

Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology
Key Voices
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‘Living theologically’ – how does this speak to me as a teacher?

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores what it means to 'live theologically' as a teacher. The aim was to understand how practical theology relates to education. The key objective was to discover theoretical perspectives from practical theology related to the spiritual development of young people. This review of literary voices explores how practical theology relates to increasing religious literacy of young people in a multi cultural context and how it can enable learners to develop their own world view. The review also explores the aims of future research into the impact of new pedagogical tools on both learner and practitioner.

The review examines two key literary voices from practical theology and education; Terry Veling, Head of Theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane and Thomas Groome, Professor of Theology at Boston College, Mass. The former is a practical theologian and the latter a theological educationalist. The professional context used was Peacethread, an inter faith post 16 citizenship project. The rationale for using this educational project was to analyse and synthesise the theoretical perspectives deriving from the key voices in the context of a practical setting.

Theoretical perspectives were discovered in the interplay between the voices. Firstly, the key voices had elements of engagement in common such as authentic dialogue, inclusion of the other and the role of the community. Secondly, methodological perspectives were identified that could move participants from simply being informed to being agents of change. The outcomes of the interplay between Veling and Groome demonstrate that to live theologically as a teacher requires the confidence to hold different perspectives in tension.

In conclusion Veling and Groome help develop an understanding of how practical theology engages with education. Theoretically the analysis and synthesis of practical theology and education expands pedagogy to include and enhance spiritual development of young people. However it remains to be seen if in practice, through key elements of inclusion, relationship and conversation, religious literacy of learners in a multi cultural context can be developed. Furthermore the impact of learners moving from 'inform' to 'act' in order to better develop their world view needs examining. If practical theology has something to say to a teacher the impact of putting theory into practice needs assessing through further research.

INTRODUCTION

The rationale of this paper is to converse with key voices from the fields of practical theology and educational theory. The voices are Professor Terry Veling, Head of Theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane and Thomas Groome, Professor of Theology at Boston College, Mass.

The paper explores the interplay between practical theology and education, focusing on ‘what does it mean to live out theology as a teacher?’ This question stems from my background as a secondary Religious Education teacher in the comprehensive system in the UK.

The aims are to:

- Identify the relationship between practical theology and education
- Understand how practical theology engages with my professional educational context
- Explore development of pedagogy to enhance spiritual development of young people
- Identify a conceptual framework for future research

For 20 years I have taught a Religious Education (RE) curriculum that objectifies religious practice and belief and largely ignores the subjective dimension of the remit for schools to provide a Spiritual, Moral, Cultural and Social education (SMCS). The spiritual educational agenda is not restricted to teachers delivering RE, it spans the whole curriculum. In the Post 16 sector, in which I work, new guidelines on SMCS were published in March 2010 by the National Council of Faith and Beliefs in Further Education (FBFE) on behalf of the Learning Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

Therefore, I am interested in developing pedagogy to enable the spiritual development of young people, based on this guidance, outside the constraints of traditional educational practice. For the last 12 months my professional work has taken me outside the conventional classroom in pursuit of new ways to teach. This paper focuses on my recent initiative, Peacethread, a Post 16 citizenship development project based on the themes of inter faith dialogue and community cohesion. The premise of this paper is to explore whether practical theology has anything to bring to the conversation about spiritual development of participants in projects such as Peacethread. In other words how does ‘living theologically’ speak to me as a teacher?

CONTEXTS

a. Educational

The SMCS agenda derived from the 1944 Education Act under the scrutiny of Archbishop William Temple (OPSI, web source, accessed 13.03.10). By 1988 the National Curriculum stated ‘The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life’ (OPSI, web source).

Whilst the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) recognise that definitions of spiritual development ‘are a source of rich discussion and professional reflection’ (QCDA, web source, accessed 13.03.10), current guidance states:

‘a pupil’s spiritual development may be described as young people gaining personal insights from their experience of learning, enabling them to reflect on the significance of their learning, and to connect it profoundly, creatively and healthily to themselves, other people, society and the environment’ (QCDA, web source).

Professor of RE Terence Copley also recognises the elusive definition of spirituality; nevertheless he asserts it is ‘one of the few terms left whereby someone who does not identify with any specific religion can subscribe to that area of human experience previously called religious’ (2000, p1).

