

Theological Reflection and Christian Formation

Alison Le Cornu, Head of the Wesley Centre, Westminster Institute of Education,
Oxford Brookes University, Harcourt Hill, Oxford, OX2 9AT
alecornu@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract

While much has been written about the process of theological reflection, one of the least developed areas is an understanding of related outcomes, and the ‘difference that this complex, demanding process ... make[s] in theory and in practice’ (Woodward and Pattison, 2000:128-29). Through a detailed discussion of reflection *per se*, the paper argues for a range of outcomes resulting from the activity of theological reflection (TR), including the construction of individual biographies, the growth of different forms of self, and a more subtle overall existential change. Applying this to how people engage with Christian theology and hence engage in TR, four theoretical models are examined with regard to these outcomes. The results of a recent research project are also summarised, demonstrating four different forms of TR with corresponding outcomes. Since biography, self and existential change all relate to aspects of human growth and development, the paper argues that TR must also relate to Christian formation, and the final section considers each dimension in greater depth within this context.

I. Introduction

I write in the opening weeks of 2005. As I sit before my title, I am aware of a certain tiredness which accompanies the term 'theological reflection'. The activity, its theoretical underpinnings, its role and benefit to those who engage in it, have all been explored in diverse ways over the past decades, yet Pattison is nonetheless able to comment, comparatively recently, that 'the activity has a mystic flavour to it, for the teachers who demand theological reflection for the most part find it very difficult to say what it is that they are looking for' (2000:136). While models and methods do exist, some of which are usefully summarised and evaluated by Lartey (2000) who concludes by offering his own pastoral cycle method, Woodward and Pattison astutely observe that:

Perhaps the main limitation of Lartey's pastoral cycle method, and of many like it, is that it does not really illustrate the outcome of the reflective process. It could be asked: What difference does this complex, demanding process of theological activity make in theory and in practice? Maybe it is difficult to see and specify results, but practical theology will always be vulnerable to the criticism of impracticality or uselessness unless it can really demonstrate what it achieves and that it is not simply going around in ever-complexifying methodological circles' (2000:128-29).

This paper seeks to demonstrate one 'outcome' of theological reflection (TR) by considering the role of reflection *per se* in the construction of individuals. It places the conversation specifically within an educational context, focusing on the relationship between reflection and learning and highlighting the dimension of personal growth through the concept of internalisation. The link between reflection and human growth also suggests a link between TR and Christian growth, hence the title of the paper.

II. Reflection and the construction of individuals

II.1 Reflection and learning

One of the most significant aspects of the role of reflection *per se* (without, for the time being, a partnership with theology) is its contribution to the construction of individuals through the process of internalisation. This is best exemplified in the work of theorists of experiential learning such as that of Jarvis (1995, 2001, 2004, *inter alia*). In his definition(s) of learning, Jarvis emphasises the overall self-construction of individuals as they respond to experience:

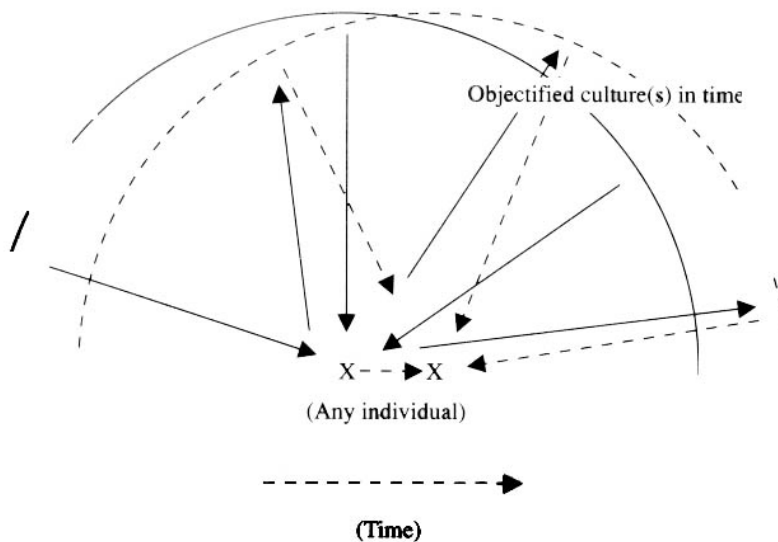
Human learning is a combination of processes whereby whole persons construct experiences of situations and transform them into knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, emotions and the senses, and integrate the outcomes into their own biographies. (2004:111)

He accompanies this definition with a model of the processes of learning in which he identifies reflection as a component part, alongside practice, experimentation, evaluation and memorization. Elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2005a, forthcoming), the assumed equality between these components is questioned, with the proposal that reflection plays a significant role in all forms of learning, something which Jarvis himself implicitly acknowledges in the different types of learning and non-learning which he identifies, all of which revolve around the type of reflection engaged in (or not). His typology of learning revolves around this, linking non-learning with no reflection (taken for granted, presumption, non-consideration and rejection), and specifying forms of learning which he defines as 'non-reflective' (basic skills learning, memorization) and 'reflective' (practice learning, contemplation) (Jarvis, 2004:108-09). The inextricable connection between learning and reflection hence supports the argument that reflection is integral to the overall construction of individuals.

A second connection between reflection and learning occurs in Jarvis's notion of internalisation. Internalisation (and its partner, externalisation) is something which he sees as an integral dimension of learning, accounting for changes both in individuals and

in the social and cultural milieu in which they live. He depicts the interaction diagrammatically, reproduced in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The processes of internalisation and externalisation (Jarvis, 1992:25)



