



GATEWAY SEMINARY

P1121-P1122
*Leadership in
Ministry Practicum*

Theological Reflection

Theological Reflection Overview

The complete and more thorough discussion is in *A Guide to Theological Reflection* by Wilson and Waggoner, chapter 1-3.

Overview of Theological Reflection

1. Theological Reflection begins with the premise that *every Christian is a theologian*.
 - “To be Christian at all is to be a theologian. No exceptions.”
 - The question is whether a person is a good theologian.
2. Theological reflection is a **holistic** approach to ministry.
 - It helps us engage all of who we are, what we know, how we feel, and our sense of God’s leadership in ministry situations.
3. It is a **developing spiritual discipline**.
 - Theological reflection helps us become better theologians.

Definition of “Theological Reflection”

Theological Reflection is identifying how our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings influence our actions, aligning them to our best understanding of God’s truth, and exploring possibilities for future ministry responses.

- The method we recommend can be seen in a reflection loop.
- We want the process to be more than an intellectual exercise.
- We want it to lead to learning and to more effective ministry.

Why Do Theological Reflection?

1. To examine the discrepancies in our personal theologies.
2. To intentionally draw from the strengths of each facet of our theology.
3. To make theology a verb, so we *do* theology.

We have Two Levels of Theology to Examine

1. First Order Theology

- Embedded Theology – The theology that is at the core of our being that has developed since we were born.
- Confessed Theology – Our confessed theology is the one we *say* we believe. It is the theology that we share when we preach, teach, counsel, or talk about our understanding of God.

2. Second Order Theology

- Operational Theology – Our operational theology is the one we share with others through how we live our life. It is not what we say but what we do. It does not always match what we say we believe, hence the urging to practice what we preach.

- Deliberative Theology – This is theology in transition or theology “in the making.” It is our theology that emerges from a process of reflecting upon the intersection of our experiences, our current embedded, confessed, and operational theology, and where we experience God at work in our lives.

Theological reflection is deliberative theology and causes us to examine the gap between our embedded, confessed, and operational theology.

We Tend to Do Theology in Two Ways

Most of us have a natural preference in approaching theology in one of these two ways – thinking or feeling.

1. **Thinking** - The thinking approach is the head approach.
 - It is what we have examined, analyzed, and coordinated in a systematic way.
 - It is well thought out.
 - It makes sense and it is logical.
 - It is the way many are taught to do theology.
 - It is primarily cognitive in nature.
2. **Feeling** - The feeling approach is the theology of the heart.
 - It is the theology that we feel.
 - It is drawn from significant persons in our background - our moms and dads, Sunday School teachers, hymns, former pastors, or persons that we admired.
 - It tends to be situational and must feel right.
 - It is primarily emotional in nature.

Drawing from the Strengths of Each

The process we use in TFE draws from the strength of each – the logical thinking (head) approach and the warmth of the feeling (heart) approach – to form a truly *pastoral* theology. Pastoral theology makes use of both approaches to formulate a holistic theology.