Yet when coupled with the word ‘development’ Copley becomes concerned that spirituality in education could move ‘beyond the current broadly spiritual path and into either moral development or citizenship, neither of which requires transcendence or mystery’ (p128). Copley is an influential contributor to the political debate regarding the role of spirituality in education. He states that the role of RE is to ‘induct children in an informed way into what is a debate, extend their options, dispel ignorance and misconception, reveal hidden assumptions’ (2005, p128). According to Copley an RE teacher’s role is to enhance the capacity of children to ‘theologize’, i.e. enable them to develop spiritually by being reflective, with ‘awareness of divergence and difference and with wonder at mystery’ (p128). Copley admits ‘this is a tightrope walk for the teacher, but it is possible’ (p128). It is this tightrope I am interested in. Educational practice that enhances spiritual development involves a tense balance, but it can be done.

FBFE guidance concurs with Copley seeking to maintain a specifically spiritual path. It states that spiritual development is framed by;

- Religion and belief literacy in preparation for life and employment in a multi-faith, multi-belief society
- The development of an informed, coherent personal worldview (FBFE web source, accessed 12.02.10)

FBFE has its roots in Christian Ecumenism, originally formed thirty years ago by a group of FE college principals, tutors and chaplains it aimed to ‘to foster and develop partnership working and community engagement largely with and through local

Christian faith groups' (FBFE web source). As a result of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 FBFE began to develop a multi faith and inter faith organisation based on 'a belief that understanding the common ground between people of different faiths and beliefs is essential to social harmony' (FBFE web source). The FBFE guidance will form a definition of spiritual development for the purposes of this paper.

Despite the elusiveness of spirituality in the school curriculum there is a connection to the subject of citizenship. Jacqueline Watson points out that spirituality and citizenship education are about an increased awareness amongst students of 'their relationship with other people, with the environment, with communities and society, and with the world as a whole' In fact she believes 'spirituality within citizenship 'could be dynamite' (Watson, 2003, p22). Indeed, practitioners need to be aware this is a potentially explosive partnership, rubbing up against tense issues and uncomfortable conversations; will the tightrope walk be too risky?

Ofqual guidance on A level Citizenship Studies suggests teachers focus on topical issues in order to develop an understanding of how individuals and communities respond as citizens (Ofqual web source, accessed 12.02.10). As recognised by FBFE inter faith dialogue and community cohesion are key issues in the early 21st century, their profile raised, in the political sense, by the 'war on terror' agenda. The context makes delivering this curriculum exciting yet challenging. Is it possible for young people to 'dispel ignorance and misconception' and 'reveal hidden assumptions' within this political context? On one hand the UK government wage a war on Afghanistan and on the other launch policies within educational frameworks to prevent violent extremism. Therefore a key question to arise from the educational context is; how can practitioners within citizenship education, many of them non specialists, confidently provide opportunities for the spiritual development of their students? The lens of practical theology provides elements of engagement that are helpful to the educational practitioner. Hence my approach is to examine how Veling's idea of 'living theologically' (2005) and Groome's concept of 'Shared Praxis' (1991) can be synthesised to develop a pedagogy to address the key question.

The world I find myself in is different from that of Veling and Groome, Catholic, men, and practising Christians whereas I am from a Protestant upbringing, female and have no links to a faith community. However, although my educational practice is far removed from Veling and Groome there are threads in their works that interweave, sometimes in contradiction but often in symmetry, with my professional context and theological reflection; hence they are helpful partners for me to be in dialogue with.

b. Professional

I am engaged in work seeking to raise aspirations of young people under the umbrella of Brightfields, a social enterprise I founded in 2008. Inspired by R. S. Thomas' *The Bright Field* (1975), which alludes to the biblical parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:44-46, NIV), Brightfields aims to bring hope to young people in discovering their own 'treasure' or 'pearl' through individual and group learning. Within Brightfields lies Peacethread, an inter faith project 'threading together young people, faith and peace' (Peacethread, web source, accessed 04.04.10).

Peacethread is a collaborative enterprise developed between me and my colleague Rev David Hodson, a student of practical theology at Moorlands Bible College in Dorset. The project creates spaces for young people from different faiths and cultures, schools and colleges, to converse with each other and inter faith representatives in the local community. It responds to a need for young people to deepen their understanding of faith and develop tolerance of diversity. Launched in September 2009 Peacethread delivers conferences and seminars to young people on global issues.

Peacethread was initially funded by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN, web source, accessed 12.02.10) and LSIS as part of their Post 16 Citizenship Support Programme. LSN operate on an independent, not-for-profit basis delivering capabilities such as consulting, research and training to provide support through teaching, leadership and skills development. They generate and share ideas along with practical solutions to inform the future of learning. LSN/LSIS engaged with the government's Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE/ LGA web source, accessed 12.03.10) agenda by issuing a remit for development projects addressing inter faith dialogue and community cohesion. Hence Peacethread was born. More recently the project has attracted funding from the Community Development Foundation as part of the government's 'face to face and side by side' inter faith framework. The political slant of the funding raises an important question; how does Peacethread stand aside from the politics in order to provide young people with the freedom to think for themselves?