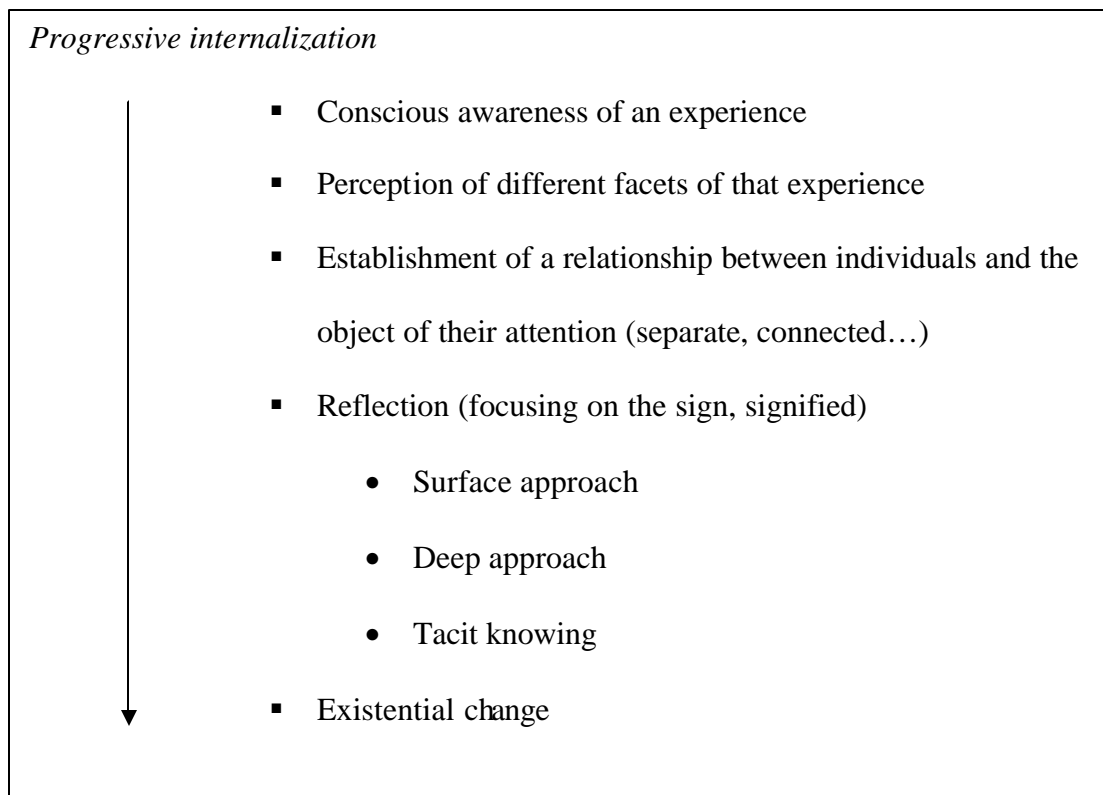
He does not explore the mechanics of the process in any depth. Other parts of his work, however, together with that of others suggest a clear link between internalisation and reflection. Theorists often focus on the fact that reflection has to do with the making of meaning (see Mezirow, 1990). Jarvis emphasises the existential dimension of meaning-making, stating:

Being is about understanding, which in turn is about knowing rather than having knowledge. (1992:169)

That existential aspect can be analysed as a progressive series of steps in which the external is gradually absorbed into individuals' beings. In a more detailed exploration of the process elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2005a, forthcoming), I propose a schema of 'progressive internalisation', presented here in Figure 2. This relates primarily to the work of Marton and Säljö (1976) and of Polanyi (1983). The former identified two approaches to learning relating to whether learners focused on the sign or the signified. The former adopted a 'surface approach' and emphasised the information itself, looking

to memorise it as discrete elements, whereas the latter took a ‘deep approach’, looking beyond the information to understand its meaning and significance, drawing links and connections wherever possible. This progression from surface to deep is primarily characterised by the degree to which meaning is sought and found, and can therefore be considered as a developing internalization through the process of reflection. This is ‘completed’ when meaning-making is so effective that none of the original discrete features are identifiable. Polanyi speaks of ‘tacit knowing’, linking it to internalization; the implication of his work is that this is a final stage at which point external knowledge has been so absorbed into people’s beings through the process of reflection that it is now part of them. Nyiri’s (1988) observation that certain forms of personal knowledge are extremely difficult to articulate and must be mined out of them ‘jewel by jewel’ supports the notion of this thorough absorption.

Figure 2: A schema of progressive internalisation



Two dimensions of how individuals are constructed through the process of learning have therefore been demonstrated. People's biographies, as defined by Jarvis as the cumulative range of learnt outcomes present at any moment in time in individual people, are constructed in accordance to whether or not people reflect, and the type of reflection engaged in. Secondly, their existential beings are formed through the process of making meaning. Different ways of relating to external knowledge and the external environment result in different levels of internalization and hence in the construction of different types of being. Space precludes a discussion of how these inter-relate and of their *modus operandi*, other than to assert that all three (surface, deep and tacit) are almost certainly equally necessary in the overall learning process and in people's day-to-day existence. Nonetheless, it might also be suggested that deep and tacit forms relate more specifically to existential development.

Reflection has been shown to be integral therefore not only to making meaning, but, more significantly, to the process of internalization and hence to this same aspect of existential development. The relationship to Christian formation is therefore also evident, although recognising at the same time a particular understanding of the term.

II.2 Reflection and the growth of the self

While the previous section focused on how reflection contributes to the growth of individuals in general and hence on its link with the making of meaning, this section considers different types of reflection and proposes that these contribute to the growth of the self. Clearly the self must be understood as part of people's beings, just as the different facets of the reflective process cannot be completely separated. A continuing theme is that of internalization and externalization. Nonetheless, the idea of 'self' is one which, although ambiguous and culturally conditioned (Allen, 1997), continues to have a place as an entity in its own right in educational literature (Jarvis, 2004).

One of the buzz words that often accompanies 'reflection' both in HE and in the adult education environment is 'critical'. Students are required to critique, evaluate and analyse

and these capacities are prized to the point of determining the quality of work submitted for assessment. The ability to critique is something similarly emphasised by educational theorists. So Brookfield (2001) sees it as a vital tool in enabling people to understand and hence influence prevailing social ideologies, and Mezirow (1990) focuses on a similar role within individual learners seeing it as a means by which people actively contribute to their own 'construction'.

Critical reflection serves another purpose, however, relating to the growth and nature of the self. In acquiring the ability to stand back from an object of attention, to look at it objectively and analyse it, so people develop an autonomy and independence of thought. Malcolm Knowles (1970), often viewed as a patriarch of theories of adult learning, suggested that these are important characteristics of adult learners. Adults' self-concept is fundamental to their learning patterns: as people mature their self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being. This progression was also identifiable in Perry's (1970) investigation into the epistemological development of college students. It is easy to see how aspects of critical reflection contribute to the development of the specifically individual self: cultivating the ability to question rather than (passively) accept; to form, articulate and accept responsibility for their views; to discriminate between and evaluate a range of options; and, which might be assumed from Brookfield, an increasing self-awareness; all foster an independent individuality which western education systems, at least, see as one of their primary goals. It is also seen as an important dimension of the self. Strawson (1999), for example, includes 'singleness' amongst his list of components that define the self, and Jarvis (1995) considers self to be an 'individuation of consciousness'.

While critical reflection clearly contributes to the development of this individual, autonomous, responsible self, other factors are also identifiable, similarly related to reflection as well as to the processes of internalisation and externalisation. Belenky *et al.* focus on the experience of voice with their women interviewees, commenting that for some ('silent') women, words were primarily weapons which others used against them. Not having the ability to speak in such a way that they were genuinely listened to, their

sense of self was weak. Speaking (externalising) and having other people 'hear' are important ways in which the self develops. As previously, people's autonomy matures as they speak in their own voice rather than in that of others, and as they take responsibility for their own views and the way in which they articulate them. It also relates to the process of reflection, however. Effective speaking (and listening) need to have certain characteristics: speaking was in 'measured tones'. Belenky *et al.* comment:

Women at this [Procedural] position think before they speak; and because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence; on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring. (1996 [1986]:94)

The 'procedures' also involved perspective taking and objectivity. People engaged in 'deliberate, systematic analysis' because things were 'not always what they seem[ed] to be'. The authors identified two primary 'ways of knowing' at this stage: Connected and Separate. These exemplified different types of self, the one relational and predisposed to trust, the other more adversarial and predisposed to doubt. Nonetheless, both were equally strong on account of the robustness of the procedures employed in their development.

