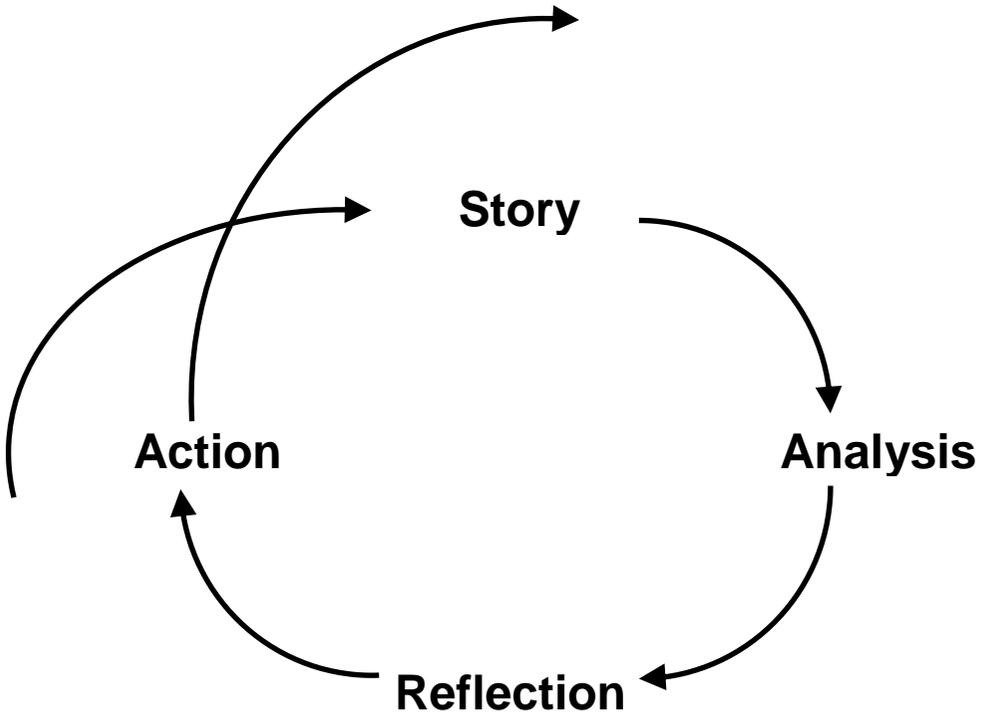


The Doing Theology Spiral

S A R A



“Theology is the activity of the whole body of Christ”

Laurie Green *Let's Do Theology*

Reflecting with God

The process of Reflecting with God is very straightforward. There are several versions of the same basic approach in common use. The basic model has four stages which follow each other in an ever widening circle or spiral. This is sometimes called the Pastoral Cycle.

Story

Members of the group need to share their first impressions of the issue. Not precise scientific information but their feelings, inclinations and preliminary thoughts.

They may have a wide range of personal experiences and stories that need to have time to be shared and valued.

The group members need to become aware of these questions:

- What are my prejudices for good or ill?
- What is my investment in this situation?
- What direct personal experiences have I had of this subject?
- What are the issues that are at stake here?

It is helpful to recognise through what filter we are each listening to this story.

By the end of this phase the group should be able to say:

- Who is involved in the issue and who is affected by the situation
- How they feel about the issue and how it affects them
- What are the basic questions or problems in the situation
- May already be sensing where God is present and active

Analysis

The aim of this stage is to paint a living and vibrant picture of the situation that leads to clarification of perceptions rather than just searching for what is wrong.

The group needs to tease the issue apart

They need to gather facts and listen to a wider range of experiences and differing perspectives e.g. from social science and the arts

The group needs to make sense of the information.

There are 3 levels of sense making

- 1 Look for connections and relationships and see the bigger picture
Does a picture emerge?
- 2 Look for values and identify the dominant
What motivates people? What are their hopes and concerns and ideologies?
Identify the dominant values
- 3 Look for causes and seek to understand the wider system
In whose interest is the present situation serving
Get below surface symptoms and identify underlying causes

Reflection

During this phase aim is to tease the connections of meaning between on the one hand, our contemporary situation as we have experienced it and explored it, and on the other hand the great wealth of Christian history, teaching and faith traditions and what this means for us.

This stage helps us to view our perspective from the alternative view of the divine God and see to see things from the point of view of the sufferer and those most in need

The group needs to check out their understanding against the alternative authority of Scripture and God

Are we telling the Jesus story or relating one of our own making?

Some of the past of our tradition will require testing against the authority of present experience and our understanding of God's present actions

Reflection with God provides us with the double edge paths of reason and imagination

Our imaginations can become inspired in the process of seeking understanding.

The Spirit guides us and illuminates our paths

At our disposal are Bible study, prayer, worship, hymns and songs, the creeds and councils of the Church, the theologies of times past, the present and social teaching of the Church.

As resources we have the great biblical themes of the faith like salvation, creation, sin, thanksgiving and so on.

We have the great stories of Creation, Exodus, Exile, Restoration, Incarnation, Passion and Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension etc,

It is important to test from whose perspective we have been reading scripture

Need to let God plant a new vision of a different future and how we might relate and respond within it? What is the truth we need to enter into?

Action

Having come thus far the response stage can then become a channel for committed action that should be the outcome of the new awareness.

Theology has as its essential aim the transformation of the present so that it may conform to the hopes and yearnings of the kingdom to come.

The transformative purpose takes us up from here and offers us opportunities of working with God's saving intentions in the transformation of ourselves and of society as is God's desire.

This will usually involve structural and political transformation as well as personal.

What would Godly action look like?

Review a range of responses and judge which one is best in the light of Christian reflection on the whole experience. It will derive from a hunger to see God's will done. It may need a courageous spirituality to accomplish it.

Actions can take a whole variety of forms from tough action to silent presence to doing nothing new.

We need to recognise that our power is limited

Implement action and this takes the group to a new place

Things don't always work out well and success and failure gives us new stories to tell.

Success and failure leads to other stories to tell