Developing the learning ethos of Peacethread is important. The methodology focuses on A level Citizenship guidance requiring learners to be informed, participate and act (Ofqual web source, accessed 12.02.10) and QCDA Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (QCDA web source, accessed 15.03.10) where all learners are expected to participate as equal partners, able to reflect, contribute and act on issues being considered. Learners are also encouraged to self manage, work in teams, be independent enquirers, critical and reflective thinkers and effective participants. Framing the project on a theological pedagogy may provide emancipation from the political agenda in order for students to become not merely recipients in the learning process but participants. Therefore the pedagogical approach benefits from a specific link to spiritual development that may be found in engagement with practical theology. Relating Peacethread to elements of engagement from Veling and Groome enables a key question to be identified; what can practical theology bring to a pedagogical approach to enhance spiritual development within this educational context?

c. Theological

Brought up in the United Reformed Church I have a sense of spiritual awareness. On the other hand, having graduated from Manchester University in the late 1980s with a degree in Religious Studies and Theology I developed a critical outlook towards matters of faith. My theology is grounded in, as Irish writer and philosopher Pete Rollins puts it, 'mystery, doubt, complexity and ambiguity' (2006, xiii).

Rollins, a research associate with the Irish School of Ecumenics is a 'writer, lecturer, storyteller, public speaker' (Pete Rollins web source, accessed 15.03.10). He suggests theology is not a revolution but a return, a secret we, ironically, are compelled to share. Theology is a rediscovery of where God has something to say for everyone, 'it is not

then a revolution that is in the process of creating something new but rather one that is returning to something very old' (2006, xv). Rollins is excited to discover new directions for theology that he likens to coming home, 'the wonder and fear associated with discovering something new alongside the comfort and security of having come home'(xv). Likewise, a surprise discovery of the 'pearl of great price', the treasure hidden in The Bright Field is a homecoming. Thomas suggests the treasure, the 'eternity that awaits you', has been there all along. Despite my critical approach I too am open to a theological homecoming.

Rollins states it is only at a point of abandonment that we act in true fellowship with God 'perhaps it is precisely this that we are being called to: engaging in that most difficult task of putting our religion to death so that a religion without religion can spring forth' (2008, p25). Drawing on Bonhoeffer (Rollins, 2008, p102,) Rollins believes atheism within belief is critical to an understanding of how a mature faith community should respond. Rollins suggests it is when we share this abandonment of God with Jesus that we act in a God - like way. In a sense this is 'incarnational theology'. Jesus models an inclusive approach even when seemingly abandoned by God at the crucifixion. This theological reflection helps inform a pedagogical method to use with young people of all faiths and none. Although Veling and Groome may be unfamiliar with Rollins' atheistic slant there is a compatibility in thinking that helps me explain what I am interested in 'living out' as a teacher.

Furthermore contemporary Christian writers such as Rob Bell (2005), Brian McLaren (2003,2007) and Desmond Tutu (2005) have influenced my rediscovery of incarnational theology as they express how the Christian story can be 'reframed' (McLaren, 2007) in the 21st century. Like Rollins, I too am excited to discover new directions for theology particularly in relation to my professional practice.

PEACETHREAD CAMEO



Figure 1 Helen O'Connor - walking the tightrope

The first Peacethread project involved 30 Dorset sixth form students meeting with representatives from the local Bournemouth and Poole faith communities; Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Quaker, at the Lighthouse Arts Centre in Poole. The project focussed on strategies for peace and reconciliation in Israel/ Palestine. Figure 1 shows

the representative from the Mosque, who had been upset by a series of pictures presented to the students by the rabbi from the Reform Synagogue, in dialogue with me.

The Muslim representatives were ready to walk out, but in fact this moment was a turning point in the project; the students saw the reality of differences of opinion and belief being held in tension right in front of them. From this point on they were on a journey of understanding others whilst considering their own world view. The picture represents tension being held in balance by conversation. As the project coordinator I needed to draw on skills of negotiation and inclusion in order to keep the peace, whilst allowing the tension to exist I was walking the tightrope, but the balance was insecure.

KEY VOICES

Engagement with Veling and Groome explores key elements that offer Peacethread a surer footing. I am searching for a dimension that is both new yet draws on the experience of the past.

a. Terry Veling - Living Theologically

‘To venture a theological life is to live theologically. It is not so much to ask about the ways that theology can be made practical; rather it is to ask how the practices of my life can be made theological’ (Veling, 2005, ch 8).

Veling claims it is possible to live theologically. So, what kind of ‘practical’ theology is this?

