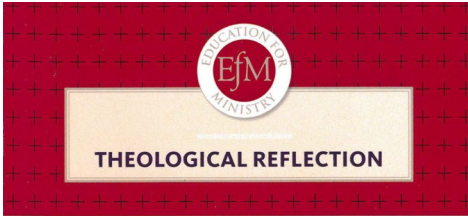


THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IS ...



A journey deeper into our experience and knowledge of God.

A disciplined method of exploring real world issues and contextualizing them within our faith and lives.



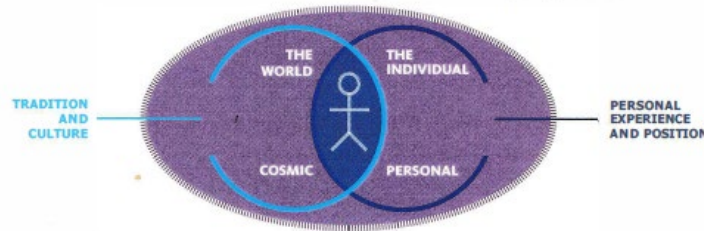
A conversation that opens us to "revelation" or new truth and meaning for living.

A set of tools that equips people for living their faith by enhancing their spiritual awareness and integrating belief and behavior.

THE FOUR SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE:

In EfM there are four areas into which we categorize our collective knowledge. These four areas come from both internal and external sources:

- 1. Christian Tradition:** (outside) scripture, doctrine, church history, liturgy & worship, church architecture, religious symbols, commentaries.
- 2. Culture:** (outside) social norms, arts, sciences, the media, secular history, politics, economics, socio-cultural environment, secular symbols, work environments.
- 3. Action:** (inside) behaviors, thoughts, feelings, experiences, fears, and hopes
- 4. Position:** (inside) personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes, convictions, hunches, perspectives.



THE STRATEGY:

- 1. Identify a focus.** Start with something specific from any of the four sources and notice details, energy, and the tone of this initial piece.

Example: (From **personal experience**) As I was driving, I saw a man at an intersection with a sign: "Need work & \$\$." I wondered what to do. I considered giving him cash but worried that I would be supporting his addiction. I thought of taking him home and paying him to weed my garden, but was uncomfortable with that. I wondered about telling him about agencies that could help him, but I knew little about them ... The chosen focus was a man in need.

- 2. Explore the focus with theological perspective questions.** Ask a few questions from categories such as wholeness/goodness, brokenness/ alienation, recognition/awareness, reorientation/repentance, and restoration/redemption. One can ask about the nature of God or human nature.

Example: What is broken/ alienated? *There are needy people; addiction is prevalent; some people are dangerous.*

Where is awareness/recognition? *I do not know how to help him. I don't know much about local agencies that could help.*

Where is redemption? *It might be recognizing the dignity of the man and treating him with respect. It might include becoming more informed about local agencies and supporting them.*

3. **Connect with the other three sources.** Bring the other sources of knowledge into the conversation. Notice similarities and differences. The interchange among Christian tradition, cultural examples, personal experiences, and beliefs provokes new questions, insights, and answers. It shows people how faith matters.

Example: CHRISTIAN TRADITION: *The story of the blind beggar Bartimaeus and Jesus.*

Where is there brokenness? *The crowd tells Bartimaeus to be quiet when he calls out to Jesus.*

What is redemptive? *Jesus pays attention to Bartimaeus when others don't. He asks him what he wants, thus recognizing his dignity. Upon the beggar's request, Jesus heals him of his blindness.*

CULTURE: *Taylor Swift's song "Now that We Don't Talk"*

What is redemptive? *The phrases "I don't have to pretend," and "the way back to my dignity" highlight self-respect and dignity.*

POSITION: What is redemptive? *I think that people with needs deserve respect. I think everyone should be treated with dignity. I think self-respect is necessary.*

4. **Apply to daily life.** This last step ensures that theological reflection goes beyond intellectual entertainment. The implication may include the need for further exploration and prayer and will be specific to each person's life. The application may integrate belief and behavior.

Example: When I want to help someone, I will ask for permission and/or inquire about what they want or need. I will support selected agencies that help people obtain jobs. When people treat me badly, I will respect myself.

THE BENEFITS:

Through the EfM model of theological reflection done in community, people gain awareness of themselves and others and deeper knowledge of Christian teaching while they:

- *Think critically.*
- *Identify subtle ways they are influenced.*
- *Converse rather than debate.*
- *Move conversations toward insight and action.*
- *Obtain knowledge of Christian tradition.*
- *Integrate various sources of knowledge.*
- *Better align what we believe with how we behave.*

People grow intellectually, spiritually, and personally as they begin to recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary. To find out more about EfM's model of theological reflection or about Education for Ministry, go to www.efm.sewanee.edu.

