

METHOD IN MINISTRY

Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry

James D Whitehead & Evelyn Easton Whitehead

First Edition 1980 Revised Edition 1995 Sheed & Ward, NY, Oxford

Preface:

Since first edition our own understandings influenced and expanded.

David Tracy *Blessed Rage for Order* and *Method in Ministry* esp influential.

Intro:

Information explosion, expansion of historical consciousness, scripture research, forms of worship, sexuality.

Need for a process which is: Portable, Performable, Communal.

From Correlation (of Tradition and Situation) to Conversation – more dynamic interplay.

MODEL:

Christian Tradition ← → Personal Experience ← → Cultural Resources

(Each is pluriform and good as well as bad)

For each of the above, the following method:

METHOD:

Attending → (listening critically to all three while suspending judgement)

Assertion → (dialogue of mutual clarification to expand religious insight)

Pastoral response (discerning, decision and action)

Conversation & Crucible:

pictures of interaction of Tradition, Experience, Culture at each phase.

The Whiteheads believe that beginning with Experience risks self-centredness.

To look at each separately is like stopping a propeller in mid flight.

Three element Model:

1. TRADITION AND SCRIPTURE

dialectical process of scripture (original action to a people's story to script)

Requires an intimacy with scripture not just knowing text.

(See how *lectio divina* or Ignatian contemplation works)

1. Attention to Scripture:

Situate it in liturgy, history, as literature.

Situate it in its moment of composition.

Situate it in church – how it's used.

Clarify images which are strange to us.

2. Assertion from Scripture:

Texts are composite of assertion.

Let the text speak its assertion for today (not just our prejudices)

3. Pastoral Response from Scripture:

2. EXPERIENCE & REFLECTION

Focus on particular persons and groups

Experience has authority – it offers up the need for scriptural healing.

Scripture itself is record of people's experience.

God's Revelation is registered in experience.

Experience needs to be attended to with non-rational elements too.

Missing Voices need to be heard – The *anawim*/blessed are the poor.

Sensus fidelium – communal instinct of the saints.

3. CONVERSATION WITH CULTURE

First half of century conversation partner was philosophy, now social sciences and multiple influences of culture. So, Karl Rahner: “theology may find its most significant dialogical partner not in philosophy but in the natural, psychological and social sciences which shape [human] self-understanding in the present.” (Anne Carr, “Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner.” *Journal of Religion* 53 (July 1973) p373) What the myths were to ancient cultures, the social sciences are to us – they give us the guiding symbols of the territory.

Clifford Geertz & Don Browning. Reflection asks us to look at the lens of culture rather than through it.

Culture influences faith tradition & consciousness of believers.

Culture can critique tradition [see Richard Burrige's study of slavery]

Three element Method:

1. ATTENDING: THE CONVERSATION BEGINS

NT akouein denotes Christian obedience. Not bring God but discern God.

Leaders must attend to the 'acoustics' of the group.

Being Actively Patient then paraphrasing back.

It is spiritual discernment – we do this academically now with scripture itself to sense sources and undercurrents. It requires *kenosis* – a theological ascetic.

[action and achievement spiral may not have this attentiveness]

2. CRUCIBLE OF ASSERTION

To present our insights forthrightly without forcing them. Called to hand on the faith.

Jabbok: stay with struggle with the Other, and each give to the other because conflict can be transformative and generative process.

Self-worth helps us assert – 'in whom well pleased'. Our tradition is normative for us.

Without it we go from culture to experience in humanistic fashion; if we go straight from tradition to experience we are fundamentalist.

[cf John Reader's refusal to be explicit about the tradition]

3. PASTORAL RESPONSE: from insight to action.

Example of Diocesan planning process.

(final part of book is chapters on assisting adults to be reflective; health dept; mujerista; china.