Bernard J Lee writes Veling has written a ‘conversation book’ (Veling, 2005, pxiii). The Veling style invites the reader to ‘listen and hear, reflect and engage’. The reader is encouraged to read the book as ‘an activity’ drawing on the rabbinical tradition that Veling is familiar with. His poetic approach draws on unexpected symbols for a professor of theology; poems, song lyrics, film. He quotes Paul Ricœur to explain how the symbolic world is ‘always prior as the genesis of all our thinking and acting in the world’ (p.xviii). Veling is from the hermeneutical school of practical theology in which interpretation is put into action.

Most appropriately Veling sees practical theology being reintegrated into ‘the weave and fabric of human living’. Theology becomes a ‘practice or way of life’ so God’s coming is ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ (p4). Helpfully he draws on other scholars to render detail to this elusive definition. Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner suggests the theory ‘in dwells the practice itself’ (Veling, 2005, p3). Whereas Professor of Religion, Don Browning, qualifies the term as a verb, a doing word, practical theology is something we do ‘to act and think practically in fresh and innovative ways’ (Veling, 2005, p4).

Influenced by South American educationalist Paulo Freire, Veling believes practical theology involves ‘passion, struggle and decision’ (Veling, 2005, p7). Theological knowledge is in the world, ‘knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful, inquiry people pursue in the world,

with the world, and with each other' (p7). Practical theology for Veling takes on the nature of a dance, a movement, something fluid, active, a weaving threading motion that at its heart reaches out towards 'the other' in the world.

Veling's Catholic context is central to the hermeneutic of his practical theology. Vatican II states the church shares with 'the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor and afflicted in any way' (Veling, 2005, p8). Not surprisingly one of the other notable influences on Veling is Liberation Theology. He quotes Gustavo Gutierrez, father of the theology of liberation, who talks of supporting life from 'the underside of history', a sentiment close to his heart in his endeavour to place Catholic social teaching alongside a theology that as Jewish philosopher Martin Buber puts it, leads you 'into the world' (Veling, 2005, p8,9).

Knowledge and experience of Judaism helps Veling draw symbolic analogies between ancient Talmudic writings and his own reflections on 'living in the margins'. He is drawn to a life of vocation centred on French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' proposition that 'love should be put into action' (Veling, 2005, p10). Levinas' ethic of the other compels Veling to grapple with the reinvention of Christianity in community as he seeks to explore his long term interest in 'intentional Christian communities' (Veling, 1996, p2).

Veling defines such communities as 'communal expressions of Christian gathering' that are 'committed to mutuality and inclusiveness, attuned to the sacred texts and rituals of their tradition, and engaged in the world as communities of public presence in culture and society' (p3). Although he speaks from a Catholic context he points out intentional communities can be found in ecumenism. So, what are the characteristics of living theologically within intentional communities? Furthermore, can these characteristics apply to a network community such as Peacethread? Key elements of engagement are apparent throughout Veling's works that help address these questions.

i. Metanoia

'Living theologically' requires the participant to be surprised, creative, take risks (Veling, 2005, p58). This is not a tame approach. Metanoia, a change of heart, is demanded from all. At times, rather than using the prefix 'intentional' Veling uses 'marginal' to describe Christian communities that interest him i.e. 'those intentional communities that have adopted a critical distance from mainstream church life' (Veling, 1996, p3). He makes it clear that intentionality is about the deliberate seeking to create 'new patterns of Christian community as an alternative expression to existing church structures and as a means for public engagement' (p3). Veling is aware change has to be sought for the communities he is dealing with, in middle class, affluent, Western society.

ii. Inclusion of the other

Veling recognises 'living theologically' demands active listening to the voice of the other. If all of our listening merely 'lead back to me' (2005, p60) we might as well not be in dialogue at all. The critical factor for Veling is to enter into relationships that understand a voice other than our own through inclusive conversation:

‘If I only let my preformed opinions or ready made answers lead the conversation, then I may as well be talking to myself, because everything I say will only lead back to me and to what I already know. If interpretation means anything at all, it must surely mean trying to understand a voice that is other than my own’ (p60).