Reflection is therefore intricately connected with the growth of the self on account of a range of factors. Externalization through speech and internalization through listening (linking at this point with the Surface and Deep approaches to learning outlined above) work together towards the construction of an autonomous, independent self, the strength and nature of which is significantly determined by the type of reasoning which supports it.

One of the clear 'outcomes' of the process of reflection is therefore the construction of some of the most profound and intimate aspects of individuals. For those involved in Christian education, especially when in a formational context, significant questions arise. Is it possible (or desirable) to construct a 'Christian' biography, a 'Christian' existential being, a 'Christian' self? The implications are considerable. How is 'Christian' to be defined? Do the questions point to the need for a theology of self, a theology of being, a

theology of learning and of reflection? How do these issues play themselves out when people engage specifically in TR?

Section IV considers these and other questions in greater depth. This is preceded, however, firstly by an overview of four models of TR with a view to determining how they relate to the issues identified, and secondly by reference to a recently-conducted empirical study into TR in action.

III. Theological reflection and the construction of Christians

The discussion above has established that the process of reflection has to do with the relationship between people and their external world, and the nature of the interaction between these two players. This section now considers forms of specifically *Theological Reflection* with an eye to this same interaction.

III.1 Models of theological reflection

The four models of TR outlined below each have similarities as well as distinctions. The first and most significant similarity for the purposes of the paper is that none concretely engages with any anticipated ‘outcome’, confirming Woodward and Pattison’s previous observation. Their differences nonetheless warrant a separate discussion of each.

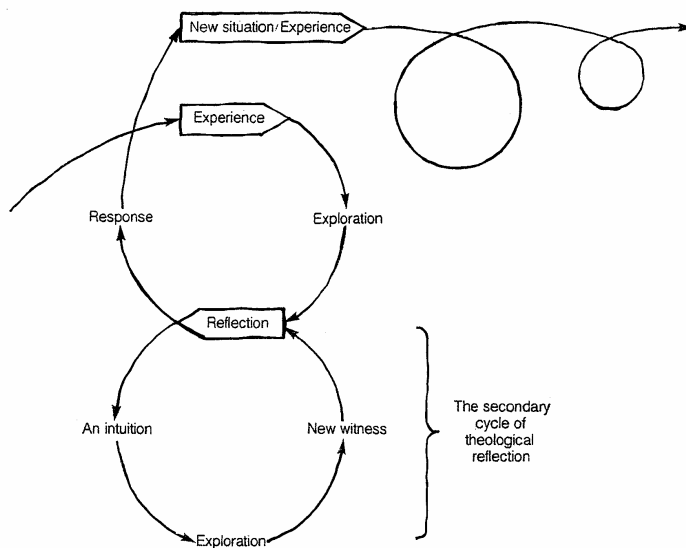
III.1.1 Green: Cycle of theological reflection (1990)

Green’s cycle of TR commanded immediate respect when published in 1990 and his book *Let’s Do Theology* continues to feature on most bibliographies of related literature. He presents the activity as a response to a perceived gap between two distinct elements of theological work: active and reflective. In pursuit of two major concerns, the transformation of theology itself and the practice of being ‘theologians’ which he sees as the responsibility of every Christian, he understands both to come about through the interaction between action and reflection. Fostering this interaction becomes his major preoccupation, and he states:

In order to do theological reflection ... we have to develop methods of 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 learn from the mix and to gain even more insight to add to the store of Christian heritage. (Green, 1990:79)

He proposes a 'cycle of theological reflection' which he bases on intuition, an 'imaginative leap which sets up an interplay between the explored issue and the Christian faith tradition so that each is affected by the other' (1990:93). He depicts the cycle diagrammatically, reproduced in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The process of doing theology (Green, 1990:95)



He attributes a dimension of the intuitive process to the work of the Holy Spirit, and as a result of this, new explorations and a new 'witness' come about. At the same time, he perceives the key to TR to be that of hermeneutics. Finding satisfactory techniques for bridging the 'hermeneutical gap' is the principal task of the theological reflector.

Our reflective task is to find some way of bridging this cultural gap and seeing connections between the Christian heritage on one side and our present experience on the other—to hear resonances, to ring bells, to sense similarities, to sense opposition, to build up a whole range of sensitivities to the tradition so that

we can draw upon it to check our present actions and understandings and see if our own story is part of the Jesus story, or not. (1990:80)

He proposes a range of techniques by which this can be done. One of the most important is the use of six theological 'tent pegs' which function as pivots between the Christian faith tradition and contemporary life. Identifying what he considers six fundamentally important theological themes (God's reign or kingdom, the incarnation, church, holy Trinity, crucifixion, and Eucharistic presence) he then draws an 'insight' from each: salvation includes liberation, all theology has context, theology includes action, concern about power, God's concern for the oppressed, and witnessing spirituality. In constructing a 'new model for doing theology, these markers remind us ... to give special regard to issues of liberation, context, action, power, oppression and spirituality' (1990:14-15).

Green's 'problem' to be solved is therefore seen to lie in the existence of a hermeneutical gap between people and their cultural biographies, and the Christian tradition. His method of bridging it is consequently also hermeneutical. From the study of reflection provided above, this approach would seem more akin to Belenky *et al.*'s 'separate' way of knowing, emphasising the intellectual relationship over the emotional, although this is somewhat lessened by his insistence on the role of intuition. His use of themes also suggests a deep approach since people must find common meaning between two apparently mismatched systems.

III.1.2 Killen and de Beer: The Art of Theological Reflection (1994)

Killen and de Beer's framework for TR is less well-developed than Green's, and consists of four components: 1. Focusing on some aspect of experience; 2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter; 3. Exploring the Heart of the Matter in conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage; and 4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meanings for living. (1994:68-69). More relevant for the present discussion is their exploration of a number of 'standpoints' that they indicate 'markedly influence the quality and trustworthiness of the insights that result when we bring our lives to our Christian heritage' (1994:46-47). Those standpoints are: a)

certitude; b) self-assurance; and c) exploration. The authors demonstrate how these different standpoints influence the *way* in which reflection is conducted. The standpoint of certitude leads to a type of victimisation mentality: their religious framework is certain and unchallengeable, so life's difficult situations must be borne stalwartly. That of self-assurance results in a general discomfort with the religious framework that in time people potentially discard: an undesirable outcome for those actively pursuing faith development. That of exploration is the only one in which the two components come together in a vibrant, creative synergy, and is therefore the standpoint the authors favour. The examples given in support of their first two standpoints are curiously negative, nor are any of their conclusions based on empirical research. They offer no analysis as to *why* people might adopt a particular standpoint, and the general impression given relates to personality, background, religious context... . It is appropriate, therefore, to view them as hypothetical and potentially unrepresentative. However, the thesis affirms the underlying suggestion that people's standpoints may then influence their pattern of reasoning. From these standpoints the authors then go on to emphasise what they term a 'movement towards insight', the culmination of which is the desired transformation, or the coming together of the two originally separate elements of faith-content and personal experience. They then offer a chart which outlines the 'complementarity between the movement toward insight and the framework for TR', reproduced in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The movement toward insight and framework for theological reflection (Killen and de Beer, 1994:74; emphasis in original)

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Framework</i>
1. When we enter our experience , we encounter our feelings .	1. Focusing on some aspect of experience .
2. When we pay attention to those feelings, images arise.	2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter .
3. Considering and questioning those images may spark insight .	3. Exploring the heart of the matter in conversation with the wisdom of the wisdom of the Christian

	heritage.
4. Insight leads, if we are willing and ready, to action.	4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meanings for living.