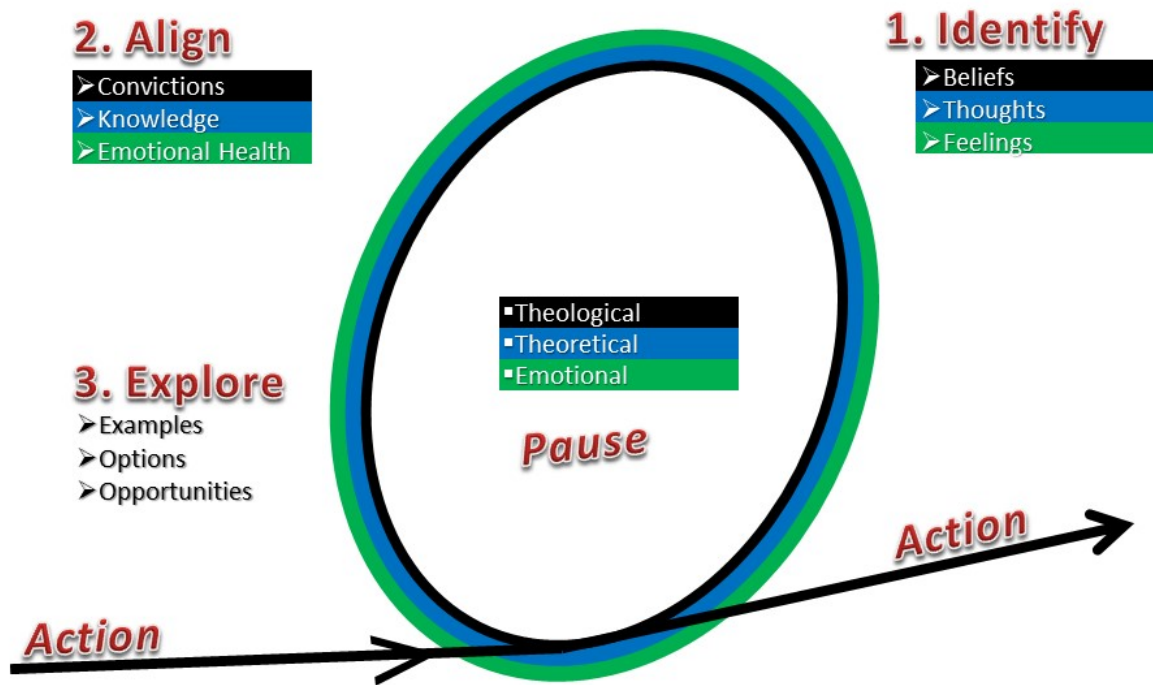
The Process of Theological Reflection

Theological reflection is a process.

- It may seem mechanical at first, but theological reflection will become more comfortable, informative, and intuitive as we use it.
- The theological reflection process we recommend for TFE is modified from one developed by Doran McCarty. It is not the only way to do theological reflection, but we have found it useful for developing theological reflection.

Review A Guide to Theological Reflection, chapters 1-3

Theological Reflection Loop Model



Upon learning of a ministry action, incident, or encounter, we are called upon to determine our next course of action. Our Reflection Loop leads us to pause and reflect on this incident in three ways: theological, theoretical, and emotional. In each of three passes around the loop, we take one of these areas into account.

Theological

1. We first Identify the beliefs of those involved
2. We then Align those beliefs with our convictions

Theoretical

1. We first Identify the thoughts of those involved
2. We then Align those thoughts with our knowledge and understanding

Emotional

1. We first Identify the feelings of those involved
2. We then Align those feelings with our best understanding of emotional health

Short Circuiting the Process

1. Some interpret and analyze the situation, then come up with the answers that we take to people. We use our head, but we do not benefit from what we can learn from the heart or the holy.
2. Others tend to be more feeling oriented. People are hurting and we want to fix it as soon as possible. We hurt with the persons and take the understanding we gain from that hurt to find help. We use our heart, but we do not benefit from what the head or the holy can tell us.

3. Still others are clear on what the Bible says about the situation.
 - We have a clear answer to the question *Where is God in all of this?* and are ready to respond to people with our knowledge.
 - We are on very dangerous ground when we speak for God.
 - We need to take time to hear what the head and the heart are saying.
4. If we do theological reflection in a holistic way, a dialogue will take place.
 - The head, heart, and holy will interact with each other. You will use all of who you are, all of your experience and learning, all of your sensitivity to people, all of the resources that God has given you to minister to others.
 - In the midst of this dialogue, God will be at work. He can help us in being more holistic in ministry to the whole person.
 - ✓ Persons will be helped.
 - ✓ Our ministry will become more effective. We will learn how to minister in this situation and in future situations.

Presuppositions Concerning Theological Reflection

Theological Reflection...

- Is an approach to life rather than an intellectual exercise.
- Is required of the competent Christian.
- Presumes a living, growing understanding of the biblical record.
- Grows in quality as it is consciously pursued.
- Directly relates to the quality of decisions we make as a result of our reflection.
- Is a spiritual discipline.

Conclusion

One of the goals of TFE is to introduce students to the process of theological reflection as a lifestyle process and spiritual discipline. As we practice theological reflection as a group, you will become more comfortable with the process. You will see the results in yourself and in your ministry. You will become more proficient in your use of all the tools God has given you to use in ministry.