Veling uses German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s concept of ‘a forgetfulness of being’ (Veling, 2005, p5) to suggest an abandonment of self is necessary in order to focus the lens elsewhere, on the other. Veling’s feeling for the ‘otherness’ of life turns us aside, as Freire put it, to ‘restlessness’. This is for Veling a form of love as demonstrated in Levinas’ words:

‘Love cannot sleep, can never be peaceful or permanent. Love is the incessant watching over the other, it can never be satisfied or contented with the bourgeois ideal of love as domestic comfort’ (Veling, 2005, p122).

iii. Innovation

To live theologically is to allow the past and future to shape our present reality by ‘drawing us to pursue innovative and fresh possibilities’ (p31). The past informs the present, reaching into the future. Our present is shaped by our past and our future, by our responses to life. The drawing in of the past and future leads us to pursue innovative ideas and fresh possibilities in the present. For Veling it is the hermeneutic of sacred texts that opens the door into a proposed world of innovation.

iv. Relationship

Veling’s hermeneutic brings us into dialogue that questions, challenges, creates an ‘in between’ where people can ask ‘what are you saying to me?’ (p56). This challenging question provokes people to widen their experience and deepen their understanding of the other through deeper relationships and conversation.

v. Conversation

In a masterclass on ‘Living in the margins’ at Manchester University (October 2009) Veling explained how threading conversational questions to our hermeneutic of faith brings theology to life. The conversation of a sacred text is lived in the margins. Veling affirms the concept of interconnectedness in his references to thinkers such as Abraham Heschel, influential Jewish theologian; ‘humanity is the knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced’ (Veling, 2005, p113). Veling is suggesting it is our very lives and actions that deliver the conversation, they are bound up, woven, threaded; in this sense our lives are speaking.

vi. Spiritual not just ethical

A question to ask of Veling’s approach to practical theology is, ‘is the practitioner merely reduced to acting ethically?’ Veling uses Liberation Theology to address this criticism quoting Gutierrez’s claim that ‘to separate love of god from love of neighbour gives rise to attitudes which impoverish one for the other’ (p124). Therefore unless we hold the ‘other’ between us and God we cannot ‘live theologically’. As Veling points out the work of our lives is

discovered by taking on responsibility for the 'other' (p149). This quality of 'living theologically' is therefore a spiritual rather than merely ethical action.

vii. *Shalom*

Veling asserts, 'To be aware of one's own culture, and to seek a deeper awareness and understanding of other cultural expressions, is crucial to practical theology' (p173). He supports this from Irish Jesuit and Roman Catholic Priest Michael Paul Gallagher, 'the whole future of humanity is intimately linked with whatever happens in the field of culture' (Veling, 2005, p174). The practical theologian searches this field for shalom. Cowan and Lee suggest to Veling this word is rich in meaning for those seeking peace; 'shalom is the peace that emerges when human beings are in right relationship with themselves, their neighbours, the earth and all its creatures and God' (Veling, 2005, p178). Therefore the imperative for the practical theologian is to seek right relationship; living theologically to construct structures where shalom brings a practical infrastructure of love, justice and mercy. Veling urges us, as practitioners, not to base this infrastructure on legislation but on 'small fragile acts of love' which he insist ultimately 'watch over justice' (p193).

In conclusion Veling intimates the journey of the practical theologian is that of the Everlasting Way (Psalm 139) where we can uncover a 'new way of dwelling in the world' (p201).

b. Thomas Groome - Shared Praxis

Groome uses educational practice to demonstrate how life can be brought to faith and vice versa with his model of Shared Praxis. Shared Praxis is a vehicle for reflection. Praxis involves, in a contemporary sense, 'purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement' (1991, p136).

Groome provides a history of empiricism to explain Shared Praxis, a 'central insight to be reflected in pedagogy for conation in Christian faith' (p65). He concludes the personal sense experience of our world constitutes the human knowledge and knowing that shapes us. However, he points out empiricism misses the fact that truth is a practical task to be 'done'. If we live truth, if we try to change reality, we grasp more fully what it means to talk of truth. In order to do this we have to build our concept of truth on the agency of the knower, in other words it is all about our interaction with the world (p76). Groome believes religious educators must bring critical reason to faith and ethics to enable people to draw upon their own life experiences as a source of their identity and an aide to acting as responsible citizens of faith.

Groome's main concern is to move from epistemology to ontology in developing a pedagogy that asks people to explore their 'ontic selves'. His aim 'is not simply that people know about justice but that they be just' (p8). Drawing on a rich philosophical resource Groome asserts that an 'ontological turn' in our pedagogy encourages educators to 'engage and inform, form and transform the very being of people in the world' (p8). Groome sees people as 'agent subjects in relationship,' the outcome of which is the development of conation; wisdom derived from a conscious effort to realise one's ontic self, one's being in the world (p8).

Groome believes the learning outcome of RE should lead individuals to form an identity creating agency in the world focusing his work on a specifically Christian approach. The philosophical foundations of Shared Praxis are outlined in Groome's rationale. Although his work is intended largely for a US based educational context he outlines its relevance to the wider pastoral setting (1991, p295). He believes all ministry has an educational setting. Groome is particularly concerned with a social ministry for peace and justice. He is therefore an appropriate literary voice in grappling with my professional context as he weaves together a 'pedagogical creed' (p2).