Killen and de Beer state their pursuit in terms of a search for ‘authentic lives’ which they see as most profoundly achievable through the Christian faith, emphasizing also the Christian’s call to transformation. Of the models explored in this paper, theirs comes the closest to articulating the link between reflection and an existential change within individuals, a point developed further at the end of this section. Their attention to feelings clearly involves the emotional and suggests a parallel with Belenky *et al.*’s ‘connected’ ways of knowing, as well as with Boud *et al.*’s (1985) study of the reflective process which emphasises the significance of the emotions. References to insight and wisdom also suggest different outcomes from the primarily knowledge-focused separate approach.

III.1.3 Pattison: The method of critical conversation (2000)

Pattison bases his understanding of TR on a particular view of theology. Proposing that theology is essentially ‘contemporary enquiry’, he suggests that what unites all theology is its ‘quest for adequate and true responses to the realities of human and religious experience’ (2000:137). It is more appropriate therefore to speak of *theologies* rather than *theology*, since anyone, anywhere, who considers how their individual experience might relate to faith is engaging in TR, often drawing quite distinct conclusions one from another. It is important for Pattison that that reflection should be ‘critical’, however, since it is in the re-examination of previously-held beliefs that theology itself remains the dynamic activity he understands it to be. He therefore commends a model for TR which he entitles the ‘critical conversation’.

The basic idea ... is that the student should imagine herself as being involved in a three way conversation between (a) her own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions, (b) the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the

Christian tradition (including the Bible) and (c) the contemporary situation which is being examined. (Pattison, 2000:139)

He defends the conversational approach on a number of grounds, emphasising in particular its 'real life' nature, before suggesting questions that might open up TR. Shaping questions from the basic shape of Christian creeds (using the creeds' representative themes, for example), asking how Jesus himself might have responded or perceived a particular situation, or starting from the difficult questions which religion itself struggles to provide a satisfactory response to... All can 'act as critical starting points against which to assess and compare the relative positions and perceptions of participants in a particular conversation' (2000:141).

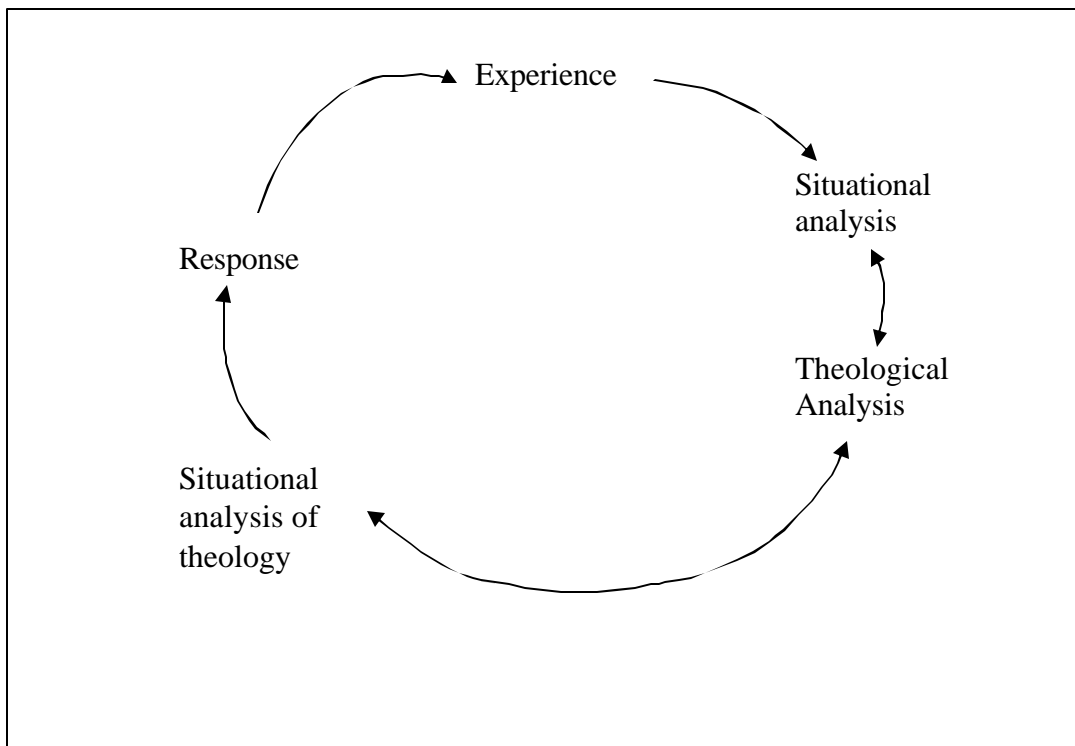
Pattison acknowledges his method has limitations. The traditional understanding that theology formulates universally valid truths and doctrines is challenged, individual theologies are necessarily subjective, and the relationship between the traditional and contemporary individual is unclear. Like Green, he identifies a 'gap' between contemporary reality and the Christian tradition, as well as connections, and considers the conversational method an appropriate tool for exploring the latter and bridging the former, even if at times it 'could lead to a great deal of superficial analysis and opinion which was then grandiosely dignified by being called theology' (2000:143). At no point, however, does he specifically focus on reflection as an activity in its own right.

III.1.4 Lartey: Pastoral cycle method (2000)

In the same volume, Lartey identifies and analyses three ways in which he sees faith and practice as having been 'connected' over the centuries: the Branch approach, the Process approach, and the 'Way of Being and Doing' approach, before proposing his own Pastoral Cycle method. In the first, he suggests that practical theology is akin to a branch of 'pure' theology. 'The emphasis is upon *content* of a discipline and the method adopted is one of applicationism' (2000:129). The second emphasises method. 'The main idea is to generate viable and workable methods which will enable practical theologians to deliver their goods' (2000:130). The third is a 'way of 'doing theology' and being theologians' which 'asks questions about what the contents of our faith are' and 'seeks to

be reflective and thoughtful ... concerned that faith is made manifest in practice [and] taking seriously the potentially transformative nature of faith and/or experience' (2000:131). Critiquing each on the grounds of implicit 'second-class citizenship' (Branch), risk of superficiality (Process), and the over-estimation of context coupled with a potential anti-intellectualism (Way of Being and Doing), he proposes a five-phased cycle, reproduced in Figure 4, in which he is at pains to emphasise that 'the whole process may be seen as theological and not simply the points within it labelled as such' (2000:132).

