our spiritual relationships.

V. THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES ENGENDERED

Theologically speaking, I value this approach to the analysis and design of church and community work and the processes which facilitate it for several reasons. It enables people to maintain a creative tension between action and belief, work and theology: their separation is anathema. It helps people towards a better personal and mutual understanding of their spiritual selves. It enables people who differ significantly in belief and theology to work together for the common good with integrity. Working together engenders relationships, mutual understanding, trust and common experiences of success, failure and difficulty. These things enable people to talk together about the deeper things of life and faith and to explore their different beliefs, theology and spiritual experiences and to apply what they learn in the work they do for the common good. And as the application of beliefs is accompanied by theological reflection, it helps people to revise their beliefs. This is truly developmental. It properly complements that which God does for us in Christ and through others. For me, therefore, it occupies an important place in the ministry and mission of the Church and the work of the kingdom of God.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Luke 11:27f NEB.

2. 2 Timothy 2:15 REB.

3. Philippians 2:12 REB.

4. 2 Corinthians 6:1 REB.

5. John 5:17 REB.

6. Romans 16:3 REB.

7. Luke 24:19. A literal translation of *en ergo kai logo*.

8. Colossians 1:20 REB.

9. The members of the group were: Revd Tony Addy, Revd Dr John Atherton, Revd Alan Gawith, Revd Dr George Lovell, Revd Prof. David Jenkins, Revd Harry Salmon, Fr Austin Smith, and Mr Richard Tetlow. The report was: *Involvement in Community: A Christian Contribution* (The William Temple Foundation, 1980). In the report some of these commitments were expressed first negatively and then positively. I have reversed that order (cf. pp. 25 ff).

10. Warren, Roland & Larry Lyon (eds), *New Perspectives on the American City* (The Dorsey Press, 1983), p. 6.

11. *Involvement in Community* (see note 9 above): cf. p. 25.

12. Cf. op. cit., p. 26.

13. Cf. op. cit., p. 27.

14. Cf. op. cit., p. 26.

15. Cf. op. cit., pp. 72 ff, 52 and 54.

16. Cf. op. cit., p. 26 f.

17. Cf. op. cit., Chapter Five

18. Cf. *Human Rights: A Study for the International Year for Human Rights* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1967).

19. Thomas, David, *The Making of Community Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 138.

20. I have taken this from some notes I wrote some years ago in an Avec Handout *Some Notes on Experiential Theology*. I cannot remember whether I quoted or composed them! My apologies to the author if I quoted them.

21. This has been demonstrated by the Religious Experience Research Unit set up by Sir Alister Hardy at Manchester College, Oxford.

22. Cf. Matthew 5:23.

23. John 19:26 f NEB.

24. Cracknell, Kenneth, *Towards A New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faiths* (London: Epworth Press, 1986), pp. 113 ff.

25. Lovell, George, *Diagrammatic Modelling: An Aid to Theological Reflection in Church and Community Development Work* (An Avec Publication). See particularly pp. 2 ff, and 28 ff.

26. Rahtjen, Bruce D. with Bryce Kramer and Ken Mitchell, *A Workbook In Experiential Theology* (A Publication of Associates in Experiential Theology Inc., 1977).

27. Taylor, Michael H., *Learning To Care: Christian Reflection on Pastoral Practice* (a volume in the New Library of Pastoral Care, edited by Derek Blows, (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 102.