Shared Praxis is a process of mutual discovery and discernment set in the context of a focusing activity and 5 subsequent movements. The focusing activity introduces the generative theme. The aim of the focusing activity is to turn people to their own 'being' in place and time (p146). Subsequently learners progress through a series of 5 movements. Groome's use of the term 'movement' is significant. Movement implies a fluid, free flowing process, like a dance. The ideas and conversations have a sequence but at times they overlap, converge, diverge, and recombine.

In the context of Shared Praxis teachers become partners in the learning, being willing to empower rather than control. Participation enables people to express, reflect, encounter and appropriate in order to make decisions while respecting each other. Shared Praxis is built around action, reflection, creativity of mutual partnership and active participation engaging the whole being of people to 'inform, form and transform' (p2).

Shared Praxis is thus characterised by key elements of engagement that inform the quest to 'live theologically':

i. Agent subjects in relationship

Groome sees RE as an activity: transcendent, ontological and political. He explains the Latin root for the word 'religious' is to 'bring things together again' (p11). The expectation is participants act as 'agent subjects in relationship' to question the whole meaning of 'being'. From a Christian point of view Groome's premise 'calls the (people) to incarnate their relationship with God in a communal way of life patterned on the life of Jesus' (p12). As agent subjects in relationship we have a duty to put the well being of the 'other' at the centre.

ii. Theory and practice working together

Groome explains that 'knowing' and 'being' have been at odds for too long resulting in a dichotomy between theory and praxis. The history of philosophy indicates a lack of dialogue between life and thought. Groome reconstructs Aristotle's notion of praxis (practical knowledge) by threading it together with 'theoria' (theory/ scientific knowledge) and 'poiesis' (creative/ artistic knowledge) as a foundation for a conative pedagogy (p42). The weave of the fabric results in a conative pedagogy that must 'engage and promote critical reflection, ethical action and imaginative creativity' (p42).

iii. Intentionality

Groome quotes philosopher Richard Kearney 'It is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality... that we choose our world and that our world chooses us' (Groome, 1991, p88). Groome believes conation will thrive in such centres

of intentionality, ‘the more a teaching/learning event can emotionally engage, inspire, delight, move and rouse the hearts of participants the more appropriate it is for conation’ (p95). Groome imagines ‘the world as it is could be otherwise’ (p96), aiming to move beyond technical rationalism to seek new ways of participatory dialogue and action. He argues communities of authentic discourse can heighten the dialectic in the wider community (p102). Such discourse requires ‘critical reflection’ uncovering interests, assumptions and ideologies of one’s own praxis and social context.

iv. Relationships

Groome focuses on the work of Buber to establish the context of ‘the other’ (Groome, 1991, p107). Buber establishes 5 important characteristics of an ‘I/thou’ relationship;

- Engagement of the whole of one’s being
- Requirement to be truly present to the other
- Marked by openness
- Characterised by agape love
- Profound sense of loyalty and responsibility to the other

v. Conversation in community/ authentic dialogue

According to Groome, creative imagining illuminates the social responsibilities we share and the consequences of our actions. This sense of responsibility should prompt us to work together for mutual solutions. Solidarity creates a liberating impact on the community. For such solidarity to occur the language used in a learning event is important. There is no point seeking an emancipatory impact if the language base of participants is chauvinistic, oppressive or destructive. Groome believes a conative dialogue must be mutual, ‘participants must have the opportunity to speak their own word and to hear the word of another’ (p107).

Furthermore Groome refers to the fulfilment of such characteristics in the context of German Sociologist Jürgen Habermas’ phrase ‘communicative competence’ (Groome, 1991, p107). Competence in community is recognised by lack of personal or strategic interest. Mutuality exists between participants when ‘symbolic interaction of language is free of domination or manipulation and there is no compulsion to agreement other than the persuasiveness and validity claims of a particular position’ (p108). Groome refers to this kind of communicative competence as ‘authentic dialogue’, an honest and fair conversation among partners in quest of the truth (p108). Dialogue is shaped by the story of our times.

Groome recognises the past and present are all part of informing our future reality. We live our lives in solidarity and community merely by living our stories together. For Groome the time we shape together gives history a new hopeful direction.

SYNTHESIS

Veling and Groome are already in dialogue. Veling cites from Groome 'At its best theology means figuring out how to bring faith and life together' (Veling, 2005, p20). They are advocates of 'bringing life to faith and faith to life' (p20). These key voices have common elements of engagement that speak to my work within Peacethread; authentic dialogue, inclusion of the other, importance of relationships, people as agents of change in community, and shalom. Whilst Veling seeks to make practices of life theological Groome makes his theology practical. This vocational direction of practical theology identifies how partners in dialogue can seek shared outcomes in a fluidity of conversation. Open mindedness is important to Groome and Veling.