Figure 4: Lartey's Pastoral cycle method (2000: 132)



Interestingly, Lartey avoids the term 'theological reflection' entirely in his brief chapter, preferring to speak instead of 'approaches' and 'methods' which connect contemporary practical theology to its traditional historic sibling. In much the same way as Jarvis emphasised the role of social context in learning, so Lartey's cycle emphasises the need for 'social and psychological analysis' throughout, suggesting that 'what is aimed at in practical theology is a relevant, meaningful, methodologically appropriate and viable

form of theological activity which may be personally and socially transformative' (2000:133).

It is difficult to see exactly how Lartey's cycle doesn't simply join the ranks of the various models of a Process approach with the various drawbacks which he identifies. Of the different cycles explored in this section, none of their originators appear to have drawn inspiration directly from David Kolb, whose 1984 volume *Experiential Learning* introduced a cycle of experiential learning consisting of four elements:

- Concrete experience
- Observations and reflections
- Formulation of abstract concepts and generalisation
- Testing implications of concepts on new situations

While the terminology might be different, there are close parallels between this and the primary cycle identified by Green (see Figure 2 above). Kolb's work continues to be recognised as one of the significant steps forward in the scholarly understanding of experiential learning. His association of experience with reflection has stood the test of time, and his cycle provided the basis for Jarvis's later revisions and elaborations (1995, 2004, *inter alia*). Elsewhere, nonetheless, it is suggested that these cycles are weak in their ability to portray the process of internalisation as articulated above (Le Cornu, 2005a, forthcoming), and although Jarvis's model does name specific outcomes of the learning process, these are conveyed in quantitative terms rather than the qualitative which relates to personal and existential transformation. The notion of transformation is important to those concerned with Christian growth and the final section of this paper looks at this in greater depth. Of the theorists of TR examined above, Lartey and Green acknowledge the link between TR and the transformation of the individual and Christian community without engaging in precisely how they relate. Killen and De Beer go somewhat further: their emphasis on authenticity introduces salient themes from existential writers, and they boldly state the Christian's call to transformation. None, however, specifically links that transformation with learning. It is an omission this paper seeks to redress.

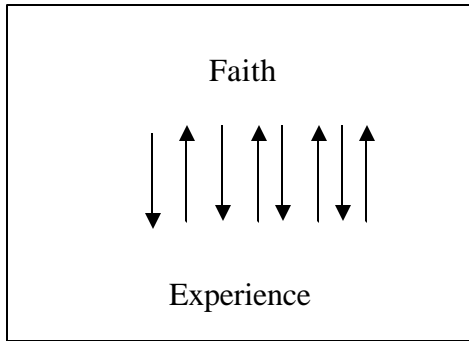
A recently conducted empirical study sheds light on much of this theorising. The next section outlines the main findings.

III.2 People's ways of believing

One of the key features of TR common to all theory is that the activity involves relating Christian teaching to contemporary experience. A recent empirical research project, reported in detail elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2005b, forthcoming), focused on this same interaction between people themselves ('experience') and external Christian faith-content and authorities. The title 'People's ways of believing' deliberately mirrors Belenky *et al.*'s *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1996 [1986]), using similar precepts and foci. One of the principal analytic tools which the authors developed was a set of Educational Dialectics which represented a variety of ways in which their interviewees related to the content of their learning. These dialectics included one entitled 'inner/outer', which asked 'What factors control goal setting, pacing, decision making, and evaluation? Who and what is experienced as validating / nonvalidating?' (Belenky *et al.*, 1996 [1986]:238). The inner/outer dialectic implicitly included the notion of authority, asking where this lay. They linked this with a study conducted by Perry (1970) which specifically focused on individuals' development in relation to external authority and exploring at what stage and how this moved to become inner. The project hypothesised that Christians' 'ways of believing' might be distinct and identifiable on account of the weighty external nature of Christian faith authorities.

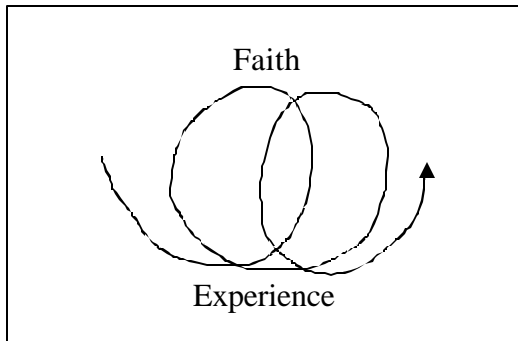
The research report (Le Cornu, 2005b, forthcoming) outlines four ways in which interviewees related their faith-content and their experience emerged from the inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews, as follows.

Discrete believers



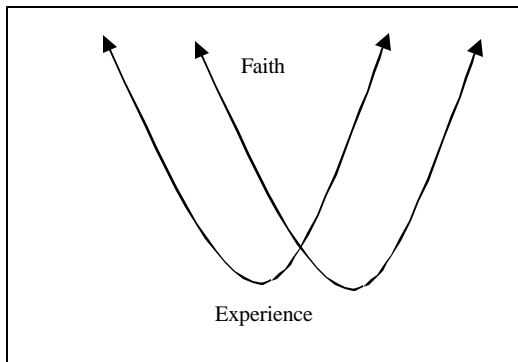
Here faith and experience were 'discrete'. So Denise reported an incomprehension about why God had not responded to her prayers to change her single state. Only recently had this led her to review her understanding of God. (Le Cornu, 2004)

Related believers



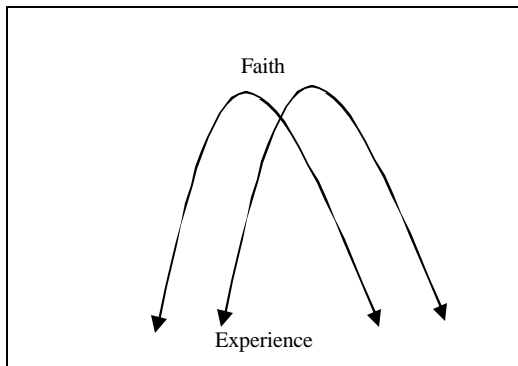
Related believers brought their faith and experience together. Beth excitedly described how she had learnt a lot about God from being pregnant and giving birth. 'I had no control over what was happening to me. And for me that was very like how God is'. (Le Cornu, 2004)

Interpretive believers



This type was labelled ‘Interpretive’ on account of interviewees’ tendency to interpret all of their experience according to faith premises. Miranda recounted a series of events in which the number 587 repeatedly, and ‘coincidentally’ occurred. Given the situational context, she took this as a sign from God of his love and care for her. Miranda’s ‘catch phrase’ was the question, ‘Where is God in this?’. (Le Cornu, 2004)

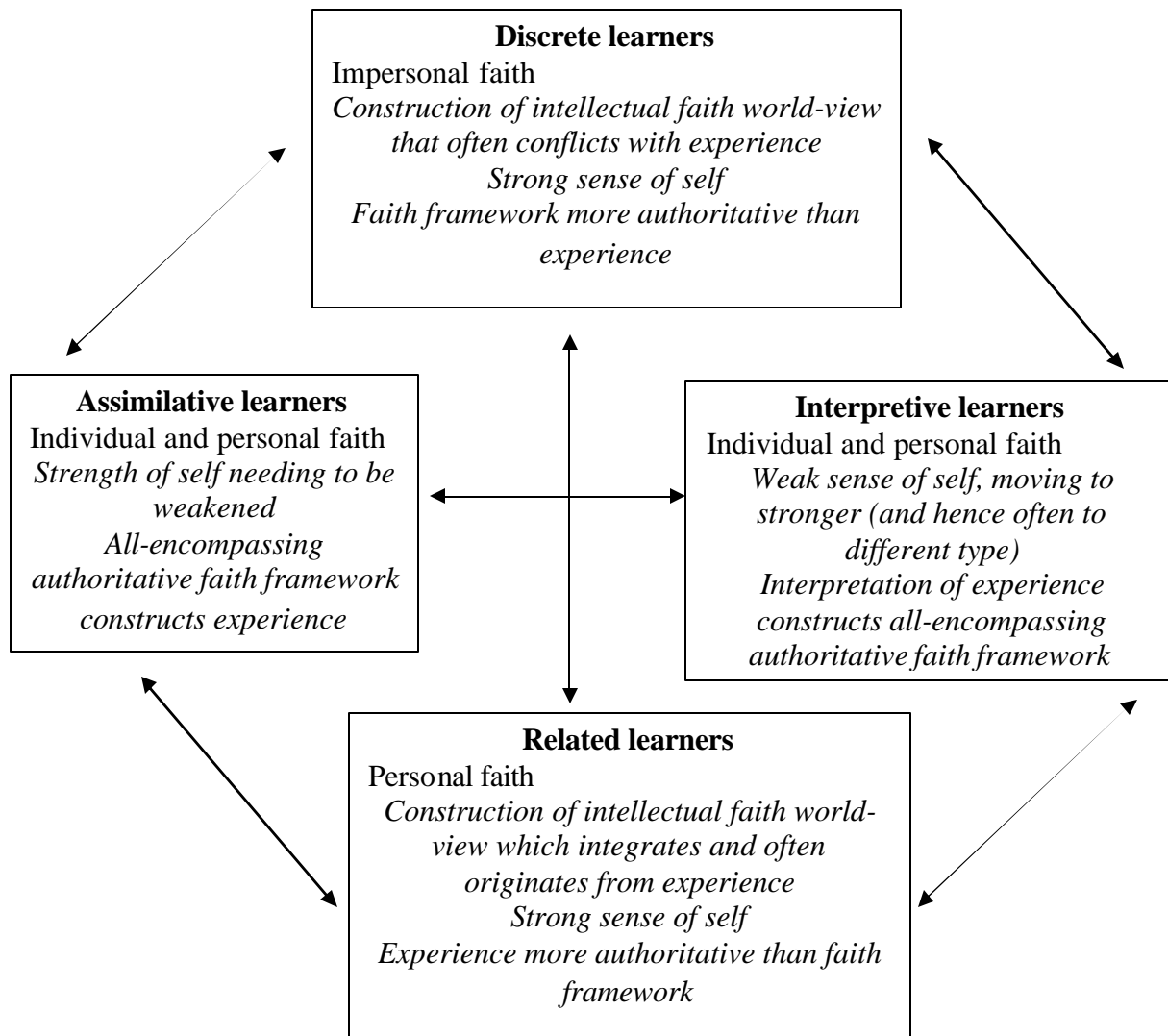
Assimilative believers



‘Assimilative’ interviewees assimilated their faith into their experience. These learners aimed to ‘allow God to take the word within them’ (Craig). Craig relived the wonder of David for creation by going outside and seeing it for himself. (Le Cornu, 2004)

Having established these types, other characteristics from the data permitted the formulation of an overall typology of believing (Figure 5).

Figure 5: People's ways of believing (Le Cornu, 2004, 2005b [forthcoming])



Four different types of TR (defined as the interaction between faith-content and experience) are evidenced, revealing significant and salient dimensions of the process. Discrete and Related believers, for example, both exhibited a strong sense of self. By and large, Related believers lived comfortably with this, having found a way of connecting the two components coherently. Many Discrete believers, on the other hand, expressed discomfort and sometimes reported an impression of schizophrenia: two equally strong

selves, one 'faith' and the other 'other', walking separate lives within each individual. One interviewee reported such tensions that he had had to seek medical help. An interesting difference between the two groups, the significance of which is difficult to evaluate without further research, is their respective foci. Discrete believers emphasised the Christian doctrinal framework and saw it as enabling them to make intellectual sense of the world; Related believers focused principally on the person of Jesus, aiming to incorporate his persona into their own lives. Of the four types, Related believers most closely exhibited an amalgamation of the forms of TR outlined above. A critical dimension was a crucial distinction between the types. Discrete believers, commensurate with their strong selves, critiqued readily but found that this then blocked mutual integration. Assimilative and Interpretive believers, on the other hand, demonstrated far less critical evaluation; indeed, they often appeared deliberately to avoid this type of thought: an important goal of Assimilative believers, for example, was specifically to *assimilate* Christian faith-content believing it to have properties that would transform them. These were the only interviewees to operate with an apparent 'theology of learning'. Working from the starting point of their own sinfulness, the purpose of learning was one of self-transformation towards the defined goal of eternal life. This primarily involved the weakening of the (sense of) self cultivated and prized by Discrete and Related believers. It also precluded critical reflection in the form(s) expressed previously. Interpretive believers were unique in frequently employing a 'faith logic' in their reasoning. An expectation of the miraculous, an interpretation of events and experience in a faith-related way (God speaking to them...), these interviewees gave the impression of living in a 'faith bubble'. While they did demonstrate a critical ability, this was within strict parameters, generally not allowing them to pierce the faith framework and using a type of faith-reasoning. Their sense of self was also weak, provoking the question whether this was in part due to their dependence on faith-reasoning, although of the four types, Interpretive believers had the greatest degree of commonality with one of Belenky *et al.s'* groups: Subjective Knowers also lived individual and subjectively-interpreted interaction with their social environment. (It is also interesting, and potentially significant, that of the four types, this one consisted of women alone.)

The typology thus depicts different forms of TR as understood from an examination of the process of internalisation and the growth of the self. Within this context, the salient features of TR become ones which connect specific forms of reflection to a range of outcomes. So critical reflection can result in a strong self, or selves, with the risk of an uncomfortable alienation between the two. It can also result in a less profound internalisation, affecting the degree to which people grow and develop existentially. Hints of other forms of reflection linked with other types of self were apparent in the typology, however, provoking questions about what alternative forms of TR might be appropriate, especially when considered alongside issues of Christian formation, how the less desirable outcomes of a highly critical approach might be offset, and if it is possible to construct a more holistic model of the process. Section IV considers these questions in greater depth.