Groome points out in the foreword to Veling's 'living in the margins' community is a valuable 'hermeneutical lens' for those concerned for 'the life of the church in the world' (Veling, 1996, xiii). Focussing on the 'shared life of an intentional faith community' is a bridge of understanding between communities. This communal way of life is one in which processes are created to enable communities to be inclusive and mutual where participants are 'enabled to speak their own word in dialogue with others' (Groome, 1991, p13). Veling and Groome are modelling 'shalom'.

Furthermore, analysis of Veling and Groome reveals a methodological approach to frame the key elements of engagement. Shared Praxis is built around action, reflection, creativity of mutual partnership and active participation engaging the whole being of people through the process of 'inform, form and transform' (Groome, 1991, p2). The central criterion for action by humans is to 'do God's will on earth as it is in heaven' (p15). Therefore, from Groome's perspective education should be shaped by a lived faith, or as Veling would put it, the faith should be lived theologically. Groome's 'inform, form, transform' and Veling's 'inclusive, relational, intentional communities' have an emancipatory quality held in balance by authentic dialogue, critical reasoning and transformation.

However, how can these theoretical perspectives be relevant to educational practice? The creative and poetic intuition of Veling and Groome encourages me as a teacher to bring forth radical change by pursuing a new path, such as Peacethread, actively seeking shalom by exploring the relevance of the qualities of inclusion, relationship, innovation, conversation in the spiritual development (metanoia) of young people. Can Peacethread take the shape of an intentional community fit for the 21st century spirituality, i.e. modelled on practical theology, created to take the first tentative steps on the tightrope?

Groome does not expect his movements of Shared Praxis to be used as a complete method of practice; rather he takes a 'meta approach' forming an overarching perspective based on his Catholic background and context. The lack of prescription is helpful as it enables me to 'weave' a form of educational pedagogical praxis for Peacethread. Groome makes it clear he is happy for his work to be set in an ecumenical or inter faith context with a remit to teach people 'about Christianity rather than become Christian' (p2). Similarly Veling's hermeneutical style lends itself to an inter faith context as he frequently draws on a richness of sources from a diversity of cultures. Peacethread as an intentional community need not be limited to Christianity but can be grounded in elements of theological engagement that enable participants to 'theologize' along their own spiritual path.

Analysis of the interplay between Veling and Groome brings some understanding of how practical theology engages with my professional educational context. Participatory pedagogy and an intentional learning environment can be imagined synonymous with the directive within Post 16 Citizenship education for students to be informed, participate and act. This progression from information to action may provide a helpful structure to aide a learner's spiritual development within the intentional community of a school, class or year group.

Living theologically is therefore a challenge to seek new ways to develop spiritual awareness of young people. Veling quotes Jewish thinker Jonathan Sacks to suggest we need a new 'theology of difference' to help us celebrate the 'dignity of difference' (Veling, 2005, p160). My literary voices in turn help me grapple with the key elements of pedagogy of difference; that acknowledges and makes a difference.

The first Peacethread project aimed to explore a 'pedagogy of difference' through the 'generative theme' of peace in the context of those 'living in the margins' e.g. in Israel/Palestine. The 'generative theme' for the second Peacethread project may focus on the transition movement, a pragmatic response to peak oil by communities changing to models of local sustainability (Hopkins, 2008). The transition movement provides useful links to the practical theology of Veling and Groome. It is an intentional initiative grounded in 6 pragmatic principles to enable communities to live sustainably. Its founder, Rob Hopkins, calls it 'an invitation to join the hundreds of communities around the world who are taking the steps towards making a nourishing and abundant future a reality' (Hopkins 2008, p15).

Peacethread aims to be transitional. The young participants in the first project were creative, reflective thinkers, able to turn the lens onto issues that affect them and the wider world and make suggestions for change that may have an impact for generations to come. Subjects such as citizenship place an emphasis on this cooperative, learner led, active style of learning and seem at one with the key elements of Veling and Groome. The values at the heart of this kind of learning, even set in the context of the PVE agenda, seek to deepen the understanding of spirituality so young people become more literate about the faith of the other but also develop a mature and informed set of beliefs of their own.

For Peacethread the hermeneutic of The Bright Field is a transitional symbol of 'the world as it could be' (Morgan, 2003, p48) and of what might be possible. The methodology of Peacethread brings a creative power to an educational pedagogy seeking to develop a communal experience where open dialogue, conversation, and practical discourse can occur between faith groups, young people, and their teachers to question the status quo and implement change if necessary.