IV. Christian formation

The paper has sought to demonstrate thus far an integral link between the process of reflection and the construction of the individual, pinpointing the 'biographical' and existential development of the individual together with the growth of different kinds of self as particularly relevant dimensions, particularly within the overall context of a discussion of TR. Empirical examples have been given of different forms of TR, each of which revolves around the same issues. A range of questions has been raised as a result of the reflection/personal construction link. This section addresses many of them through a consideration firstly of the growth of the Christian self, secondly of the development of a Christian biography, and thirdly of the development of a Christian existential being.

IV.1 The growth of a Christian self?

Reservations have already been expressed about the desirability of constructing an educational framework with the specific intention of developing a 'Christian' self. Even if the sense of control and manipulation can be lessened, the notion would still appear theologically questionable. After all, is it not actually God's job to decide on what sort of

person Christians turn out to be? Of the four models of TR outlined above, only Green specifically introduces the role of the Holy Spirit in the process, through the role of inspiration and intuition, although this should probably be tempered by Lee's observation that:

There is no empirical research evidence to suggest that a person learns religion (or even theology) in a way fundamentally different from the basic manner in which he learns any other area of reality. Consequently, the attempt by some advocates of the theological learning approach to exempt religious learning from the laws governing the learning process itself on the basis of appeals to the Holy Spirit's mysterious activity is an attempt utterly without foundation. (1996:55)

The (implicit) Assimilative theology of learning was apparent at this point. Once again emphasising the need for self to be transformed, they turned to their various sanctified faith sources and authorities and understood these to perform a transformative role in their lives. Roger, a Roman Catholic seminarian, spoke of 'eradicating his personal judgement' in favour of transmitting the views of his clerical superiors and Christian ancestors. Much of his interview was peppered with quotes from Saints and Christian giants whom he took as role models. By speaking through the voice of others who were further down the path of transformation than he was, he would both acquire their reflective skills and diminish his own sinful selfhood. So although no specific reference to the Holy Spirit was made, a work of transformation through exposure to and use of sanctified sources was nonetheless anticipated.

The question of the growth of a Christian self does appear to revolve around whether a strong or weak self is perceived as desirable, with the concept of transformation offering an alternative pathway based on a particular understanding of the nature of the self. Nonetheless, this involves a weakening of the self. The discussion above indicated that the growth of a strong self was linked to individuals' ability to reflect critically. Astley (1994, 2000) acknowledges that both critical and receptive reflection are an integral part of Christian education. Indeed, the former cannot really take place unless the latter has occurred, since it is difficult to critique and evaluate personal faith-content without 'receiving' it first. Discrete and Related believers exemplify different forms of critical

reflection; Interpretive believers functioned primarily in a receptive way. A third form of reflection is identifiable in Assimilative believers, however. Three of the four interviewees in this group either lived in a highly cloistered Benedictine monastery, or had close contact with it. Jean Leclercq, in his important study of monastic learning, outlines what he entitles a ‘theology of “admiration”’.

Baldwin of Ford often describes his attitude in the presence of the Eucharist by these two words: *stupor et admiratio*. He is surprised, rapt, as in an ecstasy, in a state which partakes both of the immobility caused by astonishment and the spontaneous élan provoked by enthusiasm; he never grows accustomed to the sublime realities on which his glance lingers; his wonder never diminishes; he marvels at the mystery Revelation proposes for contemplation, and he also marvels at the faith. His admiration rewards and, at the same time, stimulates his faith, and these two dispositions of the soul augment each other mutually. They awaken the intelligence and all the other faculties of man: reflection and understanding are benefited by admiration and, in turn, foster charity and all the other virtues, and mystical experience and asceticism flow from them. (Leclercq, 1982:226; italics in original)

Elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2001) this is shown to relate to Kolb’s analysis of the processes of experiential learning which includes ‘appreciation’. The argument includes the following quote.

Much can be said about the process and method of criticism, indeed, most scholarly method is based on it. The process of appreciation is less recognized and understood. Thus it is worth describing in some detail the character of appreciation... Appreciation is largely the process of attending to and being interested in aspects of one’s experience. We notice only those aspects of reality that interest us and thereby ‘capture our attention.’ Interest is the basic fact of mental life and the most elementary act of valuing. (Kolb, 1984:103-04)

The paper would suggest therefore that three forms of TR, when taken to extremes, result in three different types of self. Evaluating the four types outlined in section III.2, certain of them might be considered ‘better’ or ‘more desirable’ than others. The discomfort of

Discrete believers and the unrooted, often illogical and insecure existence of Interpretive believers is less appealing than the coherent strength of Related believers and the awesomely scary beauty of the transformed self of Assimilative believers.

Various observations flow from these comments relating to questions of 'quality' TR. As is typical of most typologies, each type portrays extreme characteristics, polarising these in ways which are probably untypical of the majority of Christian experience. Is there a way of integrating them into a holistic approach? The partnership between critical and receptive reflection has already been noted, so here the issue would appear to be one of imbalance: Discrete believers are overly critical, Interpretive overly receptive. This connects with their respective emphases on correct doctrine, and on being open to hearing God speak to them personally. Related believers have achieved a healthier balance by reducing their concern for 'truth' and cultivating a different ear for hearing the voice of God. How might Assimilative reflection be introduced into the overall equation, especially—as is probably the case in non-monastic contexts—if the transformation of the self to the point of its eradication is not a favoured option? For these believers, affirming God's truth was something which primarily took place during the seven-times-daily liturgy; in other words, in a worship context. Here they developed a transferable skill that they could then apply outside that context. This generally took the form of appreciating faith truths by finding new insights within them sparked from their everyday experiences, and allowing these to illuminate their faith truths in new ways. So rather than Pattison's 'critical conversation', affirmative TR might be termed an 'illuminative conversation' in which faith truths are valued and proactively appreciated. The monastic example together with Leclercq's work suggest that this benefits from an equally rigorous underlying 'method' as its critical counterpart. These different types of conversation are not mutually incompatible, and the paper proposes that a truly healthy form of TR would incorporate all three, resulting in a largely balanced growth of the Christian self. This must be accompanied, nonetheless, by a reduction in the hold of one particular dimension of Christian life.

IV.2 The development of a Christian biography?

One of the implications of Jarvis's concept of biography outlined above is that the more individuals live and operate within a specifically Christian social context, the more 'Christian' their biographies become. This is quite a difficult notion, largely because it suggests an unrealistic separation between what is 'Christian' and what isn't. Leaving aside the questions of indoctrination and brainwashing introduced previously on the grounds (in the hope?) that people's critical faculties offset this, the process of people constructing their entire biographies through the internalisation of external content nonetheless raises questions about how this applies to Christian formation.

Elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2004, 2005a [forthcoming]), both Jarvis's model of learning and his notion of biography are criticised for their quantitative nature. Learning is seen as something with a beginning and an end and hence which can be measured. It takes place within time, giving it a horizontal orientation which lies uncomfortably alongside the vertical, qualitative internalisation. This latter provides a more appropriate way of understanding how 'Christian' biographies might be constructed, since it enables a focus on the qualitative dimensions of external Christian faith content. Springsted, grappling with the nature of theology, hotly denies that it is 'critical reflection upon religious experience', contending instead that it is primarily something which 'shapes the thinker'.

Theology is spiritual because it involves an improvement, or is tied to an improvement, of the spirit. ... One becomes like what one studies. (Springsted, 1998:49, 50)

This is not the place to engage in depth with Springsted's fundamental thesis (and various contentious aspects of his argument must be recognised). For the purposes of this paper, the relevance of his argument lies in the idea that the internalisation of specifically Christian content has a transformative effect. The discussion returns to the monastic notion of transformation, but broadens. No longer is it tied to the clear sinner-to-saint progression involving a diminishing of the self; instead, the simple imbibing of 'sanctified' content necessarily effects a parallel sanctification in the learner. Biographies are 'Christianised'. While there are quantitative overtones in the implication that the more people study theology the more their biographies are transformed, this is not

expressed in terms of quantitative learning outcomes but rather in qualitative existential terms.

This existential change is the focus of the final section.

IV.3 An existential change?

A link between reflection and an existential change which takes place in people is implicit in the suggestion made previously that reflection actually involves the transformation of knowledge into knowing. The proposed deepest level of internalisation, that of tacit knowing, equally implies a fundamental change in people as external knowledge is thoroughly absorbed into individuals' beings. The argument above also highlighted the commonly-accepted connection between reflection, internalisation and the making of meaning. One of the evident difficulties experienced by Discrete believers was precisely in this area. Focusing on the sign rather than the signified, many of these interviewees emphasised the importance of hermeneutics in bringing two discrete areas of their lives together. Yet, paradoxically, hermeneutics alone did not appear to solve the problem: indeed, the impression given was more that they perpetuated it! Formal hermeneutics *is* the study of the linguistic sign and of how it can be interpreted; the interpretation differs significantly from its internalisation. A weakness in Green's cycle of TR emerges given his emphasis on hermeneutics as a means of bridging the gap between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience. Hermeneutics alone do not suffice.

The three other types all demonstrated progressively deepening levels of internalisation which linked with forms of reflection. Nonetheless, certain significant features are noteworthy. Interpretive believers appeared to internalise only superficially principally because their method of reasoning was weak. A lack of rigorous thought coupled with a desire to step beyond the bounds of 'earthly' rationality led to an insecure appropriation and an individual construction of meaning. This individuality sits comfortably with Glazer's observation that a 'base of systematic, scientific professional knowledge' cannot

emanate from 'unstable institutional contexts of practice' (Glazer, 1974; quoted in Schön, 1991:23). In other words, by stepping beyond the conventional rationality of the social world in which they lived, Interpretive believers also distanced themselves from the means of making robust meaning systems and hence from the possibility of profound internalisation. Related and Assimilative believers both looked beyond the sign in different ways. The latter emphasised the two parties 'illuminating' and providing new 'insights' to the other; the former found methods of integrating the respective components in a meaningful yet logical way. Both internalised profoundly, to the point of transforming their beings.

While these observations challenge those involved with the theory and practice of TR, it is also appropriate to highlight the link between a number of these features and individual learning styles and epistemologies. Belenky *et al.*'s afore-mentioned Connected Knowers 'naturally' functioned in a way which primarily focused on understanding and finding meaning which connected with their lives, while their Separate counterparts were more concerned with critiquing and ascertaining a public knowledge separate from themselves. Unsurprisingly, given Belenky *et al.*'s influence over the project as a whole, there are distinct similarities between Related believers and Connected knowers, and between Discrete believers and Separate knowers. The discomfort experienced by Discrete believers was not a characteristic of Separate knowers, however, and the techniques employed by Related believers to integrate all the various facets of their lives into a greater whole suggested they were functioning in a way commensurate with Belenky *et al.*'s final perspective of Constructed knowers: 'All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known' (1996 [1986]:137). When considering how TR should occur, Connected and Constructed knowing provides an important way forward, while Separate knowing sounds clear warning bells. If, as Belenky *et al.*'s work seems to imply, these are epistemological positions which people adopt as part of their overall innate learning style, then those involved in Christian education need both to recognise and be familiar with their respective characteristics, and to develop ways in which the difficulties experienced by many Separate (Discrete) knowers can be obviated. In tandem, a greater understanding about how Connected and Constructed knowing can be

cultivated is called for, not least because of the links between these and existential wholeness and coherence. It may even be possible to suggest (tentatively) that authentic TR can *only* be done in a connected, related way; some of the difficulties identified by theological educators and experienced by their students may well result from the largely separate approach characteristic of traditional theology.

V. Summary and conclusion

That a link exists between the process of reflection and aspects of human growth and development has been clearly demonstrated. This pertains principally to the construction of individual biographies, to the growth of the self, and to the existential change that comes about through internalisation. Patterns of reflection have also been outlined, indicating that the reflective process occurs in a variety of ways. Since these specifically aimed to relate the Christian faith tradition with people's own lives and social contexts, it was suggested that these were also examples of *theological* reflection. Salient aspects of this revolved around the way in which people related to faith-content (separate or connected), their primary faith focus (doctrine, the person of Jesus, or themselves as individuals), their strength of self coupled with a theology of self, and the degree to which reflection was critical, receptive or affirmative. These factors together also contributed to the overall process of internalisation and people's existential development. Just as different forms of TR were evidenced empirically, so they related to theoretical models, despite the fact that these barely engaged with the outcome(s) of the process and varied in a number of ways from the lived reality.

The paper began by highlighting Pattison's comment that theories of TR continued to struggle to determine the 'difference [that] this complex, demanding process of theological activity make[s] in theory and in practice'. It has argued that one significant 'difference' that it makes is to people's overall growth and development, and, when conducted within a faith environment and with faith goals, then this is a matter of people's overall Christian formation. New questions arise for Christian educators to consider relating to the nature of that formation and the methods employed to stimulate it.

Certain dimensions of the reflective process also seem to be potentially embedded within people's individual epistemological functioning, provoking further questions about how this might be worked with.

Pattison correctly makes no claim that TR is the preserve only of those committed to the Christian faith. Clearly those with no such commitment may also engage with the tradition and its content. Aspects of the discussion above suggest that they may nonetheless be changed, even 'sanctified' through this engagement, introducing interesting new questions regarding issues of Christian identity. It is possible—probable—however, that different forms of reflection would be employed, exhibiting further dimensions of the self and of existential change.

The reflective process is integral to human formation, and hence TR is an integral dimension of Christian formation. This paper has highlighted many of the salient aspects implicit to that formation. There is much further to go before the world of Christian Education adequately understands the profound issues involved, and more research is recommended in all the areas explored.

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