However, despite this communal approach the role of the practitioner is crucial. The teacher needs confidence in taking responsibility without superimposing their views on a journey that is intended to be learner led. Groome prompts 21st century educators to consider Augustine's apt question 'for who would be so absurdly curious as to send their child to school to learn what the teacher thinks?' (Groome, 1991, p54). He sees the learner as participant not receptacle. He links Augustine to Freire's 'banking system' whereby educators bank preconceived ideas in the minds of their charges in order to keep them in their socio-economic place. Freirian thinking (Freire, 1996), emerging in the 1970s, claimed public education itself is problematic in that it often enhances

inequality. However, Freire believed that the 'educational practice of a progressive option will never be anything but an adventure in unveiling' (Freire, 2004, p1). For Freire this adventure is grounded in hope and anchored in practice (p2).

Peacethread intends to embrace this hope in a transitional model based on learners being active participants without preimposed values from the practitioners. By 'doing', learners will gain a deeper understanding of issues not only in places such as the Middle East but in their own lives and communities. This process will be centred on the learner but outward looking in order to develop their spiritual awareness.

Therefore the aim of Peacethread is to remodel Shared Praxis, to create an experiential pedagogy and an intentional learning environment in the context of asking learners to consider how best to inform, participate and act through inclusion, relationship and conversation. The learner has a critical voice and mechanism to recognise and evaluate pre-existent values. The pedagogy aims for a parity of esteem between theory and practice symbolically gestured in the term 'Peacethread'. 'Peace' is insight, information, reflection, the 'theory', whereas 'thread' is practical methodology, participation, action, transition, how we go about this. The symbol created is one of hope or as Veling puts it 'healing' (Veling, 2005, p5) where perhaps shalom will be glimpsed.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Walking the tightrope requires tension, without which we will fall. Only by balancing, being held in the tension, can we live theologically. Synthesis of Groome's Shared Praxis and Veling's 'Living Theologically' speaks to the educational practitioner who is attempting to live in this tense balance.

On reflection the practitioner holds the balance of responsibility for the learner. Veling refers to 'The unbearable lightness of being' (2005, p136) to suggest the practical theologian should choose the heaviness of life. Practical theology is on the side of weight, according to Veling (p137). However, if our lives are held in the balance between ourselves, the other and God, perhaps our weightiness is turned to lightness. Veling is prone to quoting Bob Dylan, but omits to mention the connection to Dylan's poignant lyric in his famously spiritual song 'Every grain of sand'

'I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea
sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me.
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man
like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand.'

(Dylan, Shot of Love, 1981)

Dylan says we 'hang in the balance' of the 'reality of man' yet as his biblical references imply, 'like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand', rather than hanging we are **held** in a tension with God that can bring light or lightness, rather than weightiness, if that tension is shared with the 'other'.

If responsibility for 'the other' in the world is being taken seriously a tension can be held in balance by the teacher. From a theological point of view, by bearing the tension, keeping the balance, the teacher is living theologically seemingly in the absence of God,

or rather on behalf of God. Copley concurs quoting Priestley: ‘Spirituality is often regarded as something warm and cosy, breeding security. There is little support for this in religious tradition. To ‘have spirit’ may indeed be to possess security, but only in order to face up to and, indeed, to initiate tension’ (Copley, 2000, p1). Peacethread’s role is to initiate tension but to use theological insight to provide balance. Therefore the aim is to enable young people and practitioners to be able to walk the tightrope of their spiritual path, a journey that will not take place without the balanced tension.

CONCLUSION

The interplay between the literary voices of Veling and Groome develops understanding of how practical theology engages with education. On one hand it is possible to identify key elements of engagement; authentic dialogue, inclusion of the other, the importance of relationships within intentional educational communities. On the other hand there is an identifiable methodological perspective in the model of Shared Praxis through inform, form (participate), transform (act).

Theoretically the synthesis of practical theology and education offers perspectives to expand pedagogy and enhance spiritual development of young people. This leads to the development of a conceptual framework for further research. Firstly the research will aim to create a pedagogical tool designed to enhance spiritual development of young people within an educational context. Secondly the impact of delivering the pedagogy will be researched in terms of its effectiveness within the profession.

Therefore the practice of enhancing religious literacy of learners in a multi cultural context through engagement with practical theology is held in the balance. Furthermore, learners and practitioners moving from ‘inform’ to ‘act’ to better develop their world view needs questioning. Teachers need to move beyond the rhetoric to the practical in order to allow young people to walk their own spiritual path. For the teacher prepared to step onto the tightrope practical theology has something to say. Whether the outcome will amount to dynamite remains to be